



# **SOUTH CAROLINA HALL OF FAME**



**Teacher Guide**

*Septima Clark*



## South Carolina Social Studies Standards

### *Septima Poinsette Clark*

#### ***Late 20<sup>th</sup> and Early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries-The Civil Rights Movement***

**Topics include** – *Teacher, Highlander Folk School, Citizenship Schools, Citizenship Education Programs, Civil Rights Movement*

**Standard 3-5: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the major developments in South Carolina in the late nineteenth and twentieth century.**

**3-5.5** - Summarize the development of economic, political, and social opportunities of African Americans in South Carolina, including the end of Jim Crow laws, the desegregation of schools (Briggs v. Elliott) and other public facilities; and efforts of African Americans to achieve the right to vote.

**Standard 5-3: The student will demonstrate an understanding of major domestic and foreign developments that contributed to the United States becoming a world power.**

**5-3.2** - Explain the practice of discrimination and the passage of discriminatory laws in the United States and their impact on the rights of African Americans, including Jim Crow laws and the ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson.

**Standard 5-5: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the social, economic and political events that influenced the United States during the Cold War era.**

**5-5.3** - Explain the advancement of the modern Civil Rights Movement; including the desegregation of the armed forces, Brown v. Board of Education, the roles of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, the Civil Rights acts, and the Voting Rights Act.

**Standard 8-7: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the impact on South Carolina of significant events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.**

**8-7.2** - Analyze the movement for civil rights in South Carolina, including the impact of the landmark court cases Elmore v. Rice and Briggs v. Elliot; civil rights leaders Septima Poinsette Clark, Modjeska Monteith Simkins, and Matthew J. Perry; the South Carolina school equalization effort and other resistance to school integration; peaceful efforts to integrate beginning with colleges and demonstrations in South Carolina such as the Friendship Nine and the Orangeburg Massacre.





## S.C Hall of Fame Biography

### *Septima Clark*

Born in Charleston, SC, Septima Poinsette Clark was an American educator and civil rights activist. Clark developed the literacy and citizenship workshops that played an important role in the drive for voting rights and civil rights for African Americans in the American Civil Rights Movement. Septima Clark's work was commonly under appreciated by Southern male activists. She became known as the "Queen mother" or "Grandmother of the American Civil Rights Movement" in the United States. Martin Luther King, Jr. commonly referred to Clark as "The Mother of the Movement." Clark's argument for her position in the civil rights movement was one that claimed "knowledge could empower marginalized groups in ways that formal legal equality couldn't."





## Transcript

# *Septima Poinsette Clark*

Beryl:

Septima Poinsette Clark was born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1898. She was the daughter of a laundrywoman and an illiterate former slave.

D. Michael Clark, grand-nephew of Septima Clark:

Her father was a very docile man, and I can understand that under the conditions that he lived under—being a black man in the time he lived in—you know, when you are raised and are being told that you're nothing all your life, and don't you dare look me in the eye—at the same time as I beat you. You have to learn patience. That's what she learned from him. From her mother, she learned strength.

Beryl:

Septima Clark was a teacher. In 1916, she graduated from the Avery Normal Institute in Charleston. Her first teaching assignment was a black school on Johns Island.

Jon Hale, Associate Professor of History, College of Charleston”

It was a poverty stricken area, it did not have any of the amenities of Charleston. Septima Clark's method of teaching was very innovative, it was progressive, it was ahead of its time. And that is essentially meeting her students where her students were. But also treating her students, particularly her adult students, with tremendous respect.

Beryl:

During Clark's 30-plus years of teaching experience, she learned the value and role of education in the community... In the 1950s, Clark was invited to lead summer workshops at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee, a grassroots education center founded by social activist Myles Horton.

Katherine Mellen Charron, Associate Professor, North Carolina State University:

One of the things that made the Highlander Folk School unique and also made it a target is that it had integrated workshops, with white and black people living and working together. And it operated on the philosophy that oppressed people know the answers to their own problems. Septima Clark believed that the most important thing to do in the movement was to develop local leaders. People in their communities who could assume leading roles in getting things



done and solving community problems. And she was concerned with developing women, in particular, as leaders.

Beryl:

Rosa Parks attended one of Clark's seminars months before the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955... Esau Jenkins was a Johns Island farmer and bus driver who was teaching the passengers on his bus how to read. Jenkins attended sessions at Highlander where Clark was developing the concept of "citizenship schools." These were designed to help African-American adults pass the literacy test required for voting. Jenkins proposed the idea of a citizenship school on Johns Island. They needed a local teacher.

Hale:

They wanted to find somebody in the community who was well respected, well known, that people could talk to and not feel ashamed that they were illiterate. And Bernice Robinson came to mind. She was a beautician in Charleston, she was popular among African Americans. And she really had a gift of speaking to anybody and everybody at their level and building this trust over time.

Charron:

As people learned to read and write, something inside of them changed. They got more confidence. And that confidence allowed them to act, to stand up against the white power structure in their community.

Beryl:

When Highlander School closed, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference established the Citizenship Education Program, modeled on Clark's workshops. By 1970, two million African Americans had registered to vote... Yet Septima Clark and others of her generation remain largely unsung heroes.

Charron:

We have a narrative of the civil rights movement that's built around national media reports. There aren't any dramatic images that were captured and broadcast on television or reprinted in newspapers of people learning how to read and write and become citizens. But the people who do show up in those national images are people who passed through the citizenship schools and got the confidence to act because of what they gained from that citizenship education.



D. Michael Clark:

You see, without Septima Poinsette, you have no Martin Luther King, you have no Rosa Parks, you don't have a President Obama.



## Credits

South Carolina Social Studies Standard Correlations were provided by Lisa Ray

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