

# Ruby Bridges



## What do you meme? From Ruby to Kamala

<b>Grades</b>	K – 5 or 6-12 <i>(This lesson includes a basic all-ages discussion guide, followed by extensions and adaptations for varying grade levels)</i>
<b>Objective</b>	Connecting Ruby Bridge's role in desegregating schools with current events.
<b>Materials</b>	Meme by Good Trubble, depicting Kamala walking with Ruby's shadow (Included) Supporting hyperlinks and access to PowerPoint, Canva and/or Sutori (optional)

### Background

In this lesson, students examine a trending meme to compare the stories of Ruby Bridges and Kamala Harris, and to consider why the meme creators chose to put them together. November 2020 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ruby Bridges' historic enrollment at Franz Elementary School in New Orleans. While the black and white images of that moment make it seem part of the distant past, it is not. Ruby is now in her mid-60s. In fact, that generation of students who first desegregated schools through enrollment and bussing just saw one of its own enter the spotlight this year. Kamala Harris, will become the first woman, first Black person and first person of Asian descent to assume the Vice Presidency of the United States. But, like Ruby, she was part of the first generation of students to desegregate her local schools, having been part of the second class to take part in the bussing that happened in the Bay Area to integrate school populations.



In the era of social media, internet memes have become a crucial part of shorthand mass communication. [Merriam-Webster](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme) defines a meme as following, with the second meaning

- 1 : an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture Memes (discrete units of knowledge, gossip, jokes and so on) are to culture what genes are to life.*
- 2 : an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media*

Internet memes are ever-present in our culture. In addition to making historical connections, this lesson allows students to explore the intentionality of choices in creating a meme. Students consider how memes reflect choices of images and texts as a way of expressing an opinion or observation.

## **Lesson Procedure**

### **1.) Introduce the Ruby-Kamala meme (a pdf version is provided with this lesson)**

- What do you see in this image?
- How many figures do you see?
- How are they similar or different?
- How are they dressed?
- Are they carrying anything?
- Does the picture tell us anything about what they are doing or feeling?
- One person is seen clearly, the other is in a silhouette, or shadow. Do you know who either person is?
- What do you think the artist wants to tell us about these two people?

### **2.) Contextualize the meme**

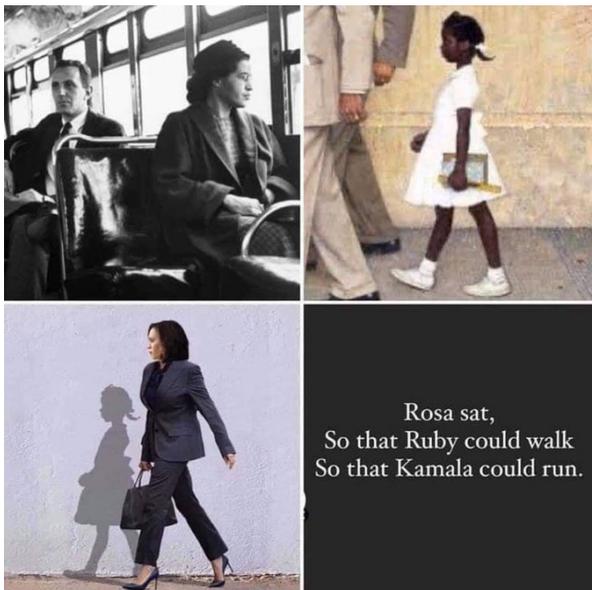
- Explain that the image is a meme – an image designed to communicate an idea on the internet
- The image is designed to look realistic, but actually combines two different people, Ruby Bridges and Kamala Harris, who have separate stories
- As you saw (or will see) in *Ruby Bridges*, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges was the first Black student to enroll in a school that had previously only allowed white children. She grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana. Each day, she walked alone into the school, escorted by federal agents who protected her from angry grown-ups who did not want kids of different colors to study together. She was among the first students to create schools like the one you attend now, where all students are welcome. She is 67 today.
- Kamala Harris started school in Berkeley, California. She is about 10 years younger than Ruby, but she was also among the first students in a program to bring students of all colors to share the same school. Every morning she boarded a bus that would take her and other Black children to a school in a wealthier, mostly white neighborhood. Now, she is about to become the first woman, the first Black person and the first Asian person to be Vice President of the United States. Kamala is 56 years old today.

