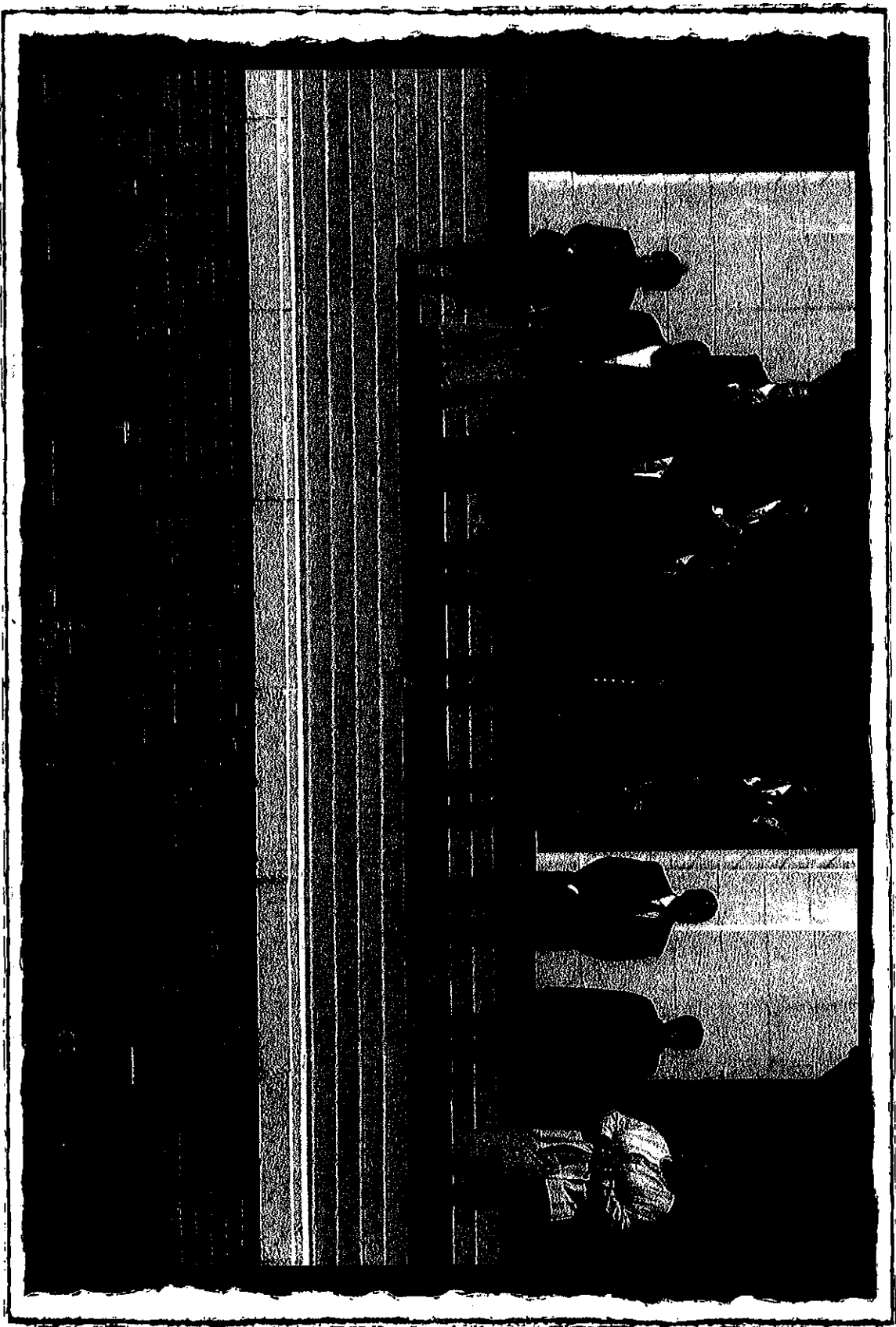


# THE LITTLE ROCK NINE

Battling Segregation



**F**ifteen-year-old Elizabeth Eckford hurried to get ready for school. After putting on the new dress she had made, she grabbed her notebook and headed out the door. On the way to the city bus stop, she said a prayer. She wasn't afraid, but she was a little nervous. It was Wednesday, September 4, 1957, and she was on her way to Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. She and eight other teenagers were about to become the first black students ever to attend that all-white school.

