

# Ruby Bridges Differentiated Reading Comprehension

The resources in this pack are designed to support teaching on or around the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the USA, or as part of UKS2 learning during Black History Month. This pack is specifically aimed at an UKS2 audience due to the potentially upsetting nature of the content.

It is your responsibility to consider whether it is appropriate to use this resource with your students. If you do use this resource, it is your responsibility to ensure that appropriate support is available for anyone affected.

# Ruby Bridges

Ruby Bridges was born on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1954 in Mississippi, USA. She was born during the US **civil rights movement**. The year that she was born, racial **segregation** in schools across America was ended. When she was six years old, Ruby became the first African-American child to go to an all-white elementary school.

## Segregated Schools

Before 1954, black children and white children in the USA had to go to separate schools. In 1954, a Supreme Court ruling was made to **desegregate** schools. As a result, it became law for black and white children to be able to go to the same school. However, some parts of America, especially the southern states, resisted this law.



A protest against desegregation, 1959

Despite resisting, in 1960, Louisiana was ordered to **desegregate** its schools. At that time, Ruby was living in New Orleans, Louisiana. She was attending an all-black kindergarten that was a long distance from her home.

The school district created an entrance exam to test African-American children. Ruby's father was worried about her safety if she passed because many local, white Americans were angry about **desegregation**. However, her mother wanted her to have a better education than she had had.

Ruby and five other African-American children passed the test. Consequently, Ruby was able to join a local all-white school, William Frantz Elementary School, close to her home.

## Her First Day at School

On her first day of school, Ruby and her mother were escorted into the building by American police officers called, 'US Marshals'. When they arrived, lots of people were protesting. Ruby did not fully understand what was happening, but people shouted offensive words and called her names. Many angry white parents kept their children at home and there were no lessons on that first day.



Ruby's First Day



### Did You Know ...?

In 1964, the artist Norman Rockwell created a painting to show Ruby Bridge's first day at school. It is called: 'The Problem We All Live With'.

### The First Year

Most of the existing teachers at the school refused to have Ruby in their class. There was only one who was willing to teach Ruby. Barbara Henry was a white teacher originally from Boston, MA, in the north of the USA. She had recently moved to New Orleans after teaching abroad and was new to the school.

On that first day, some parents stormed the school to take their children home. Some permanently removed their children. In fact, for one whole year, it was only Ruby and Mrs Henry together in one classroom. Ruby ate lunch alone and played alone, or sometimes with her teacher. Despite this, she did not miss one day of school in that whole year.

### What Happened Next?

Ruby went on to graduate from a **desegregated** high school, to marry, have four sons, and she is now a civil rights activist. She created the Ruby Bridges Foundation, which aims to promote "the values of tolerance, respect, and appreciation of all differences".

In 2001, she was awarded the Presidential Citizen's Medal from President Bill Clinton and in 2011, she visited the White House again. There, standing beside President Barack Obama, she looked at the Norman Rockwell painting showing her bravery on that day in 1960. Turning to her, the then President of the USA – the first black person to hold that title – said to her,



**"I think it's fair to say that if it hadn't been for you guys, I might not be here".**

In 2014, a statue of Ruby was unveiled outside William Frantz School to celebrate and remember her courage and determination.

## Glossary

### **activist**

A person who campaigns for change.

### **civil rights movement**

A movement to end treating people differently based on the colour of their skin, and to improve the lives of African Americans.

### **desegregate/desegregation**

The ending of a policy of segregation.

### **segregate/segregation**

The separation of different racial groups.

# Questions

1. When was Ruby Bridges born? Tick **one**.

- 8<sup>th</sup> September 1945
- 8<sup>th</sup> September 1954
- 8<sup>th</sup> September 1854
- 8<sup>th</sup> September 1845

2. What did Ruby Bridges do that made her famous when she was six years old?

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3. Who walked with Ruby to school to make sure she was safe?

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4. Look at the 'Her First Day at School' section. Why did people shout offensive words and call her names?

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5. What was the title of the painting that Norman Rockwell created? Tick **one**.

- The Problem We All Live With
- The Problem Today
- The Girl Going to School
- The Walk to School

6. Which two American presidents has Ruby met?

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7. People say that Ruby was very brave. Do you agree? Why?

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8. How was Mrs Henry different from the other teachers?

