

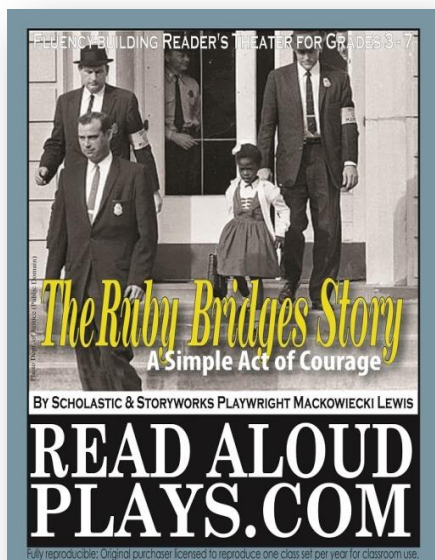
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A Simple Act of Courage tells the story of Ruby Bridges, who at just six years of age became one of the first black students to integrate New Orleans public schools.

“Nothing can be more moving than watching a small black child climbing the steps of her elementary school that historically and legally did not welcome her presence,” said actor and civil rights crusader Harry Belafonte. This play is based on those events—as depicted in Ruby’s own book, *Through My Eyes*. Parts from 9 to 21 students (parts can be doubled or tripled). Suitable for reader’s theater, podcast, or discussion-oriented classroom reading.

If the script meets your needs, please be sure to follow me and leave a positive review. Remember, anything less than 5 out of 5 stars is considered negative. Thanks!



In 1960, African-Americans faced discrimination in every walk of life, even in schools. That's why a six-year-old girl named Ruby had to risk her health and happiness in a simple act of courage.

Play Script by Mack Lewis • Based on real events as described in *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges

Characters:

Narrators 1 & 2 • Historians 1 & 2
Ruby Bridges • Mr. & Mrs. Bridges • Ruby's parents
Visitors 1 & 2 • men from the NAACP • Marshals 1 & 2
Principal • Parents 1 & 2 • Mrs. Henry • Ruby's teacher
Yolanda & Pamela • Ruby's friends • Boy • Classmates 1 & 2 (non-speaking)

Scene One: Nov. 14, 1960

H1: Desegregation hit New Orleans like a hurricane.

H2: Police sirens blow through town as if gale-force winds.

H2: And in the middle of it all stood a six-year-old girl named Ruby.

Marshal 1: Stay between us, Ruby. Look straight ahead.

Marshal 2: Pay no attention to the crowd.

H1: Ruby is surrounded by federal marshals, but there is no ignoring the fury.

N1: And then fly the tomatoes, the eggs, the stones.

Marshal 1: Keep walking, Ruby. We'll protect you.

N2: Ruby and her mother stride quickly up the steps and into the school.

N1: Although safe inside the storm has just begun.

Mrs. Bridges: Oh, that's a nice school, and it's just a couple blocks from here!

Mr. Bridges: Not so fast, I'm all for integration, but these things always seem to turn violent.

You know what happened up in Little Rock when those black kids tried to enroll in high school.

H1: Three years before, matters grew violent when nine black students started attending Central High School.

Visitor 2: You're right, Mr. Bridges. Though we'll see that she's safe, it won't be easy for her.

Visitor 1: But it's important she weathers the storm. If she doesn't finish the school year, our efforts will be severely damaged.

Mrs. Bridges: We all know the white schools are better funded than black schools, and I want Ruby to get the best education she can have. I say we should do it.

Mr. Bridges: I still don't like it.

Mrs. Bridges: Fill me with her the first day.

Scene Two – Earlier that Year

H1: Just a few months before, men in nice suits had come to Ruby's home.

H2: They were from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The NAACP.

Visitor 1: As you know, the Supreme Court has ordered Louisiana schools to integrate.

Visitor 2: Last spring, your daughter took a test to see if she qualifies to attend an all-white school. She was one of just a few children to pass.

Mr. Bridges: We've always known Ruby was smart.

Visitor 1: Well, Ruby's marks have earned her the right to attend first grade at the

school.

Visitor 2: Ruby's marks have earned her the right to attend first grade at the

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school.

A Simple Act of Courage

Bubble Quiz

Date:

Select the best answer for each question. Be prepared to support your answers by locating evidence in the story. (CCSS Literature Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 10.1, 10.2, 10.3)

1. In Scene 1 the playwright uses words such as "hurricane" and "hurricane." Why?

A. O Because the weather in New Orleans was stormy.

B. O Because Ruby stormed into her new school.

C. O Because the process of desegregating the schools created an emotional storm.

D. O Because Mrs. Henry had a stormy personality.

2. A synonym is a word that has the same meaning as another. In Scene 1, the protesters hurt "jeers" at Ruby. In what other scene is there a synonym for jeers?

