

# LESSON 2: MEET RUBY BRIDGES

CIVIL RIGHTS ICON, ACTIVIST, ARTIST, & AUTHOR



Ruby Bridges, (b. September 8, 1954)

*“Don’t follow the path. Go where there is no path and begin the trail. When you start a new trail equipped with courage, strength and conviction, the only thing that can stop you is you!” -Ruby Bridges*

## INTRODUCTION

To “keep your eyes on the prize” means to determine what is important and to muster up the courage to take action towards making the vision a reality. This year’s VocalEssence WITNESS School Program introduces us to three women who continue to make a positive impact on our society as they speak out about and stand up for change. As you learn more about them and their life’s work, we hope each of you are inspired to consider, What is the prize that your eyes are on? What issues or causes are you willing to work and stand up for to make our society a better place?

## PROCESS

1. Divide students into small groups to read the short biographical article, “Meet Ruby Bridges” (one copy per group, or per student).
2. Direct them to read out loud and share the reader’s role within their group.
3. Remaining in groups, students then discuss what they’ve learned about Ruby Bridges, highlighting some of the events, experiences, and key details of her life they find interesting or significant.
4. Encourage note taking as they share information and comments on her background, achievements, and other interesting and important events and circumstances that led to her becoming an important figure in the American Civil Rights Movement and the impact and legacy of her work.
5. Provide a copy of the “A Portrait of Ruby Bridges” worksheet for each individual student to complete. They can work in their group or as individuals. You may also make it a homework assignment.
6. As time allows, consider doing some of the suggested EXTENSION ACTIVITIES to engage student’s creativity and student-led projects to further their learning and understanding while meeting other MN Academic Standards. These extension activities can be done with any of the three “biographical” lesson plans (Claudette Colvin, Ruby Bridges, Mari Copeny)

## OBJECTIVES

### LEARNING GOALS

- Students will understand the historical context of racial segregation in schools and the significance of Ruby Bridges’ contribution to desegregation.
- Students will explore Ruby Bridges’ continued advocacy for racial justice beyond her childhood.
- Students will read and comprehend a biographical article about Ruby Bridges, identifying key events and achievements in her life.
- Students will create a portrait activity that highlights Ruby Bridges’ major accomplishments, life events, and values that reflect her impact on racial justice.

### MATERIALS:

- Copies of the Biographical Article: Meet Ruby Bridges
- Copies of the Student Worksheet: A Portrait of Ruby Bridges
- EXTENSION ACTIVITIES call for other resources or materials not included with this lesson.

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## ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

Students' written descriptions on the biographical "A Portrait of Ruby Bridges" worksheet provide evidence of critical thinking and understanding, and their ability to summarize and describe Ruby Bridges' life's work, impact and achievements toward racial justice. Additional assessments may include any student-created projects as outlined in the EXTENSION ACTIVITIES section below.

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES

- **VISUAL ARTS:** Students may work individually or in pairs or small groups to create an artistic collage using the information they learned and recorded on their "Portrait" worksheets. Encourage the use of a variety of art supplies, materials, and student creativity (paints, markers, colored paper, found materials, student-created illustrations, etc.) These can then be displayed in the classroom or school hallway for others to enjoy and learn from.
- **LANGUAGE ARTS:** Students may work individually or in teams to create an acrostic poem, using each letter of Ruby's first and last name to create statements reflecting her impact and legacy.
- **DANCE & MOVEMENT:** Students may work in teams to create tableau, choreography or other sequences of movement to highlight important aspects of Ruby's life and work. Consider encouraging students use the acrostic poems they created, or to write a new spoken word poem or rap to accompany their movement.
- **SONGWRITING:** Students in music classes may work individually or in teams to create an original song about Ruby Bridges, which could be performed for their peers. Use instruments or found objects to create a rhythmic soundscape.
- **DEEPER DIG FOR OLDER STUDENTS:** Students can explore more about Ruby Bridges by researching and writing an essay about her life and aspects of her work and legacy. Students can present highlights from their research for the rest of the class.

### MINNESOTA STATE STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS:**

##### Read

-Standard 1: Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details

##### **DANCE:** Create

-Standard 1: Improvise a movement phrase using stimulus/stimuli  
-Standard 2: Choreograph a movement phrase using the elements of dance

##### **VISUAL ARTS:** Create

-Standard 1: Create art that communicates an idea using artistic foundations.