### **3.) Compare and Connect**

- How are Ruby and Kamala's childhood experiences similar?
- How are their experiences different?
- Why do you think the creators of the meme chose to put Ruby and Kamala together?
- When we see historical pictures of Ruby in black and white, we might think that it was a long, long time ago when people began to allow all kids to study together. But, Kamala is even younger than Ruby. What does this tell us about how long it's been since unfair laws separated kids by color?
- On the one hand, the meme challenges us by reminding us that it wasn't that long ago when students like you were forced to study in separate, unequal schools. On the other hand, the meme presents us with a very positive message: How does Ruby's bravery as a young girl support Kamala's achievements as the first Black woman to be Vice President?

## Extensions and Adaptations

- A.) Contrast the Ruby/Kamala meme with Norman Rockwell's painting of Ruby, The Problem We All Live With (1964). The image and teacher resources are at <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/visual-arts/norman-rockwell--the-problem-we-all-live-with/> (WARNING: Rockwell's image depicts the N-word)
- B.) For younger grades, do a virtual read-aloud:  
*Ruby Bridges Goes to School*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTRTfwUQ4bl>  
*The Story of Ruby Bridges*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8D4ldGY41s>
- C.) Utilize the "Kamala Harris background" pdf provided with this lesson to learn more about Kamala's childhood and see photos from her early days.
- D.) Preview Ruby Bridge's new book, *This Is Your Time*, in which she connects her story with a message of civic involvement for young people of today.  
NPR Interview: <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/07/932091148/60-years-later-ruby-bridges-tells-her-story-in-this-is-your-time>  
Visual and audiobook preview: <https://www.amazon.com/This-Your-Time-Ruby-Bridges/dp/0593378520>
- E.) Show another meme, the "Rosa, Ruby, Kamala" (jpg) meme provided and below. Discuss the phrase that accompanies it: "Rosa SAT, so Ruby could WALK, so Kamala could RUN."
- What does the phrase mean?
  - How are the stories of Rosa, Ruby and Kamala related?
  - Why is sitting associated with Rosa, walking with Ruby and running with Kamala?
  - Using art supplies or a program like Canva, have students design their own memes for this phrase
  - Using PowerPoint or Sutori, create a timeline illustrating the phrase



F.) While many have found the meme inspiring, it has also encountered criticism from several sides. The image was conceptualized by the Black-owned business, Good Trouble, by Gordon Jones with art by young white artist Bria Goeller. For grades 8 – 12, consider dividing up the following articles and videos for small groups to investigate and then share back. Each group reports back on the information and perspectives expressed in their source.

Articles:

L.A. Times

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-11-13/election-2020-kamala-harris-ruby-bridges-illustration-sacramento>

Zora

<https://zora.medium.com/the-kamala-harris-ruby-bridges-meme-is-powerful-and-polarizing-2b47118bd1c5>

Artist Bria Goeller's Statement

<https://www.briagoeller.com/good-trouble>

People

<https://people.com/human-interest/civil-rights-icon-ruby-bridges-responds-to-kamala-harris-meme/>

Today

<https://www.today.com/news/illustration-kamala-harris-ruby-bridges-goes-viral-t198056>

Art Daily

<https://artdaily.com/news/130069/Rockwell-painting-of-Ruby-Bridges-inspires-viral-Kamala-Harris-image#.X9riyV57mL->

**Tips for virtual learning:**

1. Utilize a virtual whiteboard or screen-shared document for group brainstorming.
2. Encourage students to select the next person after sharing their comment, to keep conversation moving
3. Use a combination of chat and microphones to offer multi-modal participation opportunities
4. Utilize “share screen” feature to share images, memes and videos
5. Students can use “share screen” or send links to share work done on Canva, Sutori, etc..