**2** A federal court had ordered Central High to begin admitting black students. Three years earlier, in 1954, the United States Supreme Court had ruled that it was unconstitutional to require black and white students to go to separate public schools. Such a system did not offer equal educational opportunities for everyone. Hundreds of schools had become partially integrated since 1954. But in spite of the Supreme Court ruling, Arkansas had not yet begun to integrate its schools. The order to Central High to open its doors to black students was an order for the state to begin the process of desegregation.

**3** The bus dropped Elizabeth off one block from Central High. As she walked toward the school, she saw hundreds of white people surrounding the building. She also saw members of the Arkansas National Guard standing by the doorways.

*The Little Rock Nine gather with President Clinton and local officials on the steps of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, on September 25, 1997, the fortieth anniversary of their enrollment in the school.*

The guardsmen were holding rifles equipped with bayonets. Elizabeth assumed that the soldiers were there to protect her. She thought they would help her get into the school and make sure no one in the crowd bothered her.

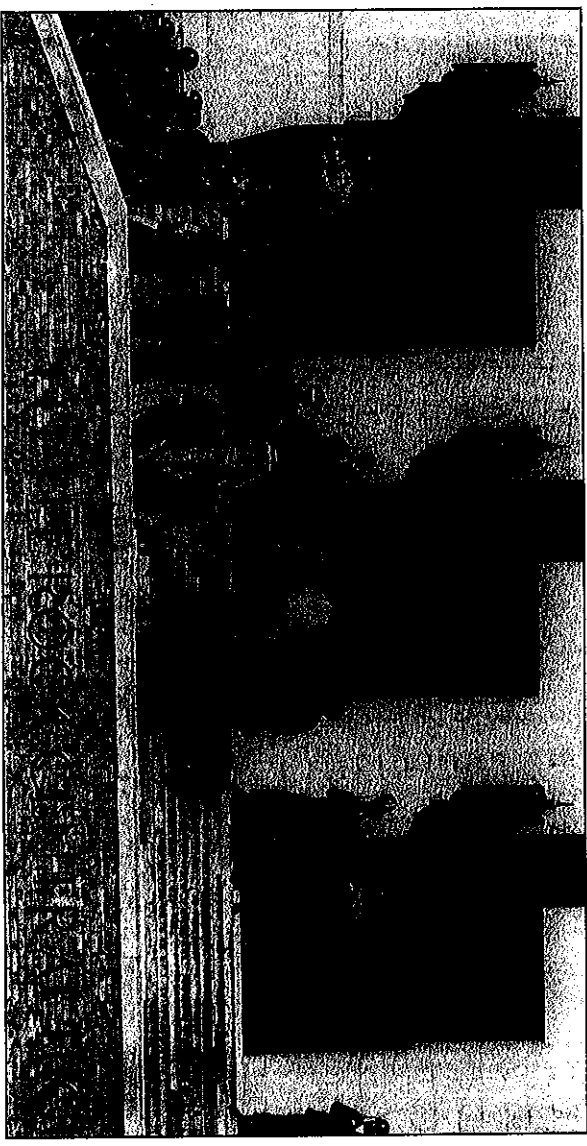
**4** As she approached the school, she tried not to notice the people staring at her. Still, she sensed their anger. They didn't want her going to the same school as their white children. Walking toward the school, Elizabeth felt her knees start to shake. Suddenly she wasn't sure she could make it. "It was," she said, "the longest block I ever walked in my whole life."

**5** Finally she reached the entrance. She expected the soldiers to move aside and escort her into the building. Instead, they put their bayonets across the doorway and refused to let her enter. Only then did

Elizabeth realize why they were there. Orval Faubus, the governor of Arkansas, had defied the court order. He had sent the soldiers to keep her out of the school.

