

Ruby Bridges

A Time When I was Brave



Grades K - 5

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

Materials Image of Ruby Bridges being escorted by federal marshals (Included)
Paper and pencil and/or crayons/markers

Background

A developmental approach to Civics begins with young students' emerging sense of self and other, as well as giving vocabulary to feelings and concepts of fairness and unfairness. In this activity, young students imagine themselves in Ruby's circumstances, naming emotions Ruby might have felt, then think about a time when they felt those emotions in their own life. After documenting their own experience, they compare the emotions they felt in the moment with emotions they felt after the experience was over.

Lesson Procedure

1.) Examine

Share the picture of Ruby Bridges when she was six years old going to school (included after the directions or available online). Ask the following questions and list the responses on paper:

- 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

After noting what students observed in the image, offer some background. The following paragraph contextualizes Ruby's situation in age-appropriate language.

"Ruby grew up at a time when our country was just beginning to make schools more fair. New rules – or laws – made sure that all kids could attend classes together. But some people at that time did not want different kids sharing the same school. They wanted their kids to have their own schools. They argued that kids who were different, who maybe had a different skin color, or spoke another language should have to go to other schools. They would shout and scream, threaten others with violence and even throw garbage or spit on kids who were different from their own kids. As a young black girl, Ruby started going to a school where white families had sent their kids. Many of those families could not accept sharing their school with a kid who had a different skin color. They could not accept a school that welcomed all kids. When Ruby tried to go to school, there were such big crowds of angry people that wanted to stop her that she had to be protected by law officers. It would be months and months before Ruby was able to enjoy being at school with many different kinds of kids."

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 so students can refer to them later.

- 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

Ask students to think of a time in their own life when they felt one or some of the emotions that Ruby felt, recalling the emotions from your list as needed. Invite students to share out loud or to share with a partner.

Now challenge students to either illustrate or write about the time when they felt the same emotions they identified for Ruby.

- Depending on literacy levels, students can write multi-sentence paragraphs, draw a picture of the experience and/or dictate their stories.
- Play with the art of theatre, and have students write a script with dialogue for a short scene that tells the story of their experience. Play out the scene by reading the dialogue aloud.
- If drawing the experiences, encourage students to caption their images with short sentences such as “One time when I felt _____ was when....” or at least to label the drawing with the specific emotions.

5.) Reflect

Ask students to share (and name) the emotions they felt *after* they got through the experience they illustrated or wrote about. Contrast the emotions felt 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?
- After going through that experience and the emotions during and after, what have you learned about yourself?

6.) Project (optional)

Transition from reflection on the past to projection on the future. Ruby was very brave by walking past angry crowds to attend a new school. Through her bravery, she got through a scary situation and helped make our community better. Discuss with students:

- What ways can we be brave to make our community better?
- What can children do?
- What can adults do?

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