**The Story of Ruby Bridges**

by Robert Coles

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**Overview**

Sustained by family and faith, one brave six-year-old child found the strength to walk alone through howling protesters and enter a whites-only school in New Orleans in 1960. Ruby Bridges did it every day for weeks that turned into months. The white parents withdrew their kids, and Ruby sat alone with her teacher in an empty classroom in an empty building and learned her lessons.

**Grade 3**

**LEARNING TARGETS**

* I can identify how Ruby Bridges made a difference in the civic life of our nation.
* I can explain how civic discourse would have changed Ruby’s experience attending school.
* I can explain how the principals of majority rule and minority rights played a part in the court decision to allow Ruby to attend William Frantz Elementary School.
* I can describe how the services provided by government were important in the story of Ruby Bridges.
* I can identify the actions taken by the judicial and the executive branch in the story of Ruby Bridges.

**STANDARDS**

**Grade 3**

**Civics**

**3.1.1.1.1** Identify ways people make a difference in the civic life of their communities, state, nation or world by working as individuals or groups to address a specific problem or need.

**3.1.2.3.1** Explain the importance of civic discourse (including speaking, listening, voting and respecting diverse viewpoints) and the principles of majority rule and minority rights.

**3.1.4.7.1** Describe the importance of the services provided by government; explain that they are funded through taxes and fees.

**3.1.4.7.2** Identify the three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial) and their primary functions.

**3.2.1.1** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

**Grade 3**

**Language Arts**

**3.2.3.3** Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

**3.2.4.4** Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 3 topic or subject area.

**GUIDE**

1. Before reading The Story of Ruby Bridges ask the students if they have heard of segregation. Explain about segregation in the United States and specifically as it related to schools. Read the story together. Ruby’s actions are powerful and attract the greatest attention. Make sure to pause as you read to allow students to note the actions of others in the book: Ruby’s parents, the judge, the President (although he is not pictured), the federal marshals, Mrs. Henry. (Make sure the students know what a judge and a federal marshal is) Notice the crowd of people who wanted to keep Ruby from attending Frantz School. Talk about why these people are so angry. Talk about the families who would not send their children to school with Ruby. What might they be feeling? Could they have been frightened to send their children through the angry mob? Talk about Mrs. Henry. The rest of the teachers in the building actually refused to teach Ruby. Make sure that you also read the Afterward to the children so that they can understand that the school did become desegregated. Have the students make a mind web of the people involved in the Ruby Bridges story and what they did. Ruby would be at the center of the web.

Civics Standard: 3.1.1.1.1 3.1.2.3.1 3.1.4.7.1

Language Arts Standard: 3.2.1.1 3.2.4.4

1. How do you think Ruby felt each day as she walked through the crowd? She appeared calm, but do you think she was afraid? Do you think she got angry with the people who yelled at her? How do you think her parents felt? Were they frightened for their little girl? Were they angry with the people who mistreated her? Why do you think Ruby and her parents decided to insist on her attending Frantz School? Couldn’t she have attended a different school and avoided this trouble? Look at the pages in the book where the family is in the courtroom and in their church. What do they say about the decision to have Ruby be a part of this case? (They new it wasn’t fair that black children did not get the same education as white children. They were proud to be a part of an important event in American history. They wanted to be brave. They wanted Ruby to be a credit to her people and to all American people.) What would have happened if Ruby Bridges had not attended Frantz School? Her actions lead to the desegregation of that school, and other schools throughout the segregated states. Explain to the students that Ruby’s actions were part of the “civic life” of our nation, because they changed how our nation treated some of our people. She changed how our nation treated schoolchildren. Ruby’s actions were impressive because it was such an important time in American history, and because she was so brave. There are many smaller ways that people can be part of the civic life of our nation or community. Spend some time as a class making a list of ways that students could be part of the civic life of their school or city. Remind the students that these don’t have to be big actions, but they should be actions that impact the community.

