

YMCA Project Cornerstone

Special Lesson: Race, Racism, Civil Rights



For our children, racial tensions and struggles to achieve civil rights that they see on TV and through social media sound scary and out of control. This past week we have seen several troubling stories that are calling to light the issues of racism we continue to face in our country and the world.



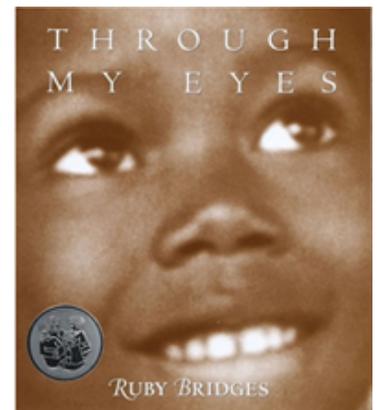
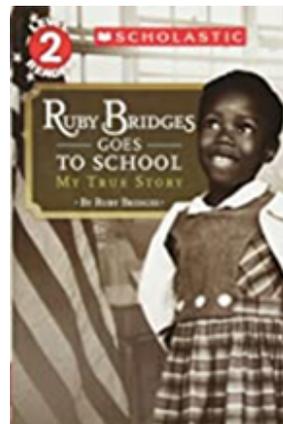
To help your child understand what is happening and to assist you in engaging in conversations with your child about race and racism, here are lessons (abbreviated and extended) from Project Cornerstone's ABC Program books, *Through My Eyes (grades 3-8)* and *Ruby Bridges Goes to School (grades K-2)*.

Through My Eyes & Ruby Bridges Goes To School **by Ruby Bridges**

Abbreviated Lesson for Grades K-8

Overview

These books tell the story of Ruby Bridges, a six-year-old black girl, who on November 14, 1960 walked through a mob of screaming segregationists escorted by Federal Marshals into her new school in New Orleans, Louisiana. Surrounded by racial turmoil, Ruby spent first grade learning to read and add with one supportive teacher. These books are written by Ruby Bridges and tell her story.



Discussion Questions

If you cannot get a copy of the books, view a Read Aloud video of it. There are many versions available on YouTube, including these:

- Ruby Bridges Goes To School: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTRTfwUQ4bI>
- Through My Eyes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rC9EpGtFSD4&t=76s>

After reading the book or watching the video, continue the conversation with your child.

Kindergarten-2nd Grade Questions:

1. How did Ruby feel about her experience?
2. How was Ruby an *UPstander*?
3. How did caring adults stand up for her?
4. How is Ruby different from you? Same as you?
5. How are you feeling about what is happening now?

3rd-8th Grade Questions:

1. What injustices do you see happening today in our school, community, or world?
2. How are you feeling? How is your body reacting to the stress?
3. What can one person do/say to make a difference as an *UPstander*?
 - Give each other *warm fuzzies* or *fill their buckets*.
 - You have the power to choose how to react. *Don't take the bait!*
 - *Say and do something* to give support.
 - *It just takes ONE* to make a difference.
 - Use an *I message*.
 - Use *peaceful conflict resolution steps*.
4. How can you be an *UPstander* in your community? What kind of agreements can we create to make sure we show caring towards one another?

Activity

Ruby talks about the support of her teacher and her parents during her experience. Sit down with your child and talk about "Who is in their Web of Support." Together, list the people who care and support your child.

By role modeling your personal acceptance of differences in others and your commitment to sharing *intentional acts of caring*, you will help your child to grow healthy and strong.

