

# Ruby Bridges

Ruby Bridges, born in Tylertown, Mississippi in 1954, was the first African-American child to go to a white school after desegregation in southern America. At this time, she was only six.

## School Segregation

In 1954, the Supreme Court in America ruled that schools should no longer be segregated. This was coincidentally the same year that Ruby was born. Even though it became law to desegregate schools, it took a number of years for African-American children to be able to go to white schools and even then, there was a lot of resistance.



When Ruby was in nursery school in New Orleans, she took a test to see if she could go to the white school which had become open to African-Americans who passed the test. Ruby's father was concerned about her going to the white school because of the trouble it might cause, but her mother was sure that she would get a better education. It is widely believed that the test was made hard so that not many children would succeed. However, in 1960, Ruby and her parents found out that she was one of only six African-American children to pass the test and able to go to white schools in the area.

## The First Day at School

People expected there to be trouble for Ruby when she started at the white William Frantz School, so to keep her safe, she was driven and walked into school by four US Federal Marshals. At school, there were crowds of people protesting, shouting rude names and throwing things because they did not want African-American children coming to the white school. There was so much trouble that the white children had been kept at home, so there were no classes that day. A famous painting was done by Norman Rockwell of this iconic walk to school called 'The Problem We All Live With'.

## The First Year

Only one white teacher, Mrs Henry, agreed to teach Ruby. Mrs Henry's choices

also made her unpopular with the white parents, but she did not care and saw Ruby as the most important. Other parents kept their white children away from Ruby, so, for a whole year, there was only Ruby and Mrs Henry together in one classroom for lessons, break times and even for meals. Thankfully, after the first year, white children started to return to Ruby's class and the Federal Marshals stops taking her to school. She had found the first year very hard and knew that children did not want to play with her because of the colour of her skin.

### Later Years

Ruby went on to be successful. She graduated from high school and had a good career. She had four sons and is now a civil rights activist focussing on making life fair for black and white people living together.



In 2014, a statue of Ruby was placed outside William Frantz School. In 2001, she was awarded a medal from President Bill Clinton and in 2011, she looked at the Norman Rockwell painting with President Barak Obama and he said to her,

*“I think it’s fair to say that if it hadn’t have been for you guys, I might not be here”.*

# Ruby Bridges Questions

1. What does the word 'segregation' mean?

---

2. Look at the end of paragraph two, why do you think that '...there was a lot of trouble'?

---

3. What type of adjective is African-American in paragraph two?

---

4. What did Ruby have to do to be able to go to the white school?

---

5. 'The First Day of School' paragraph starts with 'People expected there to be trouble...'

Why did people expect trouble?

---

---

6. At the end of the fourth paragraph, the author uses the word 'iconic' - what does this mean?

---

---

7. We know that Ruby was very brave to go through this experience.

Why do you think Mrs Henry was also brave?

---

---

8. Find a fronted adverbial in the fifth paragraph.

---

9. Explain what you think the 'problem' is in the title of the painting talked about in the text.

---

---

10. Look at the final quote from Barack Obama. What does he mean by this?

---

---