Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story

BY RUBY BRIDGES

The Story of Ruby Bridges

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MAP  Grade 2 • Unit 4
TITLE  A Long Journey to Freedom
TYPE  Informational Text (Bridges: Lexile 410L; Coles: 730L)

OVERVIEW

RATIONALE

Ruby Bridges Goes to School is an autobiography of Ruby Bridges’s experience, presented in a way that six- and seven-year-olds can easily grasp. Pairing this accessible autobiography with The Story of Ruby Bridges, a beautiful biographical narrative written by an award-winning author and illustrator, fleshes out the courageous act of Ruby Bridges. Each book can stand alone as an anchor text. However, when read together, the texts illustrate Ruby Bridges’s strength of character in a way that provides students with rich insight into this key moment of our national history. Students will use the knowledge gained from both books to craft a paragraph in which they select a word to describe the character of Ruby Bridges and defend their selection with evidence from both texts.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story has a Lexile level of 410, low in the range of the 2-3 grade band suggested by the CCSS-ELA. Students will likely be able to read this book independently, but due to the subject matter and difficulty of certain vocabulary words, they may benefit from reading the book with an adult. The second anchor text, The Story of Ruby Bridges, is intended to be read aloud by the teacher, given its Lexile level of 730.
COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

(a) Focus Standards

Students will practice the following standards through an analysis of the texts and completion of the performance assessment task:

RI.2.9: Compare and contrast the most important points presented by two texts on the same topic.

W.2.1: Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic of book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., because, and, also) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.

(b) Additional Standards

- RI.2.3
- W.2.6
- RF.2.4.a-c

VOCABULARY

Some words from these books may be unfamiliar to students or may be used in a different way than students have seen previously. Possible words for study include:

- tenants
- negroes
- neighborhoods
- segregation
- integrate
- government
- marshals
- famous
TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story by Ruby Bridges

1. Look closely at the photographs on the cover and title of this book. Who is the author? What did she do to become famous? Is the setting of the account present day or long ago?
   - Ruby Bridges is a young African American girl.
   - The title of the book is *Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story*. This title suggests that this little girl is famous because she went to school, which would not make someone famous today.
   - The photograph shows other children in a school with desks and an American flag.
   - The setting appears to be long ago, as seen in the children's old-fashioned dresses in the photograph in the background.

2. According to page 1, when did this story take place?
   - The text says “a long time ago.”
   - *Note to teachers: Later in the account, students will learn that the main event took place in 1961.*

3. According to page 1, what did some people believe about black people and white people? How does the sign held by the boy in this photograph illustrate this belief?
   - “Some people thought black people and white people should not be friends” and should not be “allowed to live in the same neighborhoods.”
   - The sign reads, “We want white tenants in our white community.” The sign illustrates that some neighborhoods wanted to keep black people from living near white people.

4. What other places in the community separated white people from black people many years ago?
   - A white boy is holding a sign saying, “We won’t go to school with negroes.” From the information on page 1, a reader can infer that the white boy is saying he will not go to school with black children.
   - Stores had signs that read “white only” or “for colored,” meaning that black and white people were kept apart from each other. The text says that “in some places, black people were not allowed to eat in the same restaurants as white people.”
   - *Note to teachers: The photograph shows a store with a billboard, “Booker TEA Washington.” You might want to point out how Booker T. Washington was a famous African American (1856 – 1915) who helped with teacher education and with impoverished black schools.*

5. On page 5, photographs and the text describe the word “segregation.” According to this text, what does “segregation” mean? How does this word apply to the first five pages of this story?
   - The photographs show separate schools for the black children and the white children. The text explains that black and white children could not attend the same schools.
   - *Note to teachers: According to one dictionary, segregation means “the separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group.”*
   - Each of the first five pages gives examples of segregation. Segregation was evident in friendships, in neighborhoods, in stores, in restaurants, and in schools.
What did the laws of the United States government say about segregation?

- “The U.S. government said that ‘segregation was wrong.’ People, black and white, were supposed to be allowed to “live where they want” to “eat where they want,” and to “go to school where they want.”

How does the voice in the story change on page 7?

- The story changes from explaining information about the time in which Ruby Bridges lived, to being the story of Ruby Bridges herself.
- Ruby introduces herself, saying, “My name is Ruby Bridges.”
- She uses short sentences, like a young girl would write.
- Note to teachers: You may want to discuss how students in your classroom might write just like Ruby Bridges does. This shared voice makes students feel more connected to, and similar to, Ruby Bridges.

