

**ACTIVITY**

# Staging the Compelling Question

## Overview

### About This Activity

Students explore the ideas behind the compelling question for this inquiry: *What can we learn from Boston's past about what it takes to make progress toward educational justice today?*

To generate curiosity about the inquiry and begin thinking about the meaning of *educational justice*, students complete an anticipation guide by indicating their level of agreement with a series of statements. Then they share their thinking using the Four Corners discussion strategy.

<b>Compelling Question</b>	What can we learn from Boston's past about what it takes to make progress toward educational justice today?
<b>Student Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Handout:</b> Dissecting the Compelling Question</li> <li>• <b>Handout:</b> Educational Justice Anticipation Guide</li> <li>• <b>Handout:</b> Boston Community Profiles</li> </ul> Find these materials in this <a href="#">Google Folder</a> .

## Procedure

### Notes to Teacher

#### 1. A Note on Racial and Ethnic Classifications

Race and ethnicity classifications are complex, and they are not sufficient to capture the diversity that exists within any single group. Nevertheless, an important part of learning about the history of educational justice in Boston in the 1960s and 1970s is understanding how race and ethnicity were conceptualized at the time. In this inquiry, we have attempted to use terms denoting racial and ethnic groups with care and intention.

Before sharing the **Boston Community Profiles** with students in Activity 4, review the document **A Note on Racial and Ethnic Classifications** for important information about how this inquiry uses these terms. You might use the information in the document to support your ability to provide clarity and guidance to students. You might also choose to share and discuss the document itself with the class.

## Preparing to Teach

### DAY 1

#### Activity 1: Introduce and Dissect the Compelling Question

Explain to students that the class is about to begin an inquiry about the battles in Boston over public schools in the 1960s and 1970s, and what those battles mean for us today.

Pass out the **Dissecting the Compelling Question** handout. Read the compelling question aloud, and then tell students that this question will guide the class's inquiry. Ask the students to reread and annotate the compelling question with a partner. They should:

- Circle words they do not know or understand in the context of the prompt.
- Star words that seem to be the central ideas of the prompt.
- Jot down any questions they have or anything else that they need to find out about in order to be able to answer the prompt at the end of the inquiry.

#### Activity 2: Complete an Anticipation Guide about Educational Justice

One term that students likely circled or starred in the previous activity is *educational justice*. Explain to them that later in the inquiry, they will create their own definitions for the term, but to begin the inquiry, they will respond to and discuss a variety of statements about schools and education in order to spark their thinking.

Pass out the **Educational Justice Anticipation Guide**. Give students several minutes to respond to each question, indicating whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. They should then choose at least one of the statements and explain their answer in more detail in the space provided. They will have the opportunity to discuss their responses in a group discussion later in class.

#### Activity 3: Discuss Anticipation Guide Responses

Give students the opportunity to share their thinking about the statements from the anticipation guide using the [Four Corners](#) discussion strategy. Before class, hang signs in corners of the classroom (or a designated area within the room) for each of the four responses to the anticipation guide questions (*strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree*). Read one of the statements aloud, and have students move around the room and stand near the sign that indicates their response. Give them a few moments to discuss their thinking with one or more people in the same corner, and then open the floor for students to hear from those in other corners who responded differently. Then repeat the process for as many additional statements as you have time for.

## DAY 2

### Activity 1: Review Profiles of Boston Communities

Explain that the conflict and struggles over Boston's public schools that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s took place as growing numbers of African American, Latinx, and Chinese American Bostonians demanded better education for their children from a school system controlled by white Bostonians. Before students begin to explore this history, they need some historical context and population data about each of these four communities in Boston.

Share with students the **Boston Community Profiles** handout. Explain that the handout includes short overviews of the three fastest-growing racial and ethnic groups in Boston in the 1960s, African American, Latinx, and Chinese American, as well as the city's shrinking white population during that time period. Group students into pairs and assign one of the communities to each pair. With their partners, ask students to read the their assigned profile and record their responses to the following questions:

1. What were the times of most rapid growth for this population group in Boston?
2. What information about this group do you find most surprising, interesting, or otherwise notable?
3. What aspirations and goals might members of this group have had for their families and communities?
4. What questions do you have after reading this profile?

Next, lead a brief whole-group discussion. Move through the three questions above, inviting responses from students assigned to each community. Prompt students to consider the similarities they notice between the groups' experiences, aspirations, and goals.

Finally, ask students to synthesize what they have learned by [creating a headline](#) that answers the question: *How was Boston's population changing in the 1950s and 1960s?* Headlines should contain both subjects and verbs and be no more than about 12 words in length. Students might compose their headlines for homework. Once these are complete, give students the chance to hear each other's headlines by using the [Wraparound](#) teaching strategy.

### Activity 2: Explore the Connection between Redlining and Boston's Neighborhoods

In the 1960s and 1970s, Boston was known as a city whose residential patterns were largely segregated by race, ethnicity, and class, and it remains so today. Students should know that this did not happen as the result of chance or solely because of the choices made by individual Bostonians as they sought housing. As in cities everywhere in the United States, the laws and policies of federal, state, and local governments, as well as the practices of banks, real estate developers, and community organizations, have deliberately created opportunities for white people to purchase homes in desirable areas while denying those opportunities to people of color. This is an important and complex historical topic that this inquiry will not cover in depth, but to help students understand how Boston's segregated neighborhoods became that way, contributing to the segregation of schools, share the WGBH video "[How A Long-Ago Map Created Racial Boundaries That Still Define Boston.](#)"