Additional Resources

- Read more about her here, including information about the Ruby Bridges Foundation: <https://www.biography.com/activist/ruby-bridges>
- Check out the Southern Poverty Law Center website: www.teachingtolerance.org
 - This national education project is dedicated to helping foster equity, respect, and understanding in the classroom.
 - It has a wealth of information on the Civil Rights Movement – past and present – as well as lessons and activities on bullying and discrimination. Look for their guide: *Responding to Hate at School*. Free copies are available upon written request.
- Video clip of Ruby visiting the White House with President Obama
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCsJ-24MdZc>

Through My Eyes & Ruby Bridges Goes To School **by Ruby Bridges**

Extended Lessons for Grades K-2 and 3-8

Overview

For our children, racial tensions and struggles to achieve civil rights may sound like ancient history. But, as you know, our collective struggle to overcome injustice of all kinds is ongoing.

These books tell the story of Ruby Bridges, a six-year-old black girl, who on November 14, 1960 walked through a mob of screaming segregationists escorted by Federal Marshals into her new school in New Orleans, Louisiana. Surrounded by racial turmoil, Ruby spent first grade learning to read and add with one supportive teacher. These books are written by Ruby Bridges and tell her story.

Please read the book and/or view read-along videos (links provided in the Abbreviated Lesson Plan) first, then follow along with these extended lesson plans.

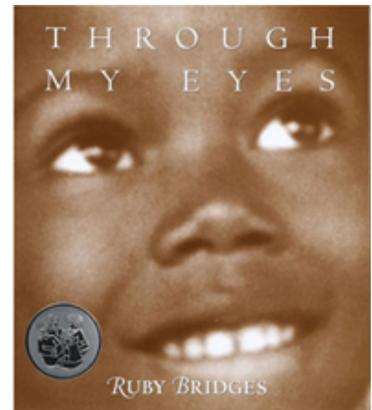
Through My Eyes (Grades 3-8)

President Obama stands upon the shoulders of many courageous people of conscience who walked before him. Their names and stories are in our history books – Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Brown vs. Board of Education, three civil rights workers slain while helping register black voters in the South, four little girls killed while they attended Sunday school – as well as a six-year-old girl named Ruby Bridges.

This is the story of one brave little girl who became an *UPstander*. Ruby and her family lived in New Orleans in the 1950's. During that time, Ruby attended a segregated, all black school for kindergarten. This was the way school was conducted for many generations in the South.

Following the 1954 Supreme Court case Brown vs. Board of Education, school districts all over the South were ordered to end their policy of racially segregated schools. A federal court in New Orleans ordered two white public schools to integrate in 1960. The plan was to integrate only the first grade for that year, and only black kindergarten students had to pass a difficult test in order to attend the previously all white school. The test was designed so that no one would pass it. Despite others' efforts to keep black students out, Ruby Bridges was one of only five students to pass the test.

The drama that unfolded on black and white TV screens all over the nation that fall was powerful. Ruby Bridges was one of four first grade girls attending their new school under the protection and safety of laws upheld by the Supreme Court of the United States of



America. Day after day, the girls heard shouts of racial epitaphs from an angry crowd of white protesters at their school. They were escorted through this crowd by Federal Marshals who were there to provide protection for the girls. In spite of it all, these little girls persevered.

The selection of these ABC books honors those who had the courage to *stand tall* for equality and social justice – whether they were a young eloquent minister, a seamstress “too tired of giving in” who fought for her seat on a bus, or an innocent, six-year-old child striving to achieve an equal education.

Extended Discussion and Questions (Grades 3-8)

Clearly, intolerance and injustice continue today. We hope that by encouraging discussion of past intolerance and injustice, we can help guide our students toward actions that will build a more caring, just, inclusive, tolerant, and safe school community for all.

Managing bias during discussions with students (*What we permit, we promote!*)

When students share *put downs*, *bucket dipping* experiences or *cold pricklies*, it is likely they will share derogatory labels and stereotypes about race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender. Some children may be passing on comments they have heard, but not understand. Others may reflect the bias deeply embedded in our society. Regardless of the roots of the comments, remember no child is born prejudiced; the ideas are learned. When you hear a comment expressed, don't be afraid to take a second and *say something*. Giving a response to what you heard is better than ignoring the situation. You must stop the harassment.

