

Ruby Bridges

Ruby Bridges was born in Tylertown, Mississippi in 1954 and, when she was six, she was the first African-American child to go to a school with white children in Southern America.

Separated Schools

Up until 1954, the same year that Ruby was born, black and white children had to go to separate schools – this was called ‘segregation’. Even though it became law to let children mix in schools, it took quite a while for African-American children to be able to go to white schools and even then, there was a lot of trouble.



When Ruby was in nursery school in New Orleans, she took a test to see if she could go to the school for white children, which had become open to African-Americans that passed the test. Ruby’s father was worried what would happen if she went to the white school, but her mother was sure that she would get a better education. Many think that the test was made hard so that not many children would pass it and be able to go. 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 Marshals (American police officers). When she arrived at school, there were crowds of people. Some were 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 anyway. A painting was done by Norman Rockwell of this famous walk to school called ‘The Problem We All Live With’.

The First Year

Time went on and during this first year, only one white teacher would agree to teach Ruby. Her name was Mrs Henry. The other parents even kept their

white children away from Ruby, so for a whole year, it was only Ruby and Mrs Henry together in one classroom. Thankfully, after the first year, white children started to return to Ruby's class and the Federal Marshals stopped 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.

What Happened to Ruby Next?

Ruby went on to graduate from high school and work as a travel agent. She had four sons and is now a civil rights activist, which means that she does anything she can to make life fair for black and white people 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 punctuation mark joins the adjective 'African-American'?

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

5. Why did Ruby need to be taken to school by US Marshals?

6. People say that Ruby was very brave – do you agree and why?

7. In your own words, explain what sort of person Mrs Henry must have been.

8. Find a fronted adverbial in the fifth paragraph.

9. Ruby is now a civil rights activist. What does that mean?

10. Look at the final quote from Barack Obama. How have people like Ruby helped him?
