

Walking Tall

How did Ruby Bridges make history 50 years ago?

"Don't be afraid." That's what Ruby Bridges's mother told her on Nov. 4, 1960. Little Ruby listened carefully to the advice. Soon, four United States federal court **marshals**, or officers, arrived at the Bridges family home in New Orleans, Louisiana to drive the first grader to William Frantz Public School. A screaming mob was waiting. People stood near the building shouting.



AP Images

Ruby Bridges enters her school in 1960.

Ruby held her head high. With the marshals surrounding her, the 6-year-old walked into the school and into history books. That morning, Ruby became one of the first African Americans to attend an all-white elementary school in the South.

Dividing Lines

For a long time, parts of the United States were **segregated**, or separated by race. Under law, black children could not attend the same public schools as white children. People of different races also had to use separate public restrooms and drinking fountains.

U.S. leaders worked hard to end segregation. They wanted all Americans to have **civil rights**. Civil rights are the rights to be treated equally. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. The case was *Brown v. Board of Education*.

By the year 1960, however, many Southern cities, including New Orleans, were still not following the court's ruling. That prompted a federal court to take action in New Orleans. It ordered the city to desegregate its public schools. Ruby Bridges was one of the first students to lead the way.

School Days

Ruby made it inside William Frantz Public School that first day. However, there was so much uproar that she didn't make it to class. From the principal's office, Ruby watched as angry parents pulled their children out of school.

On her second day, Ruby met her teacher, Barbara Henry. By then, so many kids had been removed from the school that Ruby was Henry's only student. The pair worked one-on-one for the whole year. "Mrs. Henry was one of the nicest teachers I ever had," Bridges told *WR News*. "She made school fun for me."



AP Images

Bridges was reunited with teacher Barbara Henry (left) in 1998.

Outside the building, people continued to protest. Others, though, believed everyone should have civil rights.

By the end of the year, crowds began to **dwindle**, or decrease. When Ruby returned to school for second grade, there were no more protesters. Many of the other students had returned.

Building Bridges

By the late 1960s, most schools in the United States were no longer segregated, thanks to the efforts

of civil rights workers. Other laws were passed that improved life for African Americans. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, for example, helped protect African Americans' right to seek jobs.

Bridges never had to attend a segregated school. She graduated from high school and continued her studies in business school.

Today, Bridges speaks to kids about the importance of treating one another equally. She has never forgotten her experience at William Frantz Public School, and she shares details about her first day there in her speeches.

"I wasn't really afraid," Bridges told *WR News*. "I didn't really know what was going on at the time, and I loved school."

The Little Rock Nine



The Commercial Appeal/Landov

The Caption

Before Ruby Bridges, there was the Little Rock Nine. They were nine African American students in Little Rock, Arkansas. On Sept. 4, 1957, the students attempted to begin classes at the all-white Central High School. But the governor of Arkansas and the angry mobs surrounding the school prevented them from entering.

Finally, President Dwight D. Eisenhower took action. He sent U.S. troops to protect the students, and they finally began classes. High school was far from easy for the group, but some of them went on to graduate. In 1999, Congress awarded the Little Rock Nine the Congressional Gold Medal for their bravery.

How Ruby Made History



Jay Clendenin/Aurora Photos

How does it feel to make history? *WR News* student reporter Kaelin Ray recently asked Ruby Bridges.

Kaelin Ray: How does it feel to know that you are a part of U.S. history?

Ruby Bridges: I'm [very] proud of that fact. My mother was really happy about [my] being able to attend that school. My father was more concerned about my safety.

KR: What was your first day at William Frantz Public School like?

RB: My first day I spent sitting in the principal's office, so it was very confusing.

KR: What was it like to meet your teacher, Mrs. Henry, again many years later?

RB: I was really, really excited about meeting her again because she [was] a very important part of my life that had been missing for a long time.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why were some schools still segregated in 1960 even though the Supreme Court had ruled that segregation was unconstitutional in 1954?
 - A. Under law, black children could not attend the same public schools as white children.
 - B. Many Southern cities were not following the court's ruling.
 - C. There was not enough space for black children to attend white schools.
 - D. There was not enough money for schools to implement the law.

2. What does the author describe in the beginning of the passage?
 - A. the Little Rock Nine and the problems they had when trying to attend a white high school
 - B. how President Eisenhower was forced to send U.S. troops to protect African-American students
 - C. how Ruby Bridges became one of the first African Americans to attend a white elementary school
 - D. the relationship between Ruby Bridges and her first teacher, Barbara Henry

3. Many people did not want Ruby Bridges to attend William Frantz Public School. What evidence from the passage best supports this conclusion?
 - A. Ruby Bridges spent her first day of school inside the principal's office.
 - B. Ruby Bridges was the only student in Mrs. Henry's class for her first year at school.
 - C. A screaming mob was protesting outside the school when Ruby arrived.
 - D. Ruby Bridges was one of the first African Americans to attend a white elementary school.

4. Why did parents probably pull their children out of school after Ruby Bridges arrived?
 - A. They didn't want their children to go to school with a black child.
 - B. They did not like Ruby Bridges and did not want their children to be her friend.
 - C. They were afraid that Ruby Bridges would be mean to their children.
 - D. They thought that their children deserved a vacation from school.

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. a group of African-American high school students called the Little Rock Nine
- B. the people who protested against desegregated schools in the South
- C. difficulties faced by African Americans during the desegregation of schools
- D. the efforts of civil rights workers to improve life for African Americans

6. Read the following sentence: "With the marshals surrounding her, the 6-year-old **walked** into the school and **into history books**."

What does the author suggest by saying that Ruby Bridges "**walked... into history books**"?

- A. She had difficulty finding the rooms in this new and unfamiliar school.
- B. She became very unpopular for changing the way the school operated.
- C. She became part of American history by being the first black at an all-white school.
- D. She immediately began studying history.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Ruby Bridges attended the previously all-white William Frantz Public School,
_____ many people did not want her to.

- A. therefore
- B. finally
- C. for instance
- D. even though

8. What does "segregated" mean? Give an example of something that was segregated in the United States.

9. Why did Congress award the Little Rock Nine the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999?

10. The passage states that high school was "far from easy" for the Little Rock Nine. Using evidence from the passage, explain why this may have been true.