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# Answers

1. When was Ruby Bridges born? Tick **one**.

- 8<sup>th</sup> September 1945
- 8<sup>th</sup> September 1954**
- 8<sup>th</sup> September 1854
- 8<sup>th</sup> September 1845

2. What did Ruby Bridges do that made her famous when she was six years old?  
**She was the first African-American child to go to an all-white elementary school.**

3. Who walked with Ruby to school to make sure she was safe?  
**US Marshals (Police Officers)**

4. Look at the 'Her First Day at School' section. Why did people shout offensive words and call her names?  
**People were shouting offensive words and calling her names because they were protesting against desegregation and they were angry; they did not want African-American children to join the school.**

5. What was the title of the painting that Norman Rockwell created? Tick **one**.

- The Problem We All Live With**
- The Problem Today
- The Girl Going to School
- The Walk to School

6. Which two American presidents has Ruby met?  
**Ruby has met President Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama.**

7. People say that Ruby was very brave. Do you agree? Why?  
**Pupil's own responses, such as: Ruby was brave to be the first African-American child to go to an all-white school. She carried on, even though there were protests. She must have also been brave to be on her own for the first year with no friends to play with at school.**

8. How was Mrs Henry different from the other teachers?  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: Mrs Henry was different from the others because she was a new teacher to the school and she was the only one who wanted to teach Ruby.**

# Ruby Bridges

Ruby Bridges was born in Tylertown, Mississippi on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 1954, during the **civil rights movement** in the USA. 1954 was the year that racial **segregation** in schools across America was ended. Although Ruby had attended a **segregated** kindergarten, when she was six years old, she became the first African-American child to go to an all-white elementary school.

## Segregated Schools

In the USA up until 1954, black and white children had to go to separate schools – this was called **segregation**. In 1954, a US Supreme Court ruling was made to **desegregate** schools. As a result, it became law for black and white children to be able to go to the same school. However, some parts of America, especially the southern states (including Louisiana), resisted this law.



A protest against desegregation, 1959

Despite its resistance, in 1960, Louisiana was ordered to **desegregate** its schools. Ruby, the eldest of five children whose parents were former **sharecroppers**, was living in New Orleans, Louisiana when this happened. She was attending a **segregated** kindergarten for black children some distance from her home.



Ruby

The Louisiana school district created an entrance exam to see if African-American children could compete academically with the children at the all-white schools. Worried about her safety if she passed, Ruby's father was unsure whether she should take the exam. Many local, white Americans were angry about desegregation. However, Ruby's mother was confident that Ruby should have the opportunity of a better education than she had had.

Ruby, along with five other African-American children, passed the test with flying colours. Thus, Ruby was granted admission to a local all-white school, William Frantz Elementary School, which was conveniently close to her home.

"Ruby Bridges 21 Sept 2010" by [Infroagation of New Orleans](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

## Her First Day at School

Disruption and protest was expected when the first African American to attend an all-white school arrived for her first day. As a result, Ruby was driven to school and escorted into the building by US Marshals (American Police Officers). Upon arrival, Ruby and her mother were met by a mob of angry people, chanting and protesting. Some were shouting offensive names, trying to intimidate Ruby and her family.



Ruby's First Day



### Did You Know ...?

In 1964, the artist Normal Rockwell created a painting to show Ruby Bridge's first day at school. It is called: 'The Problem We All Live With'.

## Her First Year

Only one teacher was willing to teach Ruby – Mrs Barbara Henry. For the whole year, it was just the two of them in the classroom. In fact, at playtimes and at lunchtimes, six-year-old Ruby was alone. Gradually, other children, from all backgrounds, joined her class. Many families from all over the USA praised her courage, some of whom sent money and clothing in support. However, everyday life was difficult for her family. Her father was sacked from his job, some shops refused to sell to her mother, and her grandparents were told to leave the home where they had lived for 25 years.



## What Happened Next?

Ruby Bridges continued her education at integrated schools. Many years later, her nieces attended the same elementary school. She is now a civil rights activist and chair of the Ruby Bridges Foundation, which aims to promote "the values of tolerance, respect, and appreciation of all differences".



In 2014, a statue of Ruby was unveiled in the courtyard outside William Frantz School. In 2001, she was awarded a Medal from President Bill Clinton, recognising her exemplary service to her country. In 2011, she met with President Barack Obama – the first black US president – at the White House. They both looked at the Norman Rockwell painting and he reportedly said to her,

**“I think it’s fair to say that if it hadn’t been for you guys, I might not be here and we wouldn’t be looking at this together.”**

# Glossary

**activist**

A person who campaigns for change.

**civil rights movement**

A movement to end treating people differently based on the colour of their skin, and to improve the lives of African Americans.

**desegregate/desegregation**

The ending of a policy of segregation.

