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# Ruby Bridges

On 8th September 1954, Ruby Bridges was born in Mississippi, USA. During this decade, the US civil rights movement was growing and, incredibly, six-year-old Ruby played an important part of it.

## The Civil Rights Movement

The main aim was to make sure that African Americans had equal civil rights. It was led by Martin Luther King Jr, who gave a famous speech that started, 'I have a dream...'

It did make a difference. In 1964, segregation was outlawed in schools, public places or jobs. In 1965, all black people were given the right to vote.

## Resilient Ruby

Ruby and her family had moved to the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, when she was very young. Ruby's family were African American. In America at that time, there had been a long history of unfair treatment of African Americans; one policy at the time was called segregation. This meant that there were separate swimming pools, cinemas, toilets, building entrances and even schools, depending on if you were black or white.

The year that Ruby was born, 1954, was the year that the court made a rule that all schools must desegregate, which means any child should have the right to attend any school.

In 1960, when it was time for Ruby to start school, she had to take an exam. This was because the Louisiana school district had said that African American children should be tested to see if they were as able as children at all-white schools.

Ruby passed and was able to join the previously all-white William Frantz Elementary School. It was conveniently within walking distance of her home. However, for the first year of school, Ruby had to be driven there and helped into the building by US Marshals (a type of police officer). The reason was that many local

### Did You Know ...?

In 1999, Ruby was reunited with her former teacher, Mrs Henry, on a TV show. After that, they gave speeches together to teach people about their experiences.

white people were very angry; they did not want an African American child to attend school with white children. Therefore, the Marshals protected her from any trouble.

Ruby's first day was upsetting for her. By the school gates, there were many people protesting. Ruby had no other classmates because many white children didn't want to be in her class. Most of the teachers refused to teach her. There was only one teacher who gladly would – Barbara Henry.

Mrs Henry was a young, white teacher who was from a different part of America where segregation was not so common. Unlike many other white Americans, she was supportive of the change. Together, they learned and worked in one classroom in the school. Ruby played and ate alone during that first year, but she did not miss one day's attendance.

Gradually, thanks to the civil rights movement, the lives of many African-American people improved. Ruby continued at school, making friends and eventually graduating from a fully desegregated high school.

Today, Ruby is still making a difference. She started the Ruby Bridges Foundation, which aims to promote tolerance and respect. She has met two US presidents and been awarded a medal for helping her country. She will always be remembered for her courage and resilience at such a young age.

# Questions

1. What is Ruby Bridges' date of birth? Tick

**one.** ☐ 8th September 2004

☐ 8th October 1954

☐ 8th September 1954

☐ 8th October 1954

2. Look at the section with the title 'Resilient Ruby'? This suggests that Ruby Bridges... Tick **one**.

☐ thought school was difficult but still went every day.

☐ thought school was hard and stopped going.

☐ thought school was fun and loved it all.

☐ hated school.

3. Give three examples of a places that were separate during segregation.

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4. What does the author mean when they say William Frantz Elementary School was '**previously all-white**'?

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5. Fill in the missing words. In \_\_\_\_\_, all black people were given the \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

6. Using the text, give two ways that explain why Ruby's first day was upsetting for her. Explain your answer.

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7. '**Most of the teachers refused to teach her. There was only one teacher who gladly would – Barbara Henry.**' What impression does this give us of Ruby's teacher, Mrs Henry?

It tells us that she was

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8. Do you think Ruby Bridges was brave when she was six? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

