

Then & Now:

Reading and Responding to

Ruby Bridges Goes to School – My True Story

Lesson courtesy of Patrick Johnson, Tacoma Public Schools

Grades	K – 6 [Note: The story is appropriate for ages 4 and up, questions will need to be adapted for younger grades]
Objective	To compare and contrast historic and present day conditions
Materials	Book <i>Ruby Bridges Goes to School – My True Story</i> by Ruby Bridges, T-chart, Marker

Background

In this activity, students explore Ruby Bridges' story in her own words. After a class (or independent) reading of the text, students create a chart to compare schooling in 1960 versus today. Drawing from the chart, they

Vocabulary Words

Introduce Vocabulary words i.e. flashcards, puzzles, definitions, etc.

- Community
- Federal
- Government
- Marshals
- Negroes/Colored
- Neighborhood
- Protest
- Segregation
- Integration

Lesson Procedure

1.) Introduce the lesson by telling the class that you are going to read a book to them about a little girl who was in kindergarten in 1960, and you are going to work together to make a chart that will help the class to understand how things were done then and how things are done now (compare and contrast).

Prompts:

- “As we read, I want you to think about what is different at Ruby’s school than it is at our school.”
- “How did people treat each other in Ruby’s time? How do we treat each other today?”
- “Why things may have happened as they did? What changes have occurred since then and why?”
- “Do you think things are better or worse now and why?”

2.) As you read the story, have a large sheet of paper prepped for T-Chart (see page 5) Chart the information asking students to tell you what you read and what they heard.

Examples:

- People lived in separate communities
- People went to separate schools
- In some places, black people were not allowed to eat in the same restaurants as white people
- Black people used to be referred to as colored
- In some places, black children could not go to the same school as white children.
- The government decided that segregation was wrong
- In 1961 when Ruby was in first grade, she was allowed to attend/go to the school where white children attended
- Federal Marshals escorted Ruby into the school building to keep her safe
- Some people were angry and upset and didn't want Ruby to go to the white school
- Many people protested and also took their children out of the school
- Mrs. Henry was Ruby's teacher
- Ruby loved her teacher
- Ruby wanted the other students to return to school
- Ruby learned how to do math and read
- After months passed students did begin to return to the school
- Ruby had friends to play with at school and that made her very happy
- A famous writer, John Steinbeck, wrote a story about Ruby
- Former First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, wrote a personal letter to Ruby
- Norman Rockwell, an artist, painted a picture of Ruby that became famous
- Ruby grew up, got married and had children
- Ruby and her teacher, Mrs. Henry, were both asked to be on a television show
- Now children go to school together
- Ruby likes to visit schools to tell children her story
- Ruby's most important message is for children to be kind to each other

3.) Guiding Questions for reflection

- Why do you think some white people did not want their children to go to school with black children?
- In what ways did Ruby show bravery?
- How have things changed over time in this story?
- How did the government get involved to help Ruby's situation?
- How are things different now from when Ruby started school?
- If you were Ruby, what would you have done? Why?
- How do you think Ruby's family felt?
- When was a time you felt similar to Ruby and/or her family?
- Do people still protest? Why? For what?

Follow-up Activities

- What if?
 - Write a paragraph telling what you think schools might be like now if the law never changed
- This story takes place in 1960
 - Use basic math and time skills to determine how many years ago this was.
- Historic Timeline
 - Create a timeline going forward and backward from Ruby's story.
 - What other significant events happened around Ruby's time, either before or after? How do they relate to Ruby's story?
- Compare and Contrast
 - How was Ruby's experience similar to or different from another aspect of history or the Civil Rights Movement?

Standards Addressed

Washington State Standards for Social Studies

EALR 4: History

- Component 4.2: Understands and analyzes causal factors that have shaped major events in history.
GLE 4.2.1: Individuals and Movements
- Component 4.4: Uses history to understand the present and plan for the future.
GLE 4.4.1: Historical Antecedents

1960's	NOW