



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

## **Sound Learning Feature for November 2004**

From *Minnesota Public Radio* (<http://minnesota.publicradio.org>)

This month we revisit a Public Insight Journalism special from Minnesota Public Radio. Students in Minnesota are traditionally among the nation's top performers on key standardized tests. Unfortunately, the statewide averages mask an embarrassing reality. Students of color consistently score far below their white classmates. This disparity in academic performance between groups of students is known as the achievement gap. It's a national problem. But Minnesota's gap is particularly wide.

The percentage of minority public school students in Minnesota has doubled in the past 14 years, and projections show no slowdown in that increase. Meanwhile, minority students perform less well than white students by 20 percent on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment Test. That gap is considerably larger for Hispanic and black students.

The articles in this month's feature are of particular interest to teachers and students of American history, political science, and civics.

### **Segment 1: "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment"**

In the following pages, find instructional ideas and study guides intended to aid in the teaching of:

- Reading comprehension.
- Listening comprehension.
- Critical thinking.
- Research and writing challenges.
- Key terms and topics.



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, (<http://minnesota.publicradio.org>). Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

## The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment

### Reading Comprehension

Read the abridged article by [Tim Pugmire: \*Racial Learning Gap Defies Easy Explanation or Solution\*](http://soundlearning.publicradio.org/features/2004/11/pugmire1.shtml)

#### Answer the following questions:

1. From highest to lowest, how do various ethnic groups perform on statewide tests?
2. Mark Davison identifies a specific problem for disadvantaged students. What is that problem?
3. How is the Achievement Gap defined?
4. Several possible causes for the Achievement Gap are identified. Name three.
5. When does Goldee Shear say that student have the best chance of getting back on a successful track?
6. Educators have attempt to reduce the Achievement Gap by making class sizes smaller and expanding pre-school programs. What other efforts have they made?

Read the abridged article by [Dan Olson: \*The Cost of Minnesota's Racial Achievement Gap\*](http://soundlearning.publicradio.org/features/2004/11/olson1.shtml)

#### Answer the following questions:

1. What long-term costs of the Achievement Gap do Felicia Thomas and Eugene Faizon experience?
2. What reason does Felicia Thomas give for going back to school?
3. What is the difference in potential income for a person who does not complete high school, versus a person who gets at least some post-high school training?



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

4. Does Eugene Faizon feel he is successful? Why or why not?
5. The Achievement Gap is described as a cycle. Explain how it is a cycle.
6. What does Barry Shaffer say is the way to break this cycle?

### Listening Comprehension Questions

Read the following questions, then listen to "[Roots of Gap Based in Race, Culture Differences](http://news.mpr.org/play/audio.php?media=/features/2004/09/20_williamsb_gapbarriers)" to find the answers.

[http://news.mpr.org/play/audio.php?media=/features/2004/09/20\\_williamsb\\_gapbarriers](http://news.mpr.org/play/audio.php?media=/features/2004/09/20_williamsb_gapbarriers)

1. What is Brown vs. Board of Education?
2. What reason is given for Bill Cosby's anger at the NAACP ceremony?
3. Ronald Ferguson suggests several factors that contribute to the Achievement Gap. What are they?
4. Students of color experience a unique kind of peer pressure when they perform well in school. They are sometimes accused of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Culturally-specific educational programs can found in the Twin Cities' \_\_\_\_\_ system.
6. Seed Academy/Harvest Preparatory School is a unique program. What are three ways in which this school is different from other schools?
7. What does Eric Mahmoud feel matters most to students about their teachers?

### Critical Thinking Questions

These activities are based on the (abridged) articles by [Lorna Benson: Can Early Ed Close the Gap?](#) and [Tim Pugmire: Closing the Gap: One School's Approach](#)



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

<http://soundlearning.publicradio.org/features/2004/11/benson1.shtml>

<http://soundlearning.publicradio.org/features/2004/11/pugmire2.shtml>

**Answer the following questions:**

1. What is the scientific reason disadvantaged students often fall behind in academic achievement?
2. Discuss the economics of the achievement gap: Which children in society fall behind? Why is it less expensive to deliver good education to very young children (ages 1-5) than to older students (15-20)?
3. What is the relationship between the success of our educational system and the rate of crime in our state. Do you believe there is a relationship and why or why not?
4. What is implied (in the Pugmire article) by the expression "cleaning house?" What does it mean, and what was done to "clean" the house?
5. What was Mr. Sheppard's "formula?" Do you think it would work in your school? Why or why not?

**Discussion Items:** Divide the students into two groups and prepare debates on the following topics:

- The state should pay for early education; it should design early education programs for children from age 1-5.
- The state should require that all schools meet a certain standard, and should take over those that do not.



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

### Research Challenges

- Study 4-5 schools in your neighborhood. Find out the average class size and then find out their scores on reading and math tests. Then compare the scores together with class size and decide if there is a relationship between the numbers.
- Investigate the Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) Supreme Court decision and the struggles of the Civil Rights era. Based on what you find, argue for or against Bill Cosby's opinions on today's youth.
- Who is Bill Cosby and why does his opinion matter?
- Interview an adult you know about the role of education in his or her career.
- Wisconsin is the only state with a wider Achievement Gap than Minnesota. Do you think there is a reason that such a wide achievement gap exists in the Midwest? Find out what you can about achievement gaps in other Midwestern states.
- We heard a lot about environment in these articles. Describe the best environment for your own learning. Do so in any way you wish - in written word, a visual representations, spoken word, etc. What would you put in your space? Be sure to include details.
- Reflect on your experience in school. Do you have a favorite or memorable teacher? What about him or her made an impact on you? Try to find this teacher, and share your memories with them.
- Do you know someone whose racial heritage is different than yours? Talk to him or her about their school experiences, and compare/contrast them to your own.
- People who cannot speak English experience a great deal of hardship. Find out what languages are spoken by students at your school, and what your school does to help students learn English.



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

### **Key Terms and Topics**

#### **From "Racial Learning Gap Defies Easy Explanation or Solution"**

- isolated
- Asians
- Hispanics
- American Indian
- African Americans
- evidence
- attitude
- motivation
- expanded
- mentors
- nurture
- national priority
- performance
- punitive
- proficiency

#### **From "The Cost of Minnesota's Achievement Gap"**

- long-term cost
- visible



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

- employer
- diploma
- dropout
- educate
- diminished earning power
- income
- scenario
- education history
- economic status
- marginal indicator
- reliable

**From "Roots of Gap Based in Race, Class, Culture Differences"**

- scholar
- remedies
- genetically inferior
- barrier
- Brown vs. Board of Education
- commemorate
- desegregate
- Ebonics
- squander



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

- impoverished
- vocational training
- peer pressure
- 'acting white'
- accusation
- superior
- condescending
- alienated
- curriculum
- charter school system
- Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments
- multiracial
- predominantly
- race-blind
- racial parity

#### **From "Can Early Ed Close the Gap?"**

- developing brain
- evict
- environment
- interfere



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.





From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

- unemployed
- stimuli
- ratio
- economist
- scholarship
- endowment
- favorable
- government-sponsored
- dysfunctional
- proponent

**From "Closing the Gap: One School's Approach"**

- transient
- morale
- reconstitution
- commitment
- significant
- discipline
- climate
- tough love
- veteran
- colleague



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning ([www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org))

- personalized instruction
- potential
- autobiographical
- aspiring
- demographics



© 2004, Minnesota Public Radio

Questions are based on the feature "The Education Achievement Gap: Minnesota's Embarrassment" (<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2004/09/achievementgap/>), from Minnesota Public Radio's Web site, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.