A. O "Hush" in Scene 4

B. O "Tears" in Scene 3

C. O "Shouts" in Scene 4

D. O "Chants" in Scene 5

3. In Scene 4 Ruby says that going to a white school is easy. What does she mean?

A. O The classroom was simple.

B. O She was having trouble with "takeaway."

C. O She didn't have to do any school work the first day.

D. O It wasn't difficult to be the only black student.

4. What was a consequence of Ruby attending the William Frantz School?

A. O The center market wouldn't sell to food Ruby's family anymore.

B. O Ruby's father lost his job.

C. O Ruby didn't get to go to school with her friends from the neighborhood.

D. O All of the above.

5. According to the play, what does it mean to integrate?

A. O To mix black and white people together and treat them equally.

B. O To give black people special privileges.

C. O To separate people based on their skin color.

D. O The play doesn't say what integration is.

6. How does Ruby show that she really doesn't understand how serious the events were?

A. O When asked how she's holding up, she knows on things such as "takeaway."

B. O She says she thinks all the commotion outside is a parade.

C. O When Miss Henry stops, she uses the mean chairs shouted by the protesters.

D. O All of the above.

7. Where in the play does it explain how Ruby was selected to attend the all-white school?

A. O Scene One

B. O Scene Two

C. O Scene Six

D. O Scene Nine

8. What's this play really all about? Be ready to defend your answer with evidence from the play.

A. O Friendship—Ruby wasn't worried about integrating; she just wanted to make friends.

B. O Integration—children shouldn't be separated based on the color of their skin.

C. O Sacrifice—Ruby and her family sacrificed for the benefit of others.

D. O Change—Ruby's actions changed America for the better.

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A Simple Act of Courage

Writer Response

Name:

Date:

Respond in detail on a separate sheet to one or more of the following. Be sure to support your answers by locating evidence in the play.

Original Source: In her book, *Through My Eyes*, Ruby states, "When it was time for me to start kindergarten, I went to Johnson Lockett Elementary School. My segregated school was Ruby far from my house, but I had lots of company for the long walk. All the kids on my block went to Johnson Lockett. I loved school that year." How is this idea represented in the play?

Perspective: Each of the people depicted in the play is concerned about something different. Imagine you're one of the characters other than Ruby—Mrs. Bridges, marshal, principal, or someone else. Explain what he or she might be thinking and feeling during the events and why.

So what? Why was this event important? How would the world be different today had Ruby not gone to the all-white school? What if she had gone to the Frantz School but was ill-behaved or did poorly on her work?

Debate: Imagine you're sitting at the table the day the people from the NAACP visited. Mr. Bridges doesn't want Ruby to go to the Frantz School. Looking at it from his perspective, give 3 reasons she shouldn't go, and then talk him into it by giving him 3 good reasons she should.

I think Ruby should not go to the Frantz School:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

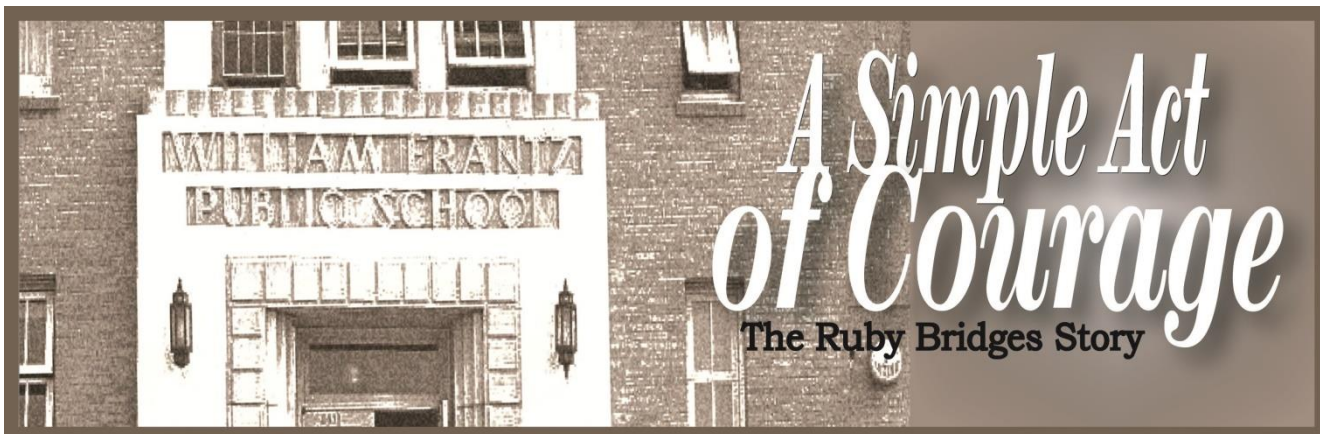
I think Ruby should go and here's why:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

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In 1960, African-Americans faced discriminated in every walk of life, even in schools. That's why a six year old girl named Ruby had to risk her health and happiness in a simple act of courage.

