

**Language Arts/Social Studies Activities**  
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**Lessons for use in the classroom in conjunction with reading and studying *The Colored Car* by Jean Alicia Elster**

**A Closer Look at *The Colored Car* – Chapter 4**

1. Have the students recount how May Ford, in 1937, described to her daughter Patsy the difference between life in the North versus life in the South.
2. Have the students recount the differences between the first-class train car and the colored car.
3. Ask the students to research, and write short reports, on additional ways life, in the 1930s, would have been different in the North versus in the South.

Lead the class in a discussion of those additional differences in the way of life in the North versus in the South in the 1930s.

Lead the class in a discussion of what would have been similarities in the way of life in the North and in the South in the 1930s.

4. Based upon the information contained in Chapter 4, lead the students in creating job descriptions for both the conductor and the Pullman Porter.

Based upon the class discussion-generated job descriptions, have the students write a short in-class reflection paper on why the conductor and the Pullman Porter acted as they did when Patsy refused to board the colored car.

5. Ask the students to research and write a short report on the history of the Pullman Porters.
6. Ask the students to research and write a short report on the United States Supreme Court case of *Plessy versus Ferguson*.

Lead the students in a discussion of the concept of “separate but equal.” In *The Colored Car*, was the first-class car equal to the colored car? Why or why not? Is it ever possible for “separate” to be “equal?”

## **Conflict Resolution**

There are several instances in *The Colored Car* where conflicts were resolved either peacefully or without further escalation.

1. Lead the class in a discussion of the instances of conflict listed below, while considering the setting, the participants, the action/inaction taken and the resolution. Conclude by discussing whether the resolution was satisfying and considering possible alternative resolutions. The students can, also, be asked to write individual essays on particular aspects of the resolution that they found either satisfying or disconcerting.

2. Groups of students in the class reenact select scenarios and resolutions from the list below. After each reenactment, lead the entire class in a discussion of the conflict and resolution, considering the setting, the participants, the action/inaction taken and the resolution.

- Chapter 2. The Baker Streetcar—One of the passengers cannot pay the nickel fare.
- Chapter 4. The Colored Car—Patsy does not want to board the colored car.
- Chapter 5. Clarksville, Tennessee—The first taxi driver will not take May Ford and her daughters to 534 Franklin Street.
- Chapter 6. A Thousand Jars—The cherry man sells Douglas Ford rotten grapes.
- Chapter 7. Twenty Squares—Two girls disrupt the game of hopscotch.
- Chapter 8. The Petition; Chapter 9. The Summons; and Chapter 11. The Courtroom—a group of neighbors complain about the noise from Douglas Ford's saw in his wood yard.

## **Oral Histories and Recipes/Food Preparation Traditions**

There are two recipes and several descriptions of food preparation in *The Colored Car*.

1. Have students interview and obtain oral histories from their caregivers (e.g., parents and grandparents) regarding the content of recipes or details of food preparation traditions within their families or caregiving units.
2. Interview questions should also explore memories specific to or events connected with those recipes and/or food preparation traditions.
3. Have students write narratives based upon the information in those oral histories.
4. In small groups, have students share and discuss their narratives, particularly noting the differences and similarities in recipes and/or food preparation traditions.