Civics Standard: 3.1.1.1.1 3.1.2.3.1

Language Arts Standard: 3.2.1.1 3.2.3.3

1. Why did the President have to send federal marshals to escort Ruby to school? (The mob wanted to keep her from entering the school. They were afraid she would get hurt. They were enforcing the ruling that the court had made.) The people who wanted to keep Ruby from attending Frantz School had very strong opinions about segregation. Generally it is important that people in the United States feel that they can talk about their opinions. What was wrong about how these people expressed their opinions? (They were taking it out on a little girl. They were angry and threatening violence.) Look again at the picture of the court. In this picture only the people who wanted desegregation are pictured, but before the judge made that decision he would have listened to both sides of the argument. He would have listened to those who wanted segregation to continue, as well as those who wanted it to end. Then he made the decision. Why is that important? (It is fair. It helps judges make good decisions based on all the facts.) Compare the picture of the courtroom with one of the pictures of the mob yelling at Ruby. In both pictures people are expressing opinions. What are differences between them? (The courtroom is quiet so that everyone can be heard. People in the courtroom look respectful. ) What would Ruby’s experiences going to school have been like if the people had accepted and followed the judge’s decision, rather than try to fight against it? (She could have peacefully gone to school.) Explain that “discourse” is when people discuss a subject in a respectful way, listening to all viewpoints. “Civic discourse” is when citizens discuss their community or nation in a respectful way. In this book, the courtroom is an example of civic discourse, the angry crowd is not.

Civics Standards: 3.1.1.1.1 3.1.2.3.1 3.1.4.7.1

Language Arts Standards: 3.2.1.1 3.2.4.4

1. Look again at the picture of the angry crowd. There are a lot of people there. If there had been a vote taken at that time, would the number of people wanting to keep Ruby out of the school been greater than the number who wanted her in the school? (Yes) Usually we say that the “majority rules.” This means that whatever gets the most votes wins. In the case of Ruby Bridges, and desegregation in general, minority rights were upheld even though majority rule was against it. The judge decided that Ruby should go to Frantz School, even though most people in New Orleans at that time did not want segregation to end. Does that seem right? Why or why not? Sometimes the right that would be taken from the minority is too important to let the majority decide it, like the right to an education and the right to be treated equally. Imagine a classroom where nearly all the students loved peanuts and wanted to bring them to school for a snack. There was one student in the classroom with a dangerous allergy to peanuts, and who could become very sick even from being in the same room as peanuts. Should the majority of students be able to vote to bring peanuts to school despite the one student’s allergy? The health of the one student is more important than the other students desire to eat peanuts at school.

Civics Standards: 3.1.1.1.1 3.1.2.3.1

Language Arts Standards: 3.2.1.1 3.2.4.4

1. There are 3 kinds of government officers that are mentioned in this book. What are they? Read the story again and see if the students can identify them. (The President, the federal marshals, the court/ judge) These people belong to two of the branches of the government. Which ones? (Judicial and Executive) What is the job of the Judicial Branch? (To interpret laws.) How did this happen in the case of Ruby Bridges? (The judge interpreted or explained that the Constitution said that segregation in schools was against the law.) What is the job of the Executive Branch when it comes to laws? (To enforce.) How did this happen in the case of Ruby Bridges? (The President sent the federal marshals to carry out the order of the court, which was to follow the law and let Ruby attend the school.)

Civics Standards: 3.1.4.7.1 3.1.4.7.2

Language Arts Standards: 3.2.1.1 3.2.3.3

**SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS**

1. Have the students write a paragraph responding to the following question: Ruby Bridges is an important example of someone who made a difference in the civic life of our country. What did she help to change? What do you think was important about how Ruby acted?
2. Have students do research on other people who have made a difference in the civic life of their community. Make a bulletin board that features the people that they learn about.
3. Make a timeline of Ruby’s story. Begin when she moved to the city, and end when she starts her own Ruby Bridges Foundation.
4. Try some “civic discourse.” Choose a topic of interest at your school. (Should we have a dance? Is there too much homework? Which class should go into lunch first?) Let the class know a day ahead of time that you will be discussing this issue, and that everyone will need to express an opinion. For the discussion have everyone in a circle. Use a timer and go around the circle, making sure everyone has the same amount of time to express opinions. Then pass out ballots and take a vote on the issue. As an exit ticket, have students answer the following questions:

* Did you change your opinion by listening to other students?
* What was good about this method of discussion?
* What was challenging about this method of discussion?

**Notes**