

LEVELED BOOK • Q

Good for Thurgood!



**Multi
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Written by Marvin Bird

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Thurgood Marshall was born in 1908 in Baltimore, Maryland. He was African American, and his grandfather was a former slave.

By the time Thurgood was born, it was against the law to own slaves. Thurgood grew up with both black and white neighbors, but in many states, people were **segregated**.



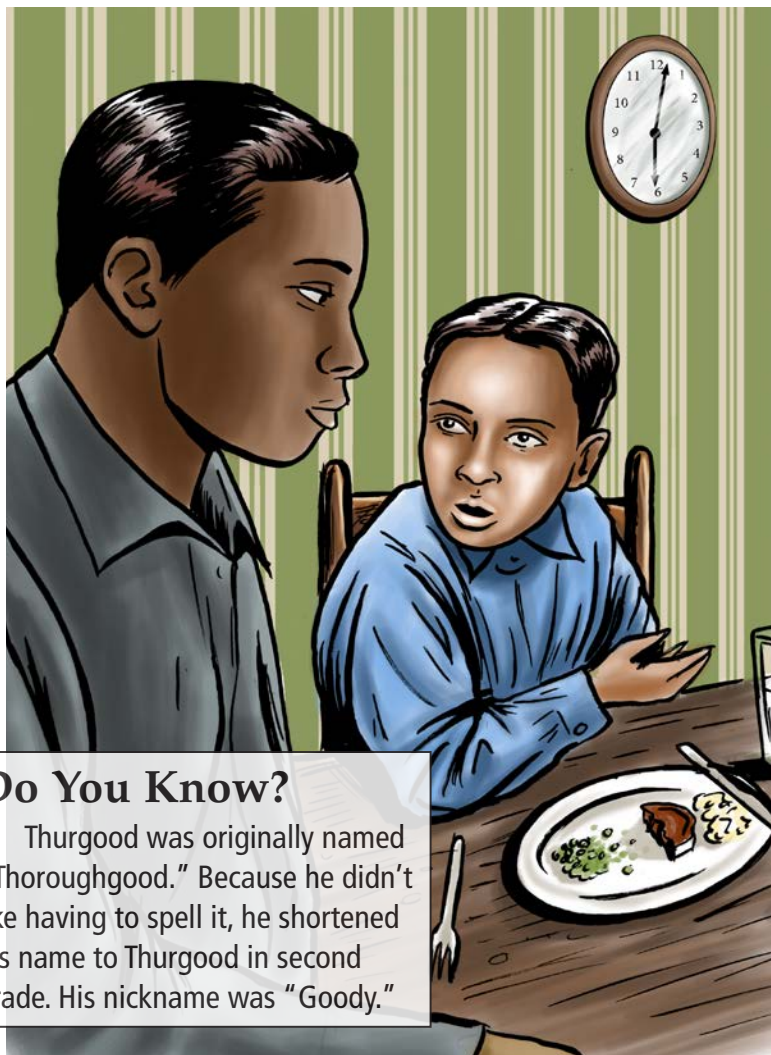
In the **South**, black people were not allowed to eat in many restaurants that served white people. They were not allowed to sit in the same train cars as white people.



Black children attend an all-black school in Kentucky in 1916.

Black children in the South were not allowed to go to school with white children. They couldn't even drink from the same water fountains.

Yet the **Supreme Court**—the highest court in the land—had made segregation legal. It decided that those restaurants, trains, schools, parks, and hotels were “separate but equal.”



Do You Know?

Thurgood was originally named "Thoroughgood." Because he didn't like having to spell it, he shortened his name to Thurgood in second grade. His nickname was "Goody."

In fact, those places were not equal, and those laws were unfair. At the dinner table, Thurgood's family used to argue about what to do about those laws. Thurgood became very good at arguing.

Thurgood liked pranks and got into his fair share of trouble growing up. His punishment in high school was often to memorize the U.S. **Constitution**. “Before I left that school, I knew the whole thing by heart,” he later said. Yet some of the ideas in the Constitution did not hold true in his own life.

Thurgood thought the rights in the Constitution should apply to everyone.

He felt that the laws in some states that segregated African Americans went against the ideas and laws put forth in the Constitution. He realized that by becoming a lawyer, he could use the law to help African Americans achieve **equality**.

After graduating from an all-black college, Marshall wanted to attend the University of Maryland Law School. Because of his **race**, the school would not let him in. Instead, he went to the all-black law school at Howard University. He graduated at the top of his class in 1933.



Marshall (standing) gets ready for court in 1935.

The next year, he began to work as a lawyer. In 1936, he won his first big victory for **civil rights**. It was against the University of Maryland Law School—the same school that Marshall had wanted to attend. Another black student had also been denied admission to the law school because of his race. That student took the school to court, saying that the school's **discrimination** was illegal. Marshall argued the case and won.



