

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.

Honoring King

Americans pay tribute to a leader's legacy.

For many Americans, Martin Luther King Jr. Day isn't just a "day off" from school or work. They will make it a "day on" and participate in community service projects in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.



Library of Congress

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King addresses a group of followers.

A Great Leader

King (1929-1968) was a famous **civil rights** leader. When King was growing up, the South was **segregated**, or separated by race. Black people did not have the same rights as white people. Under the law, they were not allowed to attend the same schools as white people and had to sit in the back seats of buses. Black people also had to use separate restrooms and drinking fountains.

When King was older, he worked to change those unjust laws. During the 1950s and 1960s, he gave speeches and organized peaceful marches and protests. Beginning in 1955, King led the famous Montgomery bus boycott. For 381 days, African Americans **boycotted**, or refused to use, public buses in the Alabama city. A year later, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation on buses was illegal.

King gained national attention from the boycott and, in 1963, delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. He told a crowd of more than 200,000 people in Washington, D.C., that his dream was for all people to be treated fairly and equally under the law. As a result of his work,

civil rights laws were passed. Those laws protect the rights of all Americans.

A Day of Service

Many people celebrate King's **legacy** on Martin Luther King Jr. Day with parades and other events. The legacy of a leader is something he or she has accomplished that would benefit future generations. For King, that meant making the world a better place. Thousands more honor King by cleaning parks, volunteering at homeless shelters, and participating in other community service projects.

"Everybody can be great because everybody can serve," King once said. By taking part in community service projects, Americans are able to keep this leader's dream alive.

A Civil Rights Hero: Martin Luther King Jr.

January 15, 1929:

Born in Atlanta, Georgia

August 28, 1963:

Delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D.C.

December 10, 1964:

Becomes the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize

April 4, 1968:

Is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee

January 20, 1986:

Martin Luther King Jr. Day first Observed as a national holiday

Name: _____ Date: _____

Use the article "Honoring King" to answer questions 1 to 2.

1. What was Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream, according to his famous speech?

2. A legacy is something valuable left by a person when he or she dies. What is Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy?

Use the article "Walking Tall" to answer questions 3 to 4.

3. Ruby Bridges was one of the first African Americans to do what?

4. Civil rights are the rights of citizens to be treated equally. How have Ruby Bridges's actions supported civil rights? Make sure to discuss her actions both as a child and as an adult in your answer.

Use the articles "Honoring King" and "Walking Tall" to answer questions 5 to 6.

5. What did both Martin Luther King Jr. and Ruby Bridges believe in and support? Use information from both articles to support your answer.

6. Think about what "Honoring King" tells you about Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy. What might Ruby Bridges's legacy be? Support your answer with information from one or both articles.