**6** Elizabeth became terrified. She didn't know what to do. Just then a member of the white mob cried, "Lynch her! Lynch her!" Elizabeth turned and searched the crowd, trying to find a friendly face. She spotted an old woman with kind-looking eyes. But when Elizabeth walked toward her, the old woman spat on her.

**7** Unnerved, Elizabeth began to walk back toward the bus stop. She knew she wouldn't be safe until she could climb onto a bus and get out of the area. As she moved down the street, she kept her head up and her eyes focused straight ahead. She didn't want the crowd to know she was scared. By the time she reached the



*Surrounded by bayonet-carrying troops, nine African American students enter Central High School in 1957.*

bus stop, the mob was in a frenzy. "Drag her over to this tree!" someone shouted. "Let's take care of the nigger!" screamed another.

8 At that point a white man stepped out of the crowd and went over to Elizabeth.

He was a reporter for a Northern newspaper. Patting her on the shoulder, he whispered, "Don't let them see you cry." Elizabeth nodded. She knew how important it was to be strong. Although she was terrified, she managed to appear calm until the bus arrived and carried her home. Only when she saw her mother did she begin to cry.

9 Elizabeth Eckford was not the only one who had to face the angry jeers of the crowd that morning. The eight other black students who showed up at Central High also had to confront the mob. One by one they approached the school, and one by one they were turned away by the guardsmen.

10 For the next two and a half weeks the black students stayed home. They had not given up, though. They were simply waiting for the tempers of the white racists to cool. By Monday, September 23, the soldiers had left Central High. On that day the nine teenagers tried again. They went to the school and entered the building. But white people in the community found out that they were there and soon some of them began to gather outside. By mid-morning there were over a thousand of them. For a while they just milled restlessly about. Then they began to talk of violence. They threatened to break into

the school and drag the black students out. City police arrived and tried to prevent trouble, but by noon the situation was almost out of control. Afraid of what might happen, the principal ordered the black students to leave.

11 Two days later the president of the United States, Dwight Eisenhower, stepped in. Overruling Governor Faubus, he put the National Guard under federal control and ordered 10,000 guardsmen to protect the black students. He also sent in a thousand army paratroopers to walk the black students to their classes. Under tight military control then, the nine teenagers returned to Central High.

12 They were finally safe from the throngs of angry adults, but they still had to face the scorn and hatred of their fellow students. Each day white students found new ways to humiliate them. They spat on them, threw ink at them, and sent them nasty notes. They stole books from their lockers. They stuffed their jackets down toilets.

13 Minnie Jean Brown was singled out as a favorite target. Everywhere she went, she heard white students laughing at her and calling her names. She often went home bruised after being tripped or pushed down stairs. One day a white girl walked up behind her in the cafeteria and, before Minnie Jean could move, dumped a bowl of hot soup on her.

14 All year the torment continued. In November, the army paratroopers left, but the National Guard remained to keep the peace and protect the students. The black

students, who became known as the Little Rock Nine, remained lonely and isolated. Yet they never stopped going to Central High School. As one southern college professor said, "I cannot recall that there has ever been a more inspiring demonstration of courage by the children of any race, in any age."

15 At the end of the school year, the black students emerged from Central High exhausted but victorious. They had survived an entire year in the hostile environment of the school. They had opened the way for other black children to begin attending white schools. They had even managed to make a few friends among the white students. When Ernest Green graduated that spring, 14 white students asked to sign his yearbook. "I have admired your courage this year," one of them wrote, "and I'm glad you made it through all right." ☛

*If you have been timed while reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words per Minute Table on page 133 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 134.*

**Reading Time: Lesson 13**

Minutes      Seconds

**A Finding the Main Idea**

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea      B—Too Broad      N—Too Narrow

1. Nine black teenagers in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 courageously faced the hatred of the white community as they became the first blacks in the state to attend an all-white high school.
2. Orval Faubus, the governor of Arkansas in 1957, tried everything he could to keep from having to desegregate the public schools of Arkansas.
3. The first black students to attend white public schools in Arkansas faced severe discrimination because of the great prejudice of the white community against blacks.