Marshall was just thirty-two when he began arguing cases before the Supreme Court. In one case, he argued against segregated neighborhoods. He said that people of other races should be allowed to purchase homes in white neighborhoods. Marshall argued another case about segregation on buses and trains. He said that black and white people should be able to ride together. Marshall won these and many other cases for civil rights.

In 1954, Marshall argued his most important case of all, *Brown v. Board of Education*. At that time, many states spent far less money on black students than on white students. Black children in those states had to attend all-black schools, even when they lived miles closer to an all-white school. Black students in crowded schools were not allowed to attend white schools with empty classrooms. In many places, they could not ride buses to school, even when a bus for white children passed their door every day.

Marshall argued that it was unfair to have separate schools for black children and white children. He argued that “separate was not equal.” The only way to gain equality was to allow children of all races to attend the same public schools.

In 1951, the closest elementary school to Linda Brown in Topeka, Kansas, was four blocks from her home. Yet because the school was all-white, Brown could not attend. Her father, Oliver Brown, started the lawsuit that became *Brown v. Board of Education*.



Linda Brown in
1952, at age 9



Marshall's work helped make it possible for black, white, and Latino students to all say the Pledge of Allegiance together.

Marshall won his case. Every **justice** on the Supreme Court voted to end school segregation. That decision helped end other kinds of segregation in the United States as well. It inspired the civil rights movement, which took place over the next decade. It also made Marshall famous.



Marshall traveled a lot in order to argue for the rights of black Americans.

In all, Marshall argued thirty-two cases before the Supreme Court and won twenty-nine of them. He became the first African American to argue cases for the U.S. government before the Supreme Court.

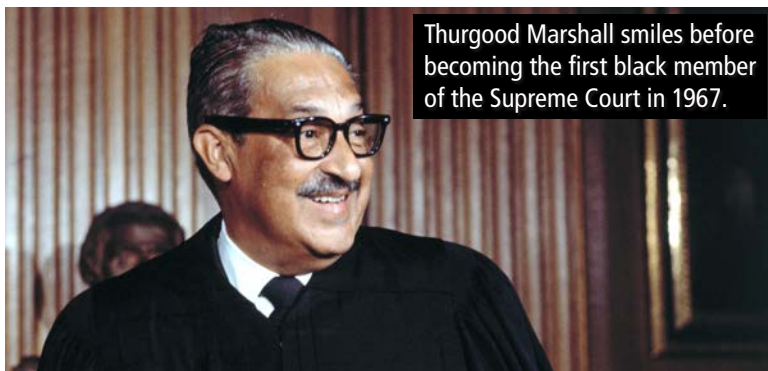
In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson chose Marshall to be a justice on the Supreme Court. He became the first African American to ever serve on the highest court of the United States.

Who Serves on the Supreme Court?



The nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court gather for a portrait in October 2010.

For many years, only white men served on the Supreme Court. Of the nine justices, there were no women and no people of color. Because the president appoints each justice for life, it took a long time to make things more equal. The first change came when Thurgood Marshall became a justice in 1967. Then the first woman, Sandra Day O'Connor, was appointed in 1981. In 2013, one African American man and three women served on the court, including one Latina woman.



Justice Marshall still got to argue a lot, and he always argued to make things fair. He upheld the rights of prisoners, children, women, and homeless people.

Justices serve on the Supreme Court for life. Justice Marshall wanted to stay on the court as long as he could so that his voice would continue to be heard. Marshall served on the court for twenty-four years. In 1991, at age eighty-three, he retired.

At that time, reporters asked him if black people were better off than when he'd joined the court.

"All Americans are better off since I joined the Court," Marshall said. "All of them."

He died two years later.



Cecilia Marshall, widow of Thurgood Marshall, unveils a new postage stamp honoring her husband in 2002.

Marshall believed in the American legal system. He believed that it was the root of equality in the country and that only the law would bring permanent change. He thought the right laws could even change the minds and hearts of some people.

Thurgood Marshall changed the country not just for African Americans but for people of all races. His ideas about the Constitution advanced justice, freedom, and opportunity for all Americans.

Good for Thurgood!

Glossary

civil rights (<i>n.</i>)	legal, social, and economic rights that guarantee freedom and equality for all citizens (p. 8)
Constitution (<i>n.</i>)	the written rules that govern the United States (p. 7)
discrimination (<i>n.</i>)	the unfair treatment of a person or group based on gender, race, age, religion, or other differences (p. 8)
equality (<i>n.</i>)	the condition in which everyone has the same rights (p. 7)
justice (<i>n.</i>)	a judge (p. 11)
race (<i>n.</i>)	a group of humans as defined by their skin color and other physical features (p. 7)
segregated (<i>adj.</i>)	kept apart on the basis of group differences, such as race (p. 3)
South (<i>n.</i>)	the southeastern part of the United States, especially states that formed part of the Confederacy during the Civil War (p. 4)
Supreme Court (<i>n.</i>)	the highest court of law in the judicial system of the United States (p. 5)

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Title page: Thurgood Marshall statue in Annapolis, Maryland

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