

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.

