

Ruby Bridges

Ruby's Shoes



Grades 6 - 12

Objective To connect Ruby's moment of courage with students' own experiences (social emotional learning/empathy)

Materials Video/images of Ruby Bridges being escorted by federal marshals
Student laptops/devices or pencil/paper

Background

While we often learn about people, places and things "from a distance" in Social Studies, this activity challenges you relate in a personal way. In this activity, you will imagine yourself in the situation experienced by Ruby Bridges, a young student who endured angry mobs shouting and spitting at her, for no other reason than the fact that she was the first African American student at a previously all-white school. What's it like to walk in the shoes of this six year old, who faced down racism and bigotry? After stepping into Ruby's shoes, you'll make connections to experiences in your own life.

Lesson Procedure

1.) Examine

Examine the picture of Ruby Bridges when she was six years old going to school (included after the directions or available online).

- What do you see in this picture?
- What do you notice about the clothing, surroundings, ages, heights and ethnicities of the people in the picture?
- Describe the facial expressions and body language of the people in the picture. What might they be thinking or feeling?

2.) Contextualize

Now that you've examined the picture, consider the background, or context, in which the action in picture took place:

"Ruby was six years old during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Across the country, states had been segregating their schools by race. That is, students were forced to attend different and unequal schools based on the color of their skin. By the time Ruby was in 1st grade in 1960, it had been six years since the Supreme Court had ruled school segregation unconstitutional, but many states and counties had resisted integrating schools. Finally, New Orleans, where the Bridges family lived began to integrate. But, there was resistance from white mobs of adult segregationists who would surround Ruby's school, shouting and spitting at the little 6 year old as she tried to go to school. So many parents at the historically white school pulled out their children that Ruby attended 1st grade alone for about 8 months and had to be escorted in and out of the school by federal marshals."

3.) Identify Emotions

Brainstorm a list of emotions that Ruby might have felt as she went through this experience. It may be helpful to add them to your notes from Step 1.

- How do you think Ruby felt in this situation?
- What emotions – or feelings – might she have had as she walked past those angry crowds into the school?
- How might she have felt when she was the only child in her classroom?

4.) Connect and Create

Think of a time in your own life when you felt some of the emotions that Ruby felt. What was the circumstance you were in that led you to experience emotions similar to Ruby's?

Now, take us there. Take the experience from your life where you felt emotions similar to Ruby and illustrate it or write about it.

- If illustrating the experiences, caption your images with narrative text. Use descriptive words to enhance your illustration.
- Write a passage in the form of a journal entry, an essay, or as if you were being interviewed for the news.
- Write a script with dialogue/monologue for a short scene that tells the story of their experience. (A monologue is for a single actor, dialogue involves speaking by two or more characters) Play out the scene by reading the dialogue aloud. Be sure to portray the script in a way that communicates the emotions associated with each line and of the experience as a whole!

5.) Reflect

Now share (and name) the emotions you felt after you got through the experience that you illustrated or wrote about. Contrast the emotions in the moment with those felt after the fact.

- How did your emotions or feelings change?
- What did you learn by going through that experience?
- Having gone through that experience and the emotions during and after, what have you learned about yourself?

6.) Dig Deeper and Project for the Future (optional)

View the segment on Ruby from the PBS series, Many Rivers to Cross at https://kcts9.pbslearningmedia.org/asset/mr13_vid_rubyb/. Using note-taking strategies, document crucial issues, people and events included in the video clip.

Now shift from reflection on the past to projection on the present and future. In the video, Ruby describes how the segregationists “could not see a child” but instead felt the threat of change.

- What is an example of a current social issue where opposing sides are quick to dehumanize each other?
- How does that affect the way in which we see opponents and the types of tactics we are willing to use?
- What is a social issue today that you feel so strongly about that you would endure a situation similar to Ruby's?

Tips for virtual learning:

1. Utilize a virtual whiteboard or screen-shared document for group brainstorming. Utilize your virtual platform(s) to allow students to perform or showcase their creations.



Ruby Bridges on school steps, being escorted by U.S. Marshals; Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Justice