

Jim Crow Days Charlotte Hawkins Brown—School Rules, Then and Now

Historical Overview

Charlotte Hawkins Brown was born in Henderson in 1883, but her family moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, in search of better educational, social, and economic opportunities than were possible in the Jim Crow south. Brown was a good student and studied under Alice Freeman Palmer, an educator in the Boston area who sponsored Brown's education and encouraged her to challenge racial stereotypes.

With that encouragement and funding from northern friends, 19-year-old Brown returned to North Carolina and began a school in Sedalia that would provide a place where African American students could escape the racial presumptions that white society placed upon them about learning.

Brown's school for African American students, which became known as the Palmer Memorial Institute, was unique in that it had an African American board of directors and its educational focus was college preparation, rather than vocational training (a common thought of the time was that education for African Americans should focus only on trades). She also taught the importance of social graces and manners. Brown soon became nationally known for her progressive educational philosophy, as well as her strict standards.

Lesson Objectives

- Students will read for information and understanding a nonfiction article about Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, an important person in the history of our state, in the history of education in the United States, and in the history of African Americans.
- Students will reflect on the purposes of school rules during the time of legal segregation in the United States and today and consider the commonalities and distinctions between the two periods.

Time

One to two 45-minute sessions

Materials

- Copies of “What One Young African American Woman Could Do: The Story of Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown and the Palmer Memorial Institute,” by Charles W. Wadlington (*Tar Heel Junior Historian*, Fall 1995), as needed
- Copies of the excerpted text from “Charlotte Hawkins Brown’s Rules for School” (located in this lesson), as needed
- Copies of your school and/or classroom rules, as needed
- Copies of both tables (located in this lesson), as needed
- Paper, pencils, highlighters

Procedure

- Have students read or listen to the article. If students are provided a copy, suggest that they highlight important passages.
- For the “Rules Are Rules Worksheet”:
 - Distribute copies of the three pages from “Charlotte Hawkins Brown’s Rules for School” along with copies of your school and/or classroom rules.
 - Distribute copies of the table and have students complete the table as instructed.
 - *Note: You may choose specific rules or sections of rules that you want students to address.*
 - Discuss the rules and identify what behaviors or attitudes the rule is trying to achieve or develop.
- For the “Fighting Racism Worksheet”:
 - Distribute copies of “Charlotte Hawkins Brown’s Rules for School.”
 - Distribute copies of the table and have students complete the table as instructed.
 - *Note: You may choose specific rules or sections of rules that you want students to address.*
 - Discuss the students’ input.

Extension

- Have students create their own rules for school or life—individually, in groups, or as a class. Rules can be presented as single words, such as “respect,” or in sentence or paragraph form. They could even be presented visually or in some other creative form. Among other considerations, encourage students to think about the following:
 - What aspects of everyday life should have rules?
 - What is the underlying goal of each rule?
 - Are consequences needed for violating a rule? Are rewards needed for following rules? Should consequences and rewards be pre-stated?
 - How many rules are reasonable? Why that number?



Charlotte Hawkins Brown's Rules for School¹

*How empty learning, and how vain is art,
But as it mends the life and guides the heart.²*

Every school has a definite set of regulations which its students are required to follow in order to maintain discipline and assure the smooth running of the schedule. Persons with varying degrees of power are charged with seeing that the regulations are kept. Aside from this, however, there is a standard decorum that the student himself should foster in order to express himself to the best advantage and exhibit the right attitude toward the other fellow. The cultivation of traits of honor, thoughtfulness, politeness, honesty, order, and proper appreciation of values is just as much a part of education as is the storing up in one's mind of a vast accumulation of historic, mathematical, and scientific facts.

In the Classroom

1. Always greet the teacher when meeting for the first time, whether it be morning or not.
2. Be sure that you have everything you need--text, paper, pen, etc. Don't be a carpenter without tools.
3. When called on to recite, always make some sort of reply. Don't sit dumbly in the seat and say nothing. Don't even think too long. Valuable minutes are wasted thus.
4. When standing or sitting, hold yourself erect. Don't slouch. Talk clearly and sufficiently loud for everyone in the room to hear.
5. Don't make a habit of laughing at the mistakes of others. This often hinders a person from doing his best.
6. Don't deface property. Writing on or cutting into desks or chairs, writing and drawing in books, breaking the backs, or turning down the corners of pages of texts are evidences of poor training.
7. Make it your business to keep the room in order. Straighten the shades, keep the floor and desks free of waste paper, and erase the boards when they need it.
8. Don't Cheat. You will never learn by "copying" from your neighbor or from the book.
9. Do not argue with or contradict the teacher in class. If you think that she has made a mistake, wait until the hour is over and discuss it with her quietly at the desk.
10. Do not yell out the answers to questions; wait until you are called upon. The teacher will let you know when concert recitation is desired.
11. Don't mistake the classroom for a lunchroom or a bedroom.