##### **MUSIC:** Create

-Standard 2: Generate rhythmic or melodic patterns  
-Standard 6: Create or improvise musical ideas that can be combined into a melody  
-Standard 3: Organize chosen musical patterns into phrases using a system of notation or recording technology

#### **RESOURCES:**

*Michals, Debra. "Ruby Bridges." National Women's History Museum. 2015. [www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/ruby-bridges](http://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/ruby-bridges).*

## LESSON 2.1

### MEET RUBY BRIDGES

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VOCALESSENCE

WITNESS 

#### MEET RUBY BRIDGES

*“Don’t follow the path. Go where there is no path and begin the trail. When you start a new trail equipped with courage, strength and conviction, the only thing that can stop you is you!”*

– Ruby Bridges



Ruby Bridges, (b. September 8, 1954)

At the tender age of six, Ruby Bridges advanced the cause of civil rights in November 1960 when she became the first African American student to integrate an elementary school in the South.

Born on September 8, 1954, Bridges was the oldest of five children for Lucille and Abon Bridges, farmers in Tylertown, Mississippi. When Ruby was two years old, her parents moved their family to New Orleans, Louisiana in search of better work opportunities. Ruby’s birth year coincided with the US Supreme Court’s landmark ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, which ended racial segregation in public schools.

Nonetheless, southern states continued to resist integration, and in 1959, Ruby attended a segregated New Orleans kindergarten. A year later, however, a federal court ordered Louisiana to desegregate. The school district created entrance exams for African American

students to see whether they could compete academically at the all-white school. Ruby and five other students passed the exam.

Her parents were torn about whether to let her attend the all-white William Frantz Elementary School, a few blocks from their home. Her father resisted, fearing for his daughter’s safety; her mother, however, wanted Ruby to have the educational opportunities that her parents had been denied. Meanwhile, the school district dragged its feet, delaying her admittance until November 14. Two of the other students decided not to leave their school at all; the other three were sent to the all-white McDonough Elementary School.



Ruby and her mother were escorted by four federal marshals to the school every day that year. She walked past crowds screaming vicious slurs at her. Undeterred, she later said she only became frightened when she saw a woman holding a black baby doll in a coffin. She spent her first day in the principal’s office due to the chaos created as angry white parents pulled their children from school. Ardent segregationists withdrew their children permanently. Barbara Henry, a white Boston native, was the only teacher willing to accept Ruby, and all year, she was a class of one. Ruby ate lunch alone and sometimes played with

her teacher at recess, but she never missed a day of school that year.

While some families supported her bravery—and some northerners sent money to aid her family—others protested throughout the city. The Bridges family suffered for their courage: Abon lost his job, and grocery stores refused to sell to Lucille. Her share-cropping grandparents were evicted from the farm where they had lived for a quarter-century. Over time, other African American students enrolled; many years later, Ruby’s four nieces would also attend. In 1964, artist Norman Rockwell celebrated her courage with a painting of that first day entitled, “The Problem We All Live With.”

Ruby graduated from a desegregated high school, became a travel agent, married and had four sons. She was reunited with her first teacher, Henry, in the mid 1990s, and for a time the pair did speaking engagements together. Ruby later wrote about her early experiences in two books and received the Carter G. Woodson Book Award.