**segregate/segregation**

The separation of different racial groups.

**sharecroppers**

Farmers who work the land but do not own it.

# Questions

1. What did Ruby have to do to be allowed to go to the all-white school? Tick **one**.

- write a letter asking to join the school
- be interviewed by the head teacher
- take and pass a test
- pay lots of money to the school

2. What was the name of the all-white school Ruby joined?

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3. Match the year to the event in Ruby's life.

1960

Ruby Bridges was born

2014

Ruby was awarded the Presidential Citizen's Medal by President Bill Clinton.

2001

Ruby started at William Frantz School.

1954

A statue of Ruby was unveiled at William Frantz School.

4. What is the name of the painting by Norman Rockwell, based on Ruby's experiences?

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5. Why did Ruby's mother want her to go to an all-white school?

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6. **Find** and **copy** a word which means 'a group of people intent on causing trouble'.

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

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8. When Ruby became the first African-American child to attend an all-white school, life changed for her whole family, too. Do you agree or disagree? Use evidence from the text.

Agree

Disagree

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9. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s changed US history. Look at the quotation from President Barack Obama. Who do you think he is talking about when he says, '...if it hadn't been for you guys'?

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# Answers

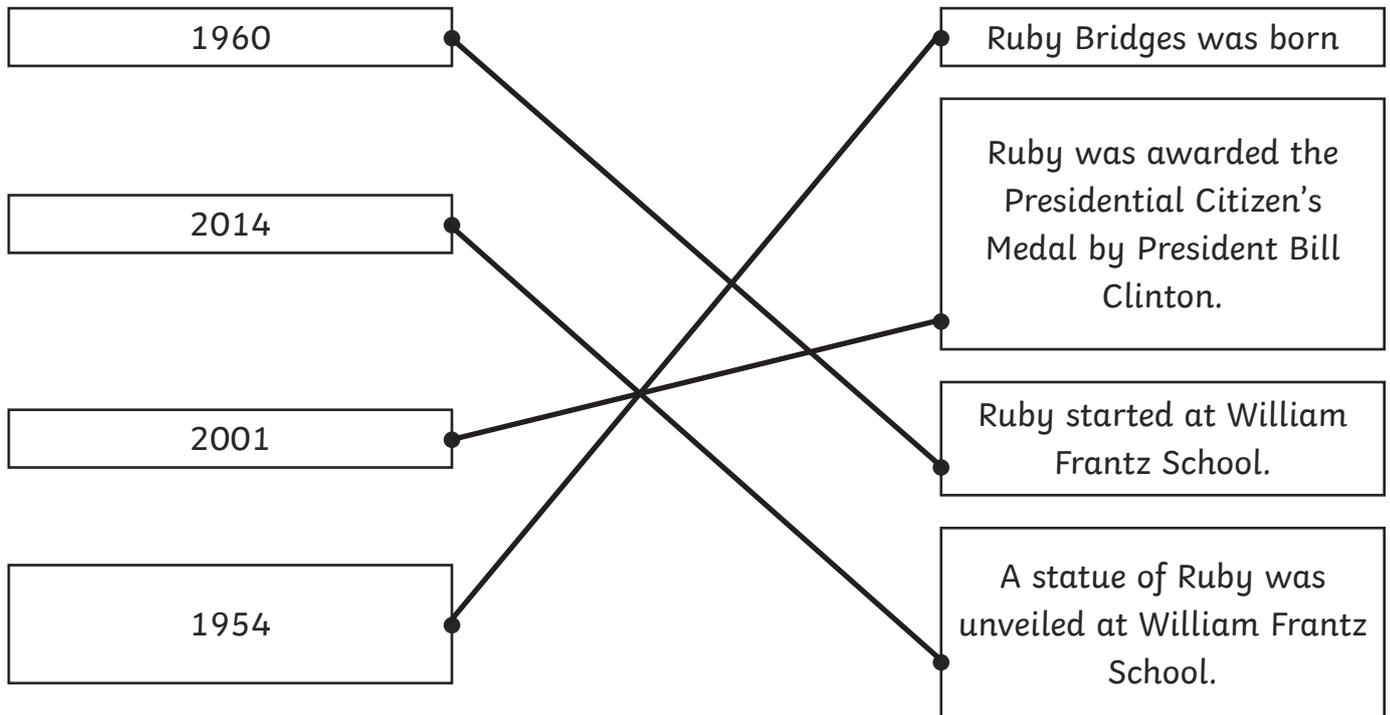
1. What did Ruby have to do to be allowed to go to the all-white school? Tick **one**.