Compare and contrast Ruby Bridges’s kindergarten with William Frantz Elementary School.

- Ruby Bridges was a kindergarten student who attended “a school for black children.”
- William Frantz Elementary School was “a school for white children.”
  - It was closer to Ruby’s house than the school for black children.
- The government said that “Ruby Bridges should be allowed to go to William Frantz Elementary.”

Given the details about the community in which Ruby Bridges grew up, why might marshals need to go to school with Ruby?

- She changed schools to go to William Frantz for first grade. She left her school with black students and went to the school that was closer to her home that had been attended only by white children.
- She needed the marshals to walk with her to “make sure that we were safe.”
- The marshals probably needed to go to school with her to make sure that the people who didn’t want black children and white children to go to school together didn’t hurt Ruby.

According to pages 13 – 16, how did community members react to Ruby attending their school?

- They yelled at her to go away.
- They carried signs saying, “We want segregation” and “We don’t want to integrate” near the school.
- Note to teachers: The antonyms “segregation” and “integration” provide an opportunity to work on dictionary and word analysis skills here, especially prefixes and root words.
- White parents took their children out of this school, leaving Ruby alone in the classroom with Mrs. Henry, her teacher.

Describe how Ruby responded to being alone in a classroom with her teacher, Mrs. Henry.

- Ruby and Mrs. Henry loved each other.
- Ruby was a good student who worked hard to learn math and reading.
- Ruby “wished the children would come back.”
12 How does the photograph on pages 19 and 20 support the text below it?

- The photograph shows Ruby playing on the playground with four white children.
- This photograph would have been taken months after Ruby began first grade. The children had finally returned and Ruby had friends.
- The text describes how “at last” Ruby “had friends with play with!”

13 According to pages 21 – 24, what character qualities did famous people admire in Ruby? Why did they think these things about Ruby?

- John Steinbeck wrote that Ruby “was very brave.”
- Eleanor Roosevelt wrote a letter to her saying she “was a good American.”
- Norman Rockwell painted a picture of her, showing how she walked to school courageously, ignoring the angry crowd around her.
- Because of the courage and strength of Ruby Bridges, black children and white children can go to the same schools.

14 How did Ruby Bridges choose to end her book? Why do you think she chose to end the book this way?

- Ruby wrote, “I tell children that black people and white people can be friends. And most important, I tell children to be kind to each other.”
- She may have chosen to end the book this way because it shows how much the world changed because of her bravery and courage. The book begins with these words, “A long time ago, some people thought that black people and white people should not be friends.”

*The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles

15 Read aloud *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles. Discuss similarities and differences in the point of view and content of each of the books. Create a compare and contrast chart showing similarities and differences. (RI.2.9)
PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

PART ONE

Continue the discussion of similarities and differences in texts to prepare for the writing assignment. Extend the discussion to focus on details that illustrate Ruby Bridges’s strength, either stated or inferred, in each of the featured texts.

PART TWO

Give students the following writing task: Write an opinion paragraph describing which characteristic you think best describes Ruby Bridges. Include two or three pieces of evidence that support this opinion, using both the autobiography and the biography as resources.

Your response should:

- Tell which characteristic you think best describes Ruby Bridges.
- Include two or three pieces of evidence that support your opinion using the autobiography and the biography as resources.
- Use linking words (e.g., because, and, also) to connect your opinion and reasons.
- Provide a concluding statement.
- Include correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling in your final draft.
TEXT FLUENCY

Read the following text for the students, demonstrating the elements of fluent reading: accuracy, prosody, and appropriate rate. Be sure to note the changes of mood in each of these sections, from factual to disturbing to loving to happy. Invite the students to practice the passage and perform it for a small group or class.

PASSAGE

(126 words)

In 1961, I was in first grade.
My mother took me to the Frantz School.
Marshals came with us to make sure that we were safe.

Some people did not want a black child to go to the white school.
They stood near the school.
They yelled at me to go away.
Parents took their children out of the school.
I was alone with my teacher, Mrs. Henry.

I loved Mrs. Henry.
And Mrs. Henry loved me.
I was a very good student.
I learned math.
I learned how to read.
But I wished the children would come back.

Months and months passed.
Then one day, children began to come back to school.
At last, I had friends to play with!
I was very, very happy!

(Bridges, pages 11 – 20)