

SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER



RFK DEFENDERS

VIDEO VIGNETTE ACTIVITY 2: MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

TOPIC

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR ALL

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Identify key elements of Marian Wright Edelman's activism
- Describe how poverty and race influence the quality of educational opportunities
- Outline several strategies for promoting equity in education

OVERVIEW

In this activity, students learn about Marian Wright Edelman's advocacy for high-quality education for all children. After discussing the lifelong benefits of a good education, students analyze various demographic and societal factors influencing the quality of education various groups are able to obtain. Then they research potential strategies for addressing inequality in education and consider steps they can take to advocate for educational equality for all.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- Article 1: Right to Equality
- Article 2: Freedom from Discrimination
- Article 3: Right to Life, Liberty, and Personal Security
- Article 22: Right to Social Security
- Article 26: Right to Education

TARGET AUDIENCE

Social Studies, Language Arts, Fine Arts, Grades 9–12

ACTIVITY DURATION

Two 45–60 minute class periods

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- High-quality education is a basic human right and is essential to every individual's success in the modern world.
- In theory, the United States Constitution guarantees all American children access to equally high-quality education. In practice, children attending schools in high-poverty areas often do not receive a high-quality education.
- All citizens can help tackle large, systemic problems by contributing to the solution in small ways.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How does a high-quality education contribute to the success of individuals and society?
- How do race and poverty affect an individual's access to high-quality education?
- How can adolescents contribute to the effort to provide high-quality education to all Americans?

MATERIALS

- Computer with internet access and projector
- **Effects of Race and Poverty on Educational Opportunities** student worksheet, one per student
- **Strategies for Improving Educational Equity** student worksheet, one per student
- Laptops with internet access and presentation software, one per student pair

BACKGROUND INFORMATION/LINKS

Marian Wright Edelman is a lawyer and civil rights activist who has dedicated her life to securing equal opportunities for disadvantaged Americans. Edelman grew up in segregated South Carolina and excelled academically despite the inferior resources available to her in segregated public schools. She began her career in the South during the turbulent 1960s as Mississippi's first black female lawyer, working to register African American voters and representing the NAACP's Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Over the next decade she served on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign, founded the Washington Research Project of the Southern Center for Public Policy, and directed Harvard University's Center for Law and Education.

In 1973, she created the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), an offshoot of the Washington Research Project. The mission of the CDF was, and is, to advocate for children's health, safety, and education, and it has become a leading voice for children's issues in the nation. The CDF has advocated legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, Head Start, and the Children's Health Insurance Program. The organization also works to increase public awareness around teen pregnancy prevention, gun violence, and child poverty. It has been a leading voice for the rights of children since its founding.

- [Children's Defense Fund website](#)
- [NAACP's Legal Defense Fund website](#)
- Human Rights Defenders' Interactive Map

This activity is sequenced in four phases: **Ask, Analyze, Apply, and Act:**

- Ask: Students discuss the purposes and advantages of a quality education for individuals and society as a whole. (Day 1: 10 minutes)
- Analyze: Students analyze a series of data sets to explore the influence race and poverty have on education. (Day 1: 20 minutes)
- Apply: Students watch a video vignette about Marian Wright Edelman's advocacy for children before researching various strategies for improving educational opportunities for all students. (Day 1: 15 minutes, Day 2: 35 minutes)

- Act: Students discuss how Edelman's activism can inspire their own efforts to defend human rights.
(Day 2: 10 minutes)

PROCEDURE

Ask (Day one—10 minutes)

1. Display the following quote: "Education is a precondition to survival in America today." —Marian Wright Edelman
2. Facilitate a class discussion around the following questions:
 - What is a "precondition?" In your own words, restate the meaning of the quotation. Do you agree or disagree with its message? Why or why not?
 - What does a "high-quality" education look like? What are the most important characteristics of a "high-quality" education?
 - Does everyone in our country have access to the same quality of education? Explain.
 - What are some of the benefits that a high-quality education provides for an individual child?
 - How does providing a high-quality education to all children benefit society as a whole?
 - What do you think are some factors that can have a negative impact on the quality of a person's education or access to education? (Note: It is not expected that students have accurate or informed responses to this question, only that they begin to think about it.)