Here are some ways and ideas to respond:

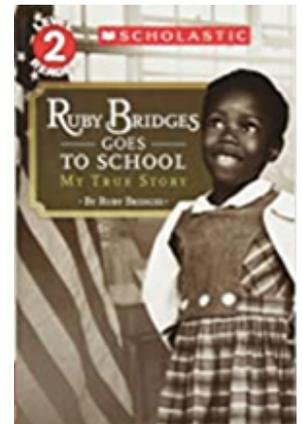
1. Respond thoughtfully and simply say:
 - Everyone at our school deserves to feel safe and cared for.
 - Everyone deserves our kindness and respect.
 - Remember we *fill buckets* in this class.
 - It's not OK to use that phrase.
2. Be gentle and instructive. Say:
 - What do you mean by that?
 - Do you know what that means?
 - You may not have meant to be hurtful, but when you use the word “_____” to mean something is bad, it is hurtful. Do you know why?
3. Correct and inform students in a non-judgmental way.
 - If you have time to educate on the spot, do it.
 - If not, mention the incident to the teacher.
 - Encourage empathy by asking children to imagine how they would feel if that particular comment was said about them.
4. Acknowledge that we all have feelings and encourage children to express their feelings in healthy ways rather than in a hurtful, derogatory manner.

Discussion questions

- How did Ruby *stand tall*?
- Who was in her *web of support*? Who were her caring adults?
- What effect does Ruby's experience have on your life today?
- What injustices do you see happening today in our school, community, or world?
- What can one person *do/say* to make a difference as an *UPstander*?
 - Give each other *warm fuzzies* or *fill their buckets*.
 - You have the power to choose how to react. *Don't take the bait!*
 - *Say and do something* to give support.
 - *It just takes ONE* to make a difference.
 - Use an *I message*.
 - Use *peaceful conflict resolution steps*.
- How can you be an *UPstander* in your community? What kind of agreements can we create to make sure we show caring towards one another?

Ruby Bridges Goes to School (Grades K-2)

Ruby Bridges wrote this book about her life – about a time in her young life when she had to have a lot of courage just to attend school every day. The story takes place in New Orleans, Louisiana and it is a true story.



Demonstration

Using eggs of varying colors and sizes, begin a discussion with your students about the similarities between eggs and us. Talk to the students about how there are people of different heights and of different colors. Then, using a bowl, begin to crack the different eggs. Ask the students what it is that they see. End by saying that "even though we are different on the outside, we are all the same on the inside." You can discuss how it is that we are the same inside but differ on the outside (i.e. similarities: We all have feelings, etc. Differences on the outside: some people have curly hair, others have freckles, etc.).

Additional Discussion Questions (Grades 1-2)

1. How did Ruby feel about her experience?
2. How would you feel if you were Ruby Bridges and had her first grade experience?
3. How was Ruby an *UPstander*?
4. Who *stood up* for her? Who were her *UPstanders*?
5. Who were the caring adults in her life?
6. How did Ruby feel about her teacher, Mrs. Henry?
7. What words would you use to describe Ruby?
8. What effect does Ruby's experience have on your life today?

Activity

Ruby's Shoes/*Walking in Someone's Shoes*

Materials: crayons, pencils, large drawing paper

Go to the following link – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9qeYBnQMnA> and listen to the song* "Ruby's Shoes." Play the song. Remind students that you wore some different shoes in the classroom today. They were uncomfortable, but you wore them anyway. What does it mean for us to *walk in someone else's shoes*?

*The lyrics are available as part of a You Tube video on Lyrics.com. Search using the song title or artist: Lori McKenna-Ruby's Shoes. After you listen to the song, pair the students up with a partner. Have the partners trace their partners' shoes with their crayons. They can be creative with this. Once they are done, they can continue to work as partners or as individuals. In their shoes on their drawing, they can write what actions they will take to be *UPstanders* to help other students feel like they belong, create a caring school, or make a difference in their community.