Narrator 1: When her family moved to the town of Westminster, California, young Sylvia Mendez was excited about enrolling in her neighborhood school.

Narrator 2: As the summer came to an end, Aunt Soledad drove Sylvia, her brothers and two cousins to enroll in the local public school.

Sylvia: What a handsome building. There were tall trees, a playground and the hallways were spacious and clean.

Aunt Soledad: I'm here to enroll the children in school.

Narrator 1: The secretary only handed Aunt Soledad two enrollment forms, one for each of Sylvia's cousins. But she did not give enrollment forms for Sylvia and her brothers.

Secretary: They cannot attend this school. They must go to the Mexican school.

Sylvia: (to herself) Why do I have to go to the Mexican school? I'm American and I speak perfect English. My father was from Mexico, but he is a U.S. citizen. My mother is from Puerto Rico which is a U.S. territory.
Aunt Soledad: (upset) But we all live in this part of town!

Narrator 2: Sylvia's cousins had light skin and long auburn hair, and their last name was Vidaurre - their father was Mexican, but of French descent.

Sylvia: (to herself) Is it because we have brown skin, thick black hair and our last name is Mendez?

Secretary: Rules are rules. The Mendez children have to go to the Mexican school.

Aunt Soledad: I will not be enrolling any of them, then.

Narrator 1: Aunt Soledad stormed out of the office, taking Sylvia and the other children with her.

Narrator 2: When they arrived home, Aunt Soledad told Sylvia's father what had happened. The next day he went to talk to the Superintendent, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Mendez: The public school on 17th St. is the closest school to our house, and my children should attend it.

Mr. Harris: Your children have to go to the Mexican school.

Mr. Mendez: But why?

Mr. Harris: That is how it is done.

Narrator 1: Mr. Mendez met with Mr. Harris's superior and the school board, but they all said the same thing. No one would give him a satisfactory answer.

Narrator 2: That fall, they attended the "Mexican school" which was a clapboard shack, was not spacious or clean, and did not have a playground. Flies landed on their food and an electric wire surrounded the pasture next to the school to keep the cows in.

Narrator 3: The Mendez family did not give up. They talked with others about how unfair it was that their children had to go to an inferior school. The poor condition of the building, teachers who didn't care and expected them to drop out by 8th grade.

Narrator 1: Mr. Mendez tried to get others to sign a petition to integrate the schools, but
they all said “We don’t want any problems” in fear of losing their jobs.

Narrator 2: One day, a truck driver overheard Mr. Mendez and told him that he could file a lawsuit.

Narrator 3: Mr. Mendez heard about this lawyer that helped integrate the pools in San Bernadino, so he decided right then and there to hire Mr. Marcus, even if it meant having to spend all of his savings to do so.

Narrator 1: For months, Mr. Mendez and Mr. Marcus left before Sylvia woke and returned after she was asleep looking for others to join the suit.

Narrator 2: Mrs. Mendez had to take care of the farm while he was preparing for the lawsuit.

Narrator 3: Other families joined the Mendez case from different school districts in Orange County. More than 5,000 children were affected by the segregation of students.

Narrator 2: On March 2, 1945, Mr. Marcus went to the courthouse and filed the lawsuit.

Narrator 1: Mendez v. Westminster is known by few American’s today. Learn about the Mendez family, their struggles and the outcome of the case by reading Separate is Never Equal.