Analyze (Day One—20 minutes)

1. Have students work in pairs or small groups to analyze various data sets (included in **Effects of Race and Poverty on Educational Opportunities** student worksheet) to address the following questions:
 - a. What impact does poverty have on academic success and the quality of educational environments?
 - b. What is the relationship between race and educational opportunities?
2. As students analyze each data set on the **Effects of Race and Poverty on Educational Opportunities** student worksheet, the pairs (or groups) will answer questions to help synthesize the information and draw conclusions. Remind students to base their conclusions on the data.

Apply, Part I (Day One—15 minutes)

1. Introduce students to Marian Wright Edelman as a human rights defender who has made it her life's work and passion to advocate for equal access to education for all children. Show students the Marian Wright Edelman video vignette and ask them to answer the following question: How has Edelman worked to address issues of educational inequality over her lifetime?
2. Present additional information about the Children's Defense Fund using the Background Information and links above.
3. Ask: What other sorts of measures need to be taken to achieve educational equality? Facilitate the discussion to help students focus on potential solutions, such as significant policy changes, government programs, etc.

¹ United Nations: Human Rights retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/human-rights/>.

Apply, Part II (Day Two—35 minutes plus homework)

1. Have students work in small groups to conduct internet research on one of the strategies below for addressing educational inequalities. Direct students to enter the terms into their internet browser and consult at least three different sources of information. Note: This is an excellent opportunity to review how to evaluate sources of information for validity and reliability. Topics include:
 - inclusionary zoning and schools
 - equitable school funding
 - cradle-to-career programs
 - equitable growth policies
 - increasing teacher quality in high poverty schools
2. Direct student groups to develop a three-slide presentation on their strategy. The presentation should include:
 - a. Slide 1: Definition or description of the strategy
 - b. Slide 2: Explanation of how the strategy improves educational opportunities, including at least one example of the application of the strategy
 - c. Slide 3: Explanation of what is necessary to successfully implement the strategy, including any obstacles/challenges
3. For homework, students view each other's slide shows online and record information about each strategy on the **Strategies for Improving Educational Equity** student worksheet. (If online access is not available to students at home, the teacher may choose to conduct this activity or have students present orally the next day.)
4. Have students work independently, in pairs, or in small groups to identify the strategies they think will be most and least effective and rank all strategies from 1–5 (with 1 being the most effective/top priority strategy).

Act (Day Two—10 minutes)

1. Present students with two more quotes from Edelman and facilitate a discussion about their meanings:
 - a. "You just need to be a flea against injustice. Enough committed fleas biting strategically can make even the biggest dog uncomfortable and transform even the biggest nation." —Marian Wright Edelman
 - b. "Don't just dream about grandiose acts of doing good. Every day do small ones, that add up over time to positive patterns." —Marian Wright Edelman
2. Ask: "Students obviously can't implement such broad policies as the ones you researched, but Ms. Edelman would say that we can all contribute to the effort somehow. What can high school students do to help address educational inequality?"
3. Facilitate a conversation around the following question: What lessons can we take away from Edelman's activism and work to help us become effective defenders? Students discuss the lessons they've learned and how they will apply them as they become defenders of human rights.

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Optional Extension

1. Together, the class brainstorms a list of possible strategies achievable by adolescents for improving educational opportunities for disadvantaged students, such as tutoring at the local Boys and Girls Club or YMCA after school or raising money to donate for technology purchases at a Title I school.
2. In pairs, students choose one of these possible strategies and develop an action plan for implementing it, including steps in the process, necessary contact information, etc.