- write a letter asking to join the school
- be interviewed by the head teacher
- take and pass a test**
- pay lots of money to the school

2. What was the name of the all-white school Ruby joined?

**William Frantz School**

3. Match the year to the event in Ruby's life.



4. What is the name of the painting by Norman Rockwell, based on Ruby's experiences?

**The Problem We All Live With**

5. Why did Ruby's mother want her to go to an all-white school?

**She wanted her to get a better education than she had had.**

6. **Find** and **copy** a word which means 'a group of people intent on causing trouble'.  
**mob**

7. 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 desegregation and who were trying to intimidate Ruby and her family.**

8. When Ruby became the first African-American child to attend an all-white school, life changed for her whole family, too. Do you agree or disagree? Use evidence from the text.

Agree

Disagree

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I agree that it changed their lives because it says that her father lost his job and his mother couldn't buy from shops. Also, her grandparents had to move house.**

9. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s changed US history. Look at the quotation from President Barack Obama. Who do you think he is talking about when he says, '...if it hadn't been for you guys'?

**Pupils' own responses, referring to the glossary and the text, such as: I think he is talking about the civil rights activists, like Ruby Bridges, who protested and campaigned for an end to racial discrimination.**

# Ruby Bridges

Ruby Nell Bridges was born in Mississippi, USA, on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 1954, the eldest of five children, during the US civil rights movement. Her birth year coincided with the **unprecedented** US Supreme Court ruling that racial **segregation** in schools must be ended, that the future of US education would now be integration between all children, regardless of the colour of their skin.

By attending the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the tender age of six years old, Ruby became the first African-American child to go to an integrated school. This was an act of courage amidst adversity that would change her life, her family's, and the lives of future African-American children, forever.

## School Segregation

In 1954, the Supreme Court in America ruled that schools must no longer be **segregated**, meaning it was now legal for black and white children to go to the same schools. Even though it became law to **desegregate** schools, in reality it took a number of years for it to happen – particularly in the southern states such as Mississippi and Louisiana where there was much resistance.

By 1960, the state of Louisiana, having delayed and resisted change, was ordered to **desegregate** its schools. At this time, Ruby was living in New Orleans, Louisiana, attending a kindergarten for black children some distance from her home.

In order to see if they could compete academically with the children at the all-white schools, the local school district created an entrance exam to test African-American children. Ruby's father was hesitant; he thought she may be able to pass, but he was worried about his eldest daughter's safety. Locally, there were many white Americans who were angry about **desegregation**. Despite this reticence, the decision was made for Ruby, among others, to sit the exam. Ruby's mother, who worked night jobs to earn money for the family, was adamant that she should be given the opportunity for a better education and life than she had had.

Ruby and five other African-American children passed the test with flying colours. Of these successful six, three children attended a different all-white school, two children chose not to leave their schools, and Ruby was able to start at a local all-white school, William Frantz School, close to her home.



## The First Day at School

On her first day of school, it was necessary for Ruby and her mother to be escorted by four American police officers, called 'US Marshals'. A mob of angry protesters greeted them. Six-year-old Ruby did not fully comprehend what was happening, but people shouted racist, abusive words and names. Due to the chaos and disruption, Ruby's first day at school was not spent learning in the classroom, but in the safety of the principal's office.



Ruby's First Day

### Did You Know...?

In 1964, the artist Normal Rockwell created an oil-painting of Ruby Bridge's first day at school and published it in a popular magazine at the time. The painting depicts Ruby's bravery despite facing adversity. The painting is called: 'The Problem We All Live With'.

## The First Year

Only one teacher was willing to teach Ruby; Barbara Henry, a white Boston native who had recently relocated to New Orleans after teaching overseas, became Ruby's first teacher.

On the first day, parents stormed classrooms to take their children home – some of whom permanently removed their children from the school. In fact, for one whole year, it was only Ruby and Mrs Henry together in one classroom. Ruby's lunchtimes and playtimes were spent alone; she was excluded from the other children's learning and games.

Despite these experiences, she did not miss one day of school, such was her determination and courage.

## What Happened to Ruby Next?

Following that controversial first year, Ruby Bridges continued her education at integrated schools. Supporters from northern states sent money and clothing to her family. Many years later, her nieces attended the same elementary school. She is now a civil rights activist and chair of the Ruby Bridges Foundation, which she formed in 1999. Its aim: to promote "the values of tolerance, respect, and appreciation of all differences".

