



Thurgood Marshall Printable Reading Comprehension

Grade Level: 5+ | Word Count: 535 | Lexile 1100

Early Life and Education

Thurgood Marshall was born on July 2, 1908 in Baltimore, Maryland. He became interested in the U.S. Constitution at an early age when he was forced to read it after being punished by his second grade teacher. He graduated from Pennsylvania's Lincoln College in 1930, but was denied admission from the University of Maryland Law School because he was Black. Instead, he graduated from Howard University Law School in Washington, D.C. in 1933. Soon after graduation, he set up his own law practice in Baltimore.

First Major Case

In 1934, Marshall won his first major case. He argued for a Black Amherst College graduate who was denied admission to the University of Maryland Law School under its "Separate but Equal" rule. The graduate's name was Donald Gaines Murray. Murray, and all Black applicants, were forced to attend one of three "other" schools affiliated with the university. Marshall argued that the "other" schools did not offer law classes and were certainly not "equal" to the University of Maryland. In a surprise verdict, the judge agreed with Marshall and ruled that the university had no right to interpret the Constitution in a biased manner.

Work with the NAACP and Brown v. Board

In 1940, Marshall was named Chief Counsel for the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). He would continue to win major civil rights cases, including the landmark Brown vs The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954). At the time, Black students could not attend the same schools as White students. Instead, they attended schools that were deemed "separate but equal." In this case, Brown argued before the Supreme Court of the United States of America that "separate but equal" education could never truly be equal. Schools attended by Black students were poorly funded, had few resources, and were often in terrible condition. The Supreme Court sided with Marshall, and all American public schools were eventually integrated. From that point on, Black students were entitled to the same education, in the same facilities, as all other students.

Appointment to the Supreme Court

In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Thurgood to the United States Supreme Court. He was the first Black person in history to sit on the Supreme Court. Marshall served on the Supreme Court for 24 years and became known as a crusader for civil rights and constitutional protection for all

individuals. He was also known as a strong opponent of the death penalty. Thurgood retired from the Supreme Court in 1991. He died two years later in 1993.

Legacy and Honors

Today, schools, highways, and public institutions are named for Thurgood Marshall. The same University of Maryland that denied him admission because of their "separate but equal" policy recently renamed their law library after him. In 2005, Baltimore/Washington International Airport was renamed Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport.

Questions

Multiple Choice Questions

1. What early event sparked Thurgood Marshall's interest in the U.S. Constitution?

- A. Being denied admission to law school
- B. Reading it as part of school punishment
- C. Listening to a speech about civil rights
- D. Writing an essay on government

2. Why was Donald Gaines Murray denied admission to the University of Maryland Law School?

- A. He did not meet the academic requirements
- B. He was an Amherst College graduate
- C. He was Black, and the school enforced segregation
- D. He refused to take the entrance exam

3. What was the main argument Marshall used in the Murray case?

- A. Black students did not want separate schools
- B. The alternative schools were not truly equal
- C. The U.S. Constitution required new laws
- D. Maryland did not need a law school

4. Which statement BEST summarizes the Brown vs. Board of Education case?

- A. It gave Black students more school funding
- B. It ended segregation in public schools
- C. It required new textbooks for Black schools
- D. It forced teachers to integrate classrooms immediately

5. How did the University of Maryland honor Thurgood Marshall years later?

- A. By offering scholarships in his name
- B. By building a statue in front of the courthouse
- C. By renaming their law library after him
- D. By awarding him an honorary degree

6. What does the passage suggest about Thurgood Marshall's legacy?

- A. It is mostly forgotten except by historians
- B. It continues to influence schools and public institutions
- C. It only mattered during the Civil Rights Movement
- D. It is important only to lawyers and judges

7. Which of these BEST describes the central idea of the passage?

- A. Thurgood Marshall's role as a Supreme Court justice
 - B. The history of segregation in U.S. schools
 - C. Thurgood Marshall's life and contributions to civil rights
 - D. The founding of the NAACP and its early leaders
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Answer Key

1. **B** – Reading it as part of school punishment
2. **C** – He was Black, and the school enforced segregation
3. **B** – The alternative schools were not truly equal
4. **B** – It ended segregation in public schools
5. **C** – By renaming their law library after him
6. **B** – It continues to influence schools and public institutions
7. **C** – Thurgood Marshall's life and contributions to civil rights