Connections

| Connect to Student Lives | Connect to Contemporary Events | Connect to the Future |
|--|---|---|
| Students will likely begin to consider the quality of their own and their peers' educational opportunities as they learn about Edelman's advocacy. | Debates about national education standards and school accountability and equity continue to rage at the local, state, and federal levels. | This activity encourages students to think about the importance of education to their own lives, as well as to the success of the community, and to consider issues of equality of opportunity. |

NATIONAL STANDARDS

College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

D1.5.9-12 Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources.

D2.Civ.7.9-12 Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.

D2.Civ.12.9-12 Analyze how people use and challenge local, state, national, and international laws to address a variety of public issues.

D2.Civ.14.9-12 Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

D2.Geo.5.9-12 Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

D3.1.9-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

D4.6.9-12. Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems; instances of such problems in multiple contexts; and challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address these problems over time and place.

D4.7.9-12. Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

W.11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

EFFECTS OF RACE AND POVERTY ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Directions: Analyze each data set to answer the questions. (Note: The number of students receiving free and reduced-price meals (FARMs) is a good measure of the relative poverty of a school. The more students who receive FARMs, the lower the average income of families attending the school.)

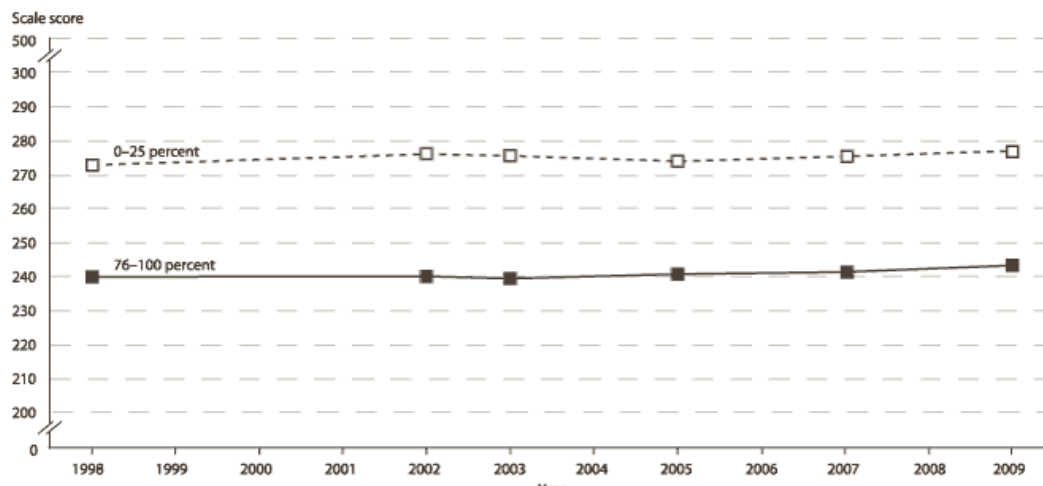
Data Set #1: Overall Academic Skills of Kindergarten Students by Household Income

| Income | Below Average Skills (%) | Average Skills (%) | Above Average Skills (%) |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| \$20,000 or less | 65.6 | 28.9 | 3.5 |
| \$20,001-\$40,000 | 53.7 | 36.8 | 8.1 |
| \$40,000 or more | 41.7 | 37.5 | 20.8 |

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS) Wave 1-5

- Kindergartners from which income bracket are most likely to have **above** average skills?
- Kindergartners from which income bracket are most likely to have **below** average skills?

