

INFORMATIONAL READING COMPREHENSION: BIOGRAPHY OF THURGOOD MARSHALL

Read the text below and answer the questions on the next page.

- 1 Thurgood Marshall was a prominent lawyer and civil rights activist and later became the first African American Supreme Court Justice. During his career, Marshall played a vital role in ending legal segregation in the United States and ensuring equal justice under the law.
- 2 Marshall was born in Maryland in 1908 and was known for being a good student and a distinguished member of his high school debate team. But Marshall was also known to be mischievous and often got in trouble in school. In fact, one of his punishments in high school was to memorize the entire U.S. Constitution. Given that Marshall had grown up in the South during the era of segregation, he knew that not all citizens were being treated equally as required by the Constitution. He realized that the best way to achieve justice for all was through the law. He dreamed of becoming a lawyer and hoped to apply to the University of Maryland's School of Law. But at the time, the University did not allow African American students to attend the school. Refusing to let this unfair treatment stop him, Marshall went on to attend law school at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and graduated first in his class.
- 3 With his law degree in hand, Marshall began working as a lawyer for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1934. He achieved recognition for taking on the University of Maryland in 1935. When the University turned away another student because of his race, Marshall took the case to court. He argued that the University was violating the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law for all Americans and won the right for African American students to attend the school.
- 4 Marshall spent most of his legal career fighting against segregation across the country, and he won far more cases than he lost. As the head lawyer for the NAACP, he brought 32 civil rights cases before the Supreme Court,



the highest court in the United States. Of those 32 cases, he won 29—a massive victory for protecting people's individual rights and liberties.

- 5 His most famous case was *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which dealt with the policy of school segregation in Kansas. In the 1950s, many schools were segregated, which meant that black children and white children attended separate schools. In some states, including Kansas, it was illegal for black and white students to be educated together. The states used the argument that the schools were "separate but equal." However, Marshall successfully argued that segregation produced unequal education for students. As a result of that case, in 1954, the Supreme Court issued its decision that segregation in schools was unconstitutional. It was a huge victory for the civil rights movement and effectively ended legalized public school segregation in the United States.
- 6 In June of 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson nominated Marshall to serve on the Supreme Court, and in August, Marshall was sworn in as the first African American Supreme Court Justice. He served on the court for 24 years until he retired in 1991, and is remembered for his steadfast dedication to equality and justice.

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Answer the questions about the text.

1 What is the main idea of the passage?

- a. Thurgood Marshall led a successful career as the head lawyer for the NAACP.
- b. Thurgood Marshall served as the first African American Supreme Court Justice.
- c. Thurgood Marshall achieved many advances for civil rights in the United States.
- d. Thurgood Marshall argued and won a landmark case against the University of Maryland.

2 According to the text, what types of cases did Marshall take on as a lawyer?

3 Based on the information in the passage, what were segregation laws?

4 Why do you think Marshall fought so tirelessly against segregation? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

5 How is the text organized?

- a. problem and solution
- b. compare and contrast
- c. cause and effect
- d. chronological order

6 Read the sentence from paragraph 2.

Refusing to let this unfair treatment stop him, Marshall went on to attend law school at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and graduated first in his class.

Which character trait is shown by Marshall's actions in this sentence? Circle one and explain your thinking on the lines below.

| | |
|------------|---------------|
| creativity | determination |
| respect | independence |

7 What was the significance of the court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*?

- a. The Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.
- b. The Supreme Court developed the rule of "separate but equal" schools for different races.
- c. The Supreme Court changed the curriculum in African American schools to be more fair.
- d. The Supreme Court decided that the protections of the Constitution did not apply to public schools.

8 Based on the text, what are two ways Marshall impacted civil rights in America?

1. _____

2. _____