In 2011, she was invited to the White House to meet with President Barack Obama – the first black US president. They both looked upon that famous Norman Rockwell painting, which had been specially hung on the walls of the President’s home and which depicted her childhood courage on that day in 1960, and he reportedly said to her,

***“I think it’s fair to say that if it hadn’t been for you guys, I might not be here and we wouldn’t be looking at this together.”***

In 2014, a statue of Ruby was unveiled in the courtyard outside William Frantz School. To this day, she continues to campaign for an end to racism and for equal opportunities for all.



Ruby

“Ruby Bridges 21 Sept 2010” by Infoamation of New Orleans is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

# Glossary

**activist**

A person who campaigns for change.

**Boston**

The state capital of Massachusetts, New England, a northern state in the USA.

**desegregate/desegregation**

The ending of a policy of segregation.

**segregate/segregation**

The enforced separation of different racial groups.

**unprecedented**

Never done before.

# Questions

1. What do you think the word **integration** means?

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2. What impression do you get of Ruby's mother? Give two impressions, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

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3. What did Ruby have to do to be able to go to an all-white school?

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4. Order these events from 1-5 to show the order in which they happened.

Ruby was driven to school by US Marshals.	
A famous painting that showed Ruby's first day was created by Norman Rockwell.	
Ruby took and passed a test to get into William Frantz School.	
The Supreme Court ruled that schools should no longer be segregated.	
Ruby's nieces joined William Frantz School.	

5. 'Only one teacher was willing to teach Ruby'. What does this tell us about Mrs Henry's feelings about desegregation in US schools?

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6. On the first day, parents **stormed** classrooms...

The word **stormed** suggests that the parents moved...

Tick **one**.

happily

slowly

worriedly

angrily

# Questions

7. In what way were the southern states of the US generally different from the northern states in their view of desegregation? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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8. What was unveiled in 2014 to honour Ruby?

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9. How do you think Ruby felt starting at William Frantz School? Explain why you think this.

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10. 'I think it's fair to say that if it hadn't been for you guys, I might not be here and we wouldn't be looking at this together.' What does President Barack Obama mean by this comment?

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# Answers

1. What do you think the word **integration** means?  
**It means the opposite of segregation and that all children would go to school together, regardless of the colour of their skin.**
2. What impression do you get of Ruby's mother? Give two impressions, using evidence from the text to support your answer.  
**Acceptable points: Ruby's mother was hard-working, caring and ambitious for her daughter to do well in school. She worked hard to support her family. She had five children to look after but she also worked nights to raise money for her family. She cared about Ruby because she walked to school with her.**
3. What did Ruby have to do to be able to go to an all-white school?  
**Ruby had to take a test and pass it.**
4. Order these events from 1-5 to show the order in which they happened.

Ruby was driven to school by US Marshals.	<b>3</b>
A famous painting that showed Ruby's first day was created by Norman Rockwell.	<b>4</b>
Ruby took and passed a test to get into William Frantz School.	<b>2</b>
The Supreme Court ruled that schools should no longer be segregated.	<b>1</b>
Ruby's nieces joined William Frantz School.	<b>5</b>

5. 'Only one teacher was willing to teach Ruby'. What does this tell us about Mrs Henry's feelings about desegregation in US schools?  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: It tells us that she was not angry about desegregation. It tells us that she was ready and eager to teach Ruby and therefore supportive of desegregation.**

# Answers

6. On the first day, parents **stormed** classrooms...

The word **stormed** suggests that the parents moved...

Tick **one**.

happily

slowly

worriedly

**angrily**

7. In what way were the southern states of the US generally different from the northern states in their view of desegregation? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.  
**Southern states resisted desegregation. States such as Mississippi and Louisiana delayed desegregation until 1960 which was six years after the ruling. Northern states were more supportive. For example, some people from northern states sent money and clothing to Ruby's family.**

8. What was unveiled in 2014 to honour Ruby?

**A statue of Ruby outside William Frantz School was unveiled in 2014.**

9. How do you think Ruby felt starting at William Frantz School? Explain why you think this.  
**Pupils' own responses, e.g. I think she felt terrified because of people shouting names at her, having to have a police escort to go to school. I think she felt lonely because she worked alone with her teacher and the other children didn't want to play with her.**

10. 'I think it's fair to say that if it hadn't been for you guys, I might not be here and we wouldn't be looking at this together.' What does President Barack Obama mean by this comment?

**He is the first black US president and he is saying that maybe this would not have happened if lots of people like Ruby had not acted during the civil rights movement to improve education and opportunities for African American people.**