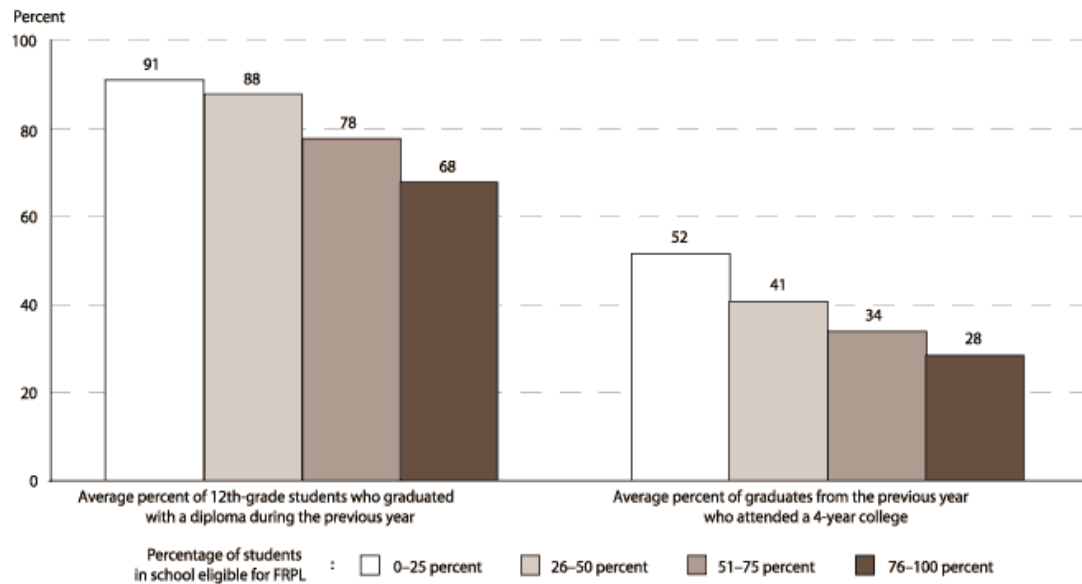
Data Set #2: Average 8th grade reading scores, by percentage of students eligible for FARMs



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), selected years, 1998-2009 Reading Assessments, NAEP Data Explorer.

EFFECTS OF RACE AND POVERTY ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. Which group of 8th graders (low-poverty or high-poverty) performs best on reading assessments?
2. In 2009, what was the approximate difference in test scores between low-poverty and high-poverty students? Is this difference significant?
3. Has this difference changed significantly in the previous ten years?



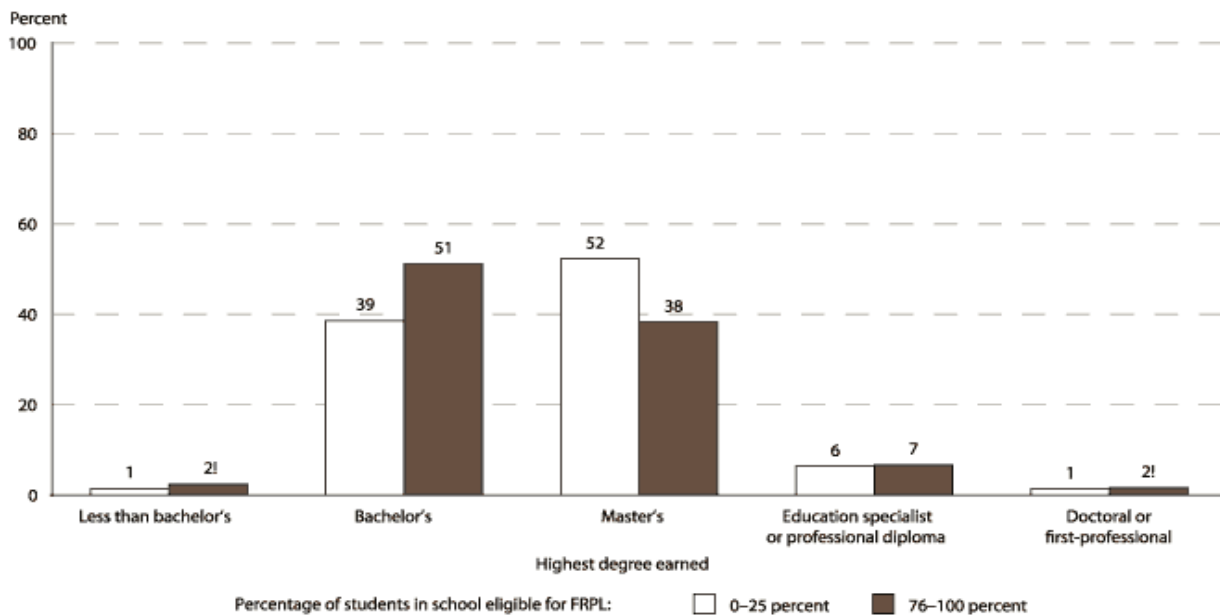
Data Set #3: Graduation and college attendance rates by percentage of students receiving FARMs

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Data File," 2007-2008

4. What percentage of students from **low** poverty schools (0%–25% FARMs eligible) obtain a high school diploma?
5. From **high** poverty schools (76%–100% FARMs eligible)?
6. Which group of students (low or high poverty) are most likely to attend a 4-year college?