\_\_\_\_\_ Score 15 points for a correct M answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ Score 5 points for each correct B or N answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Score: Finding the Main Idea

**B Recalling Facts**

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

1. The bus dropped Elizabeth Eckford off
  - a. in front of Central High.
  - b. at the back door of Central High.
  - c. one block from Central High.
2. The white man who patted Elizabeth's shoulder and said, "Don't let them see you cry" was
  - a. the principal of Central High.
  - b. a member of the Arkansas National Guard.
  - c. a reporter for a Northern newspaper.
3. Dwight Eisenhower
  - a. supported Governor Faubus's decision.
  - b. ordered army paratroopers to walk the black students to classes.
  - c. told the black students to stay home until the tempers of the white people had cooled.
4. As Ernest Green prepared to graduate, 14 white students
  - a. asked to sign his yearbook.
  - b. threatened to beat him.
  - c. poured ink all over him.
5. By the end of the school year,
  - a. all the black students had left Central High.
  - b. the black students had made a few white friends.
  - c. Governor Orval Faubus had left office.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Score: Recalling Facts

**C Making Inferences**

When you combine your own experience and information from a text to draw a conclusion that is not directly stated in that text, you are making an inference. Below are five statements that may or may not be inferences based on information in the article. Label the statements using the following key:

C—Correct Inference      F—Faulty Inference

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The parents of the Little Rock Nine did not want their children to attend Central High.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The desegregation of Central High School attracted national attention.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Elizabeth Eckford knew she might run into trouble on her first day at the all-white high school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Arkansas was the only state that was against the desegregation of its schools.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. President Dwight Eisenhower did not have the legal authority to take control of the Arkansas National Guard.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Score: Making Inferences

**D Using Words Precisely**

Each numbered sentence below contains an underlined word or phrase from the article. Following the sentence are three definitions. One definition is closest to the meaning of the underlined word. One definition is opposite or nearly opposite. Label those two definitions using the following key. Do not label the remaining definition.

C—Closest      O—Opposite or Nearly Opposite

- 1. Orval Faubus, the governor of Arkansas, had defied the court order.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. disobeyed ✓
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. misunderstood ✓
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. supported ✓
- 2. But they still had to face the scorn and hatred of their fellow students.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. respect ✓
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. curiosity ✓
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. contempt ✓
- 3. Each day white students found new ways to humiliate them.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. degrade ✓
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. honor ✓
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. anger ✓
- 4. All year the torment continued.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. prejudice ✓
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. torture ✓
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. kindness ✓

5. The black students, who became known as the Little Rock Nine, remained lonely and isolated.

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. separated ✓  
 \_\_\_\_\_ b. united ✓  
 \_\_\_\_\_ c. depressed ✓

\_\_\_\_\_ Score 3 points for each correct C answer.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Score 2 points for each correct O answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Score: Using Words Precisely

## Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

1. What is the author's purpose in writing "The Little Rock Nine: Battling Segregation"?
- a. To convey a mood about prejudice in the 1950s  
 b. To tell the reader about early efforts to desegregate schools  
 c. To emphasize the similarities between white students and black students
2. Which of the following statements from the article best describes Elizabeth Eckford?
- a. "Suddenly she wasn't sure she could make it."  
 b. "Walking toward the school, Elizabeth felt her knees start to shake."  
 c. "She didn't want the crowd to know she was scared."
3. From the statements below, choose those that you believe the author would agree with.
- a. By the end of the school year, most of the white high school students admired the black students.  
 b. The black students were frightened by their first-year experiences at Central High.  
 c. The white students' hatred of the Little Rock Nine was largely a result of ignorance and fear.

Score	Question Type	Lesson 13
_____	Finding the Main Idea	_____
_____	Recalling Facts	_____
_____	Making Inferences	_____
_____	Using Words Precisely	_____
_____	Reading Comprehension Score	_____