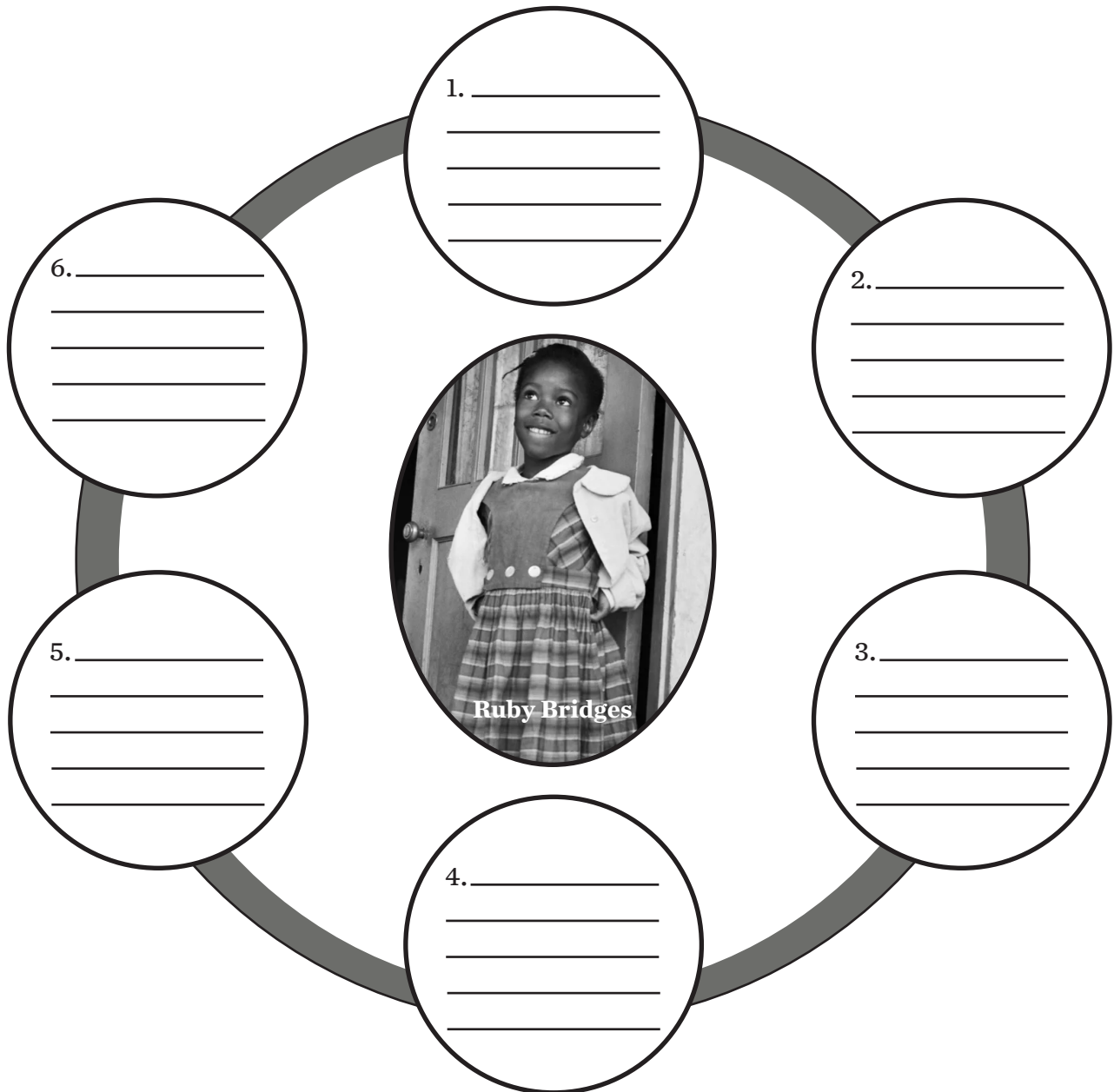


A lifelong activist for racial equality, in 1999, Ruby established The Ruby Bridges Foundation to promote tolerance and create change through education. In 2000, she was made an honorary deputy marshal in a ceremony in Washington, DC.

# LESSON 2.2:

## A PORTRAIT OF RUBY BRIDGES

A portrait is a verbal picture or description of a person. If you were going to introduce Ruby Bridges to someone who knows nothing about her, what would you say to paint a short, accurate picture of her life? Read your notes, revisit some of the readings, reflection on some of the events, facts, and/or interesting experiences that you think are important, and summarize six of them in the circles. (You can write inside AND outside the circles.)



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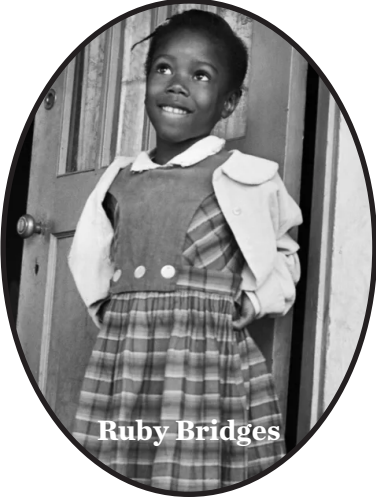
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Ruby Bridges

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_