EFFECTS OF RACE AND POVERTY ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Data Set #4: Distributions of the qualifications of public secondary school teachers by the percentage of students in the school eligible for FARMs



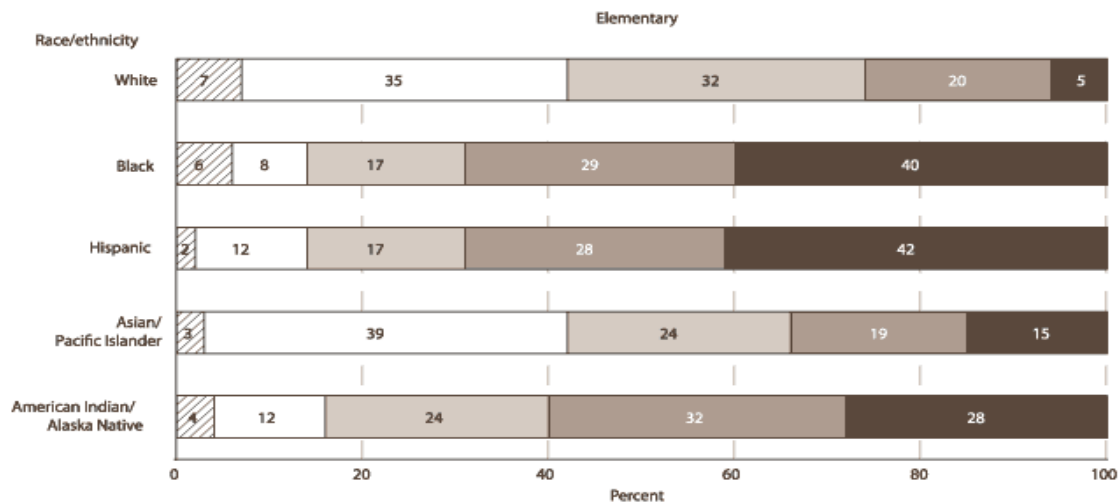
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Teacher and Private School Teacher Data Files," 2007-08.

7. Are more highly trained teachers (Master's degree or higher) more likely to teach in low-poverty or high-poverty schools?

8. What impact does this finding have on the equality of educational opportunities?

EFFECTS OF RACE AND POVERTY ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Data Set #5: Distribution of public elementary school students by race and percentage of students in the school eligible for FARMs



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," version 1a, 2007-08.

9. Which two races/ethnicities are most likely to attend **low**-poverty schools (0%-25% FARMs eligible)?

10. Which two races/ethnicities are most likely to attend **high**-poverty schools (75%-100% FARMs eligible)?

CONCLUSIONS: Based on your analysis of the data. . .

11. What is the relationship between poverty and educational achievement?

12. What is the relationship between poverty and opportunity for high-quality educational opportunities?

13. What is the relationship between race/ethnicity and attendance at high-poverty schools?

Directions: Review your classmates' presentations on the most promising strategies for improving access to high quality education for ALL children. Record what you learn in the table below.

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Inclusionary zoning and schools | | | |
| Equitable school funding | | | |
| Cradle-to-career programs | | | |
| Equitable growth policies | | | |
| Increasing teacher quality in high poverty schools | | | |

Which strategy do you think offers the best chance to improve access to high quality education for ALL students? Which do you think might be least effective? Rank your findings from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the highest priority/most effective). Explain your thinking for your top and bottom choices.