¹ Excerpted from Charlotte Hawkins Brown, *The Correct Thing to Do, to Say, to Wear* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1941).

² English poet Edward Young, 1683–1765.



In the Corridors

1. If there are monitors, respect them and obey their orders.
2. Do not run through the halls or up and down the stairways. Walk.
3. Do not congregate in the halls to talk. Standing groups hinder the passage of traffic.
4. Do not be noisy in the halls any more than in the classroom or assembly hall.
5. In passing from one room to the other, keep to the right. This will avoid confusion. Should you run into someone, take time to excuse yourself graciously.
6. If you meet one of your teachers or your principal, stop and say, "Good morning, Mr. Green." Don't fling out a short "how do" while you rush on your way.
7. Do not push your way along into and out of doors. Wait your turn. It is much easier and faster.

In General Assembly or Chapel³

1. Enter the hall in an orderly fashion, find a seat, and keep still. If it is a secular occasion, it is permissible to talk in conversational tones before the program begins. If a chapel service, there should be no talking at all.
2. Keep your mind and eyes on the person speaking or performing. Assume an attentive position. Don't lean on your elbows, drop your head, or slouch in any manner.
3. If someone comes into the room behind you or otherwise causes a disturbance, do not turn around to see who it is. Let the performer continue to have your attention.
4. Don't repeatedly look at the clock or your watch. That says to the performer, "I wish you would hurry and finish."
5. Do not laugh at mistakes. If something goes wrong, sit quietly until it can be corrected.
6. Don't write in the song book, on the back of seats, etc. Keep your feet off the seats. Your feet belong on the floor.
7. Participate whole-heartedly in whatever group work is done. Sing, read, and yell with enthusiasm. Be sure, however, to keep with the others. The effectiveness of group work depends upon the uniformity.
8. Always applaud a performer when such is in order. Have him know that you appreciate either the performance or the effort. Be sure, however, not to overdo it.
9. Always recognize the entrance of a person of importance by standing in a body. Remain standing until the person is seated or acknowledges you in some fashion. If a class is in progress, students need stand only when the visitor is introduced.
10. If you come into an exercise late, do so as quietly as possible. Try not to disturb anyone. Do not walk heavily, and sit down as near the door as possible.

³ Religious studies were part of the private Palmer Institute.



On the Platform

1. When seated, be sure to keep the knees together and the feet on the floor. If it is more comfortable for you to cross your legs, be sure to cross them at the ankles and not the knee. Be sure also, not to stretch your legs out in front of you. They should be kept close to the chair.
2. When standing, stand erect with the feet not more than three or four inches apart. Do not lounge on the back of a chair, the table, or the pulpit. Rest your hand or your elbow on it if you so desire, but not in such a way as to have your audience believe you would fall if it were removed.
3. Remember that talking from the platform requires a clearer enunciation and a slower speech than ordinary conversation. Don't rattle off or muffle what you have to say. If your audience can't understand you, you might as well not be talking.
4. If the audience laughs at or applauds something that you say, do not try to continue talking until the noise has subsided. Just hold your position or acknowledge their act by a smile and a slight bow.
5. Above all, try to avoid an appearance of stiffness or uneasiness. Be natural.
6. If you have to walk a long distance across the platform before reaching your seat, do so as noiselessly as possible. Don't put your whole weight on your heels.

The emphasis that has been placed in late years upon the freedom of the student and the abolition of regimentation has in many cases resulted in rudeness and license. Where there is no demand for order and culture, there must be desire for the same, else education is a failure.

**JIM CROW DAYS
CHARLOTTE HAWKINS BROWN—SCHOOL RULES, THEN AND NOW
FIGHTING RACISM WORKSHEET**

Complete the table below. Begin by listing a Charlotte Hawkins Brown (CHB) rule that attracts your attention. Then, explain *why* that particular rule interests you. Then, given the predominant attitude of racism in the United States at the time the rule was written for CHB students, do you think the rule was meant to address those conceptions? If so, explain why or how? Do you think the rule is still relevant in today's society? Why, or why not?

CHB Rule	Why did this rule interest you?	Based in Racism? How?	Relevance Today