

Ruby Bridges

Ruby Bridges was born in 1954 and when she was 6, she was the first African-American child to go to a school with white children in Southern America.

Schools for Only White Children

Before 1954, black and white children had to go to separate schools. Even though it became law for black and white children to go to the same school, it took a few years for it to happen and even then, there was a lot of trouble.

When Ruby was in nursery school, she took a test to see if she could go to the school for white children. Ruby's father was worried what would happen if she went to the white school, but her mother was sure that it would be better for Ruby's learning. Many people think that the test was made hard so that not many children would pass it. However, in 1960, Ruby and her parents found out that she had passed the test so they made plans to take her to the white school.



The First Day at School

People expected there to be trouble for Ruby when she started at William Frantz School, so to keep her safe, she was driven and walked into school by four American police officers called 'US Marshals'. At school, there were lots of people who 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 stayed at home, so there were no lessons on that day. A famous painting was done by Norman Rockwell of this famous day called 'The Problem We All Live With'.

The First Year

Even though Ruby kept going to school, only one white teacher agreed to teach her and she was called 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 she did not need the US Marshals to take her to

school. She 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 Next?

Ruby went on to finish 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 did Ruby Bridges do that made her famous when she was 6 years old?

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

3. What are American police officers called?

4. In the 'First Day of School' paragraph, why were people shouting and throwing things?

5. What was the name of the painting that Norman Rockwell painted?

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

7. Do you think Mrs Henry was a kind person? Explain why.

8. Find as many verbs as you can in the last paragraph.

9. Which two American presidents has she met?

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

Ruby Bridges Answers

1. What did Ruby Bridges do that made her famous when she was 6 years old?
She was the first black girl to go to a white school in South America.
2. What did Ruby have to do to be able to go to the white school?
Ruby had to pass (not just take) a test.
3. What are American police officers called?
American police officers are called 'US Marshals'.
4. In the 'First Day of School' paragraph, why were people shouting and throwing things?
People were shouting and throwing things because they did not think it was right for a black girl to go to a white school.
5. What was the name of the painting that Norman Rockwell painted?
Norman Rockwell's painting was called "The Problem We All Live With".
6. People say that Ruby was very brave – do you agree and why?
(Open-ended and good for discussion) Ruby was brave to be the first black girl to go to a white school. She carried on, even though she was being shouted at or having things thrown at her. She must have also been brave to be on her own for the first year with no friends with which to play at school.
7. Do you think Mrs Henry was a kind person? Explain why.
(Open-ended) Answers may include: Mrs Henry was kind because she thought about Ruby's feelings and cared for her even though no one else would talk to her, teach her or play with her.
8. Find as many verbs as you can in the last paragraph.
Verbs in the last paragraph: (was) placed, (was) awarded, looked, said.
9. Which two American presidents has she met?
Ruby has met President Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama.
10. Look at the final quote from President Barack Obama. How have people like Ruby helped him?
He is the first black president of America and this would not have happened if lots of people like Ruby had not done something brave like this to change how black people are seen.

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?

Ruby Bridges Answers

1. What does the word 'segregation' mean?

Segregation means setting someone or something apart from others, such as when black and white children had to go to separate schools.

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

There was a lot of trouble because people wanted to stop black children going to the white schools and they were angry about it so they might have caused trouble.

3. What type of punctuation mark joins the adjective 'African-American'?

The adjective 'African-American' is joined with a hyphen.

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

Ruby had to pass (not just take) a test.

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

Ruby needed to be taken to school by US Marshals to keep her safe from the people who were angry about her going to a white school. People were shouting unkind things and also throwing things at her.

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

(Open-ended and good for discussion) Ruby was brave to be the first black girl to go to a white school. She carried on, even though she was being shouted at or having things thrown at her. She must have also been brave to be on her own for the first year with no friends to play with at school.

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

(Open-ended) Answers may include: Brave because people were not nice to her for teaching a black girl; kind because she thought about Ruby's feelings and cared for her.

8. Find a fronted adverbial in the fifth paragraph.

The fronted adverbial in the fifth paragraph is 'thankfully'.

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

A civil rights activist is someone who tries to make sure that people are treated equally and fairly no matter the colour of their skin.

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

He is the first black president of America and this would not have happened if lots of people like Ruby had not done something brave like this to change how black people are seen.

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.



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“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?

Ruby Bridges Answers

1. What does the word 'segregation' mean?
To keep people or thing separate (usually because of race or gender).
2. Look at paragraph two. What does the author mean by the phrase '...there was a lot of resistance'?
'There was a lot of resistance' means that people wanted to stop it (desegregation) happening. Resistance means pushing against something.
3. What type of adjective is African-American in paragraph two?
African-American is a compound adjective because it is made of two adjectives joined together with a hyphen.
4. What did Ruby have to do to be able to go to the white school?
Ruby had to pass (not just take) a test.
5. 'The First Day of School' paragraph starts with 'People expected there to be trouble...' Why did people expect trouble?
People expected trouble because they were not used to black and white children at the same school and lots of people did not want children to be mixed, so people were expected to get angry about it.
6. At the end of the fourth paragraph, the author uses the word 'iconic' - what does this mean?
The word iconic means something that has become famous. It can relate to a person or image that has become very famous and means something.
7. We know that Ruby was very brave to go through this experience. Why do you think Mrs Henry was also brave?
Mrs Henry was white and would have been disliked by many people for being on Ruby's side and being nice to her. She was brave to ignore these people and the unkind things they might say and continue to do what she believed in.
8. Find a fronted adverbial in the fifth paragraph.
The fronted adverbial in the fifth paragraph is 'thankfully'.
9. Explain what you think the 'problem' is in the title of the painting talked about in the text.
The problem is racism or the fact that a black girl had so much trouble going to school with white children.
10. Look at the final quote from Barack Obama. What does he mean by this?
He is the first black president of America and this would not have happened if lots of people like Ruby had not done something brave like this to change how black people are seen.