Play Script by Mack Lewis • Based on real events as described in Through My Eyes by Ruby Bridges



Characters:

Narrators 1 & 2 • Historians 1 & 2
Ruby Bridges • Mr. & Mrs. Bridges – *Ruby's parents*
Visitors 1 & 2 – *men from the NAACP* • **Marshals 1 & 2**
Principal • Parents 1 & 2 • Mrs. Henry – *Ruby's teacher*
Yolanda & Pamela – *Ruby's friends* • **Boy • Classmates 1 & 2** (*non-speaking*)

Scene One: Nov. 14, 1960



H1: Desegregation hit New Orleans like a hurricane.

H2: Police sirens blew through town as if gale-force winds.

H1: Angry mobs and motorcycle cops thundered through the streets.

H2: And in the middle of it all stood a six year old girl named Ruby.

Marshal 1: Stay between us, Ruby. Look straight ahead.

Marshal 2: Pay no attention to the crowd.

N1: Ruby is surrounded by Federal marshals, but there is no ignoring the fury.

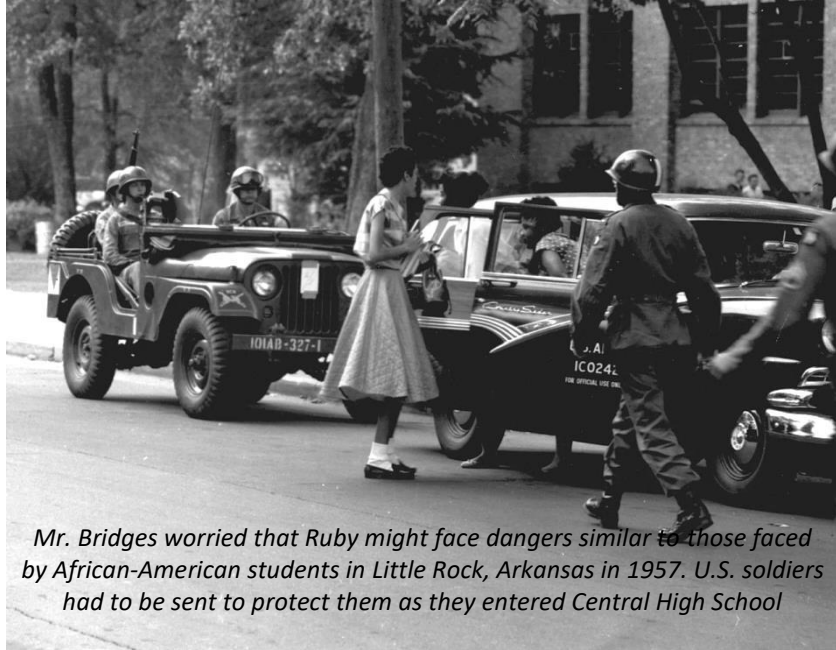
N2: From behind barricades, protestors hurl jeers—nasty insults directed at Ruby.

N1: And then fly the tomatoes, the eggs, the stones.

Marshal 1:
Keep walking, Ruby. We'll protect you.

N2: Ruby and her mother stride quickly up the steps and into the school.

N1: Although safe inside, the storm has just begun.



Mr. Bridges worried that Ruby might face dangers similar to those faced by African-American students in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. U.S. soldiers had to be sent to protect them as they entered Central High School

Mrs. Bridges: Oh, that's a nice school, and it's just a couple blocks from here!

Mr. Bridges:
Not so fast. I'm all for integration, but these things always seem to turn violent. You know what happened up in Little Rock when those black kids tried to enroll in high school.

H1: Three years

before, matters grew violent when nine black students started attending Central High School.

Visitor 2: You're right, Mr. Bridges. Though we'll see that she's safe, it won't be easy for her.

Visitor 1: But it's important she weathers the storm. If she doesn't finish the school year, our efforts will be severely damaged.

Mrs. Bridges: We all know the white schools are better funded than black schools, and I want Ruby to get the best education she can have. I say we should do it.

Mr. Bridges: I still don't like it.

Mrs. Bridges: I'll go with her the first day.

N2: Reluctantly, Mr. Bridges nods his head.

Scene Two – Earlier that Year



H1: Just a few months before, men in nice suits had come to Ruby's home.

H2: They were from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The NAACP.

Visitor 1: As you know, the Supreme Court has ordered Louisiana schools to integrate.

Visitor 2: Last spring, your daughter took a test to see if she qualifies to attend an all-white school. She was one of just a few children to pass.

Mr. Bridges: We've always known Ruby was smart.

Visitor 1: Well, Ruby's marks have earned her the right to attend first grade at the William Frantz Public School.



Visitor 2: We're in agreement then! Ruby will start first grade at the Frantz School in the fall.

Visitor 1: It will be a great moment for black children all over the south!

Mr. Bridges: Well I hope so. I suspect my Ruby will have to be courageous.

Scene Three – November 1960



N1: When Ruby and her mother step into the Frantz School for the first time, it doesn't seem like such a great moment.

N2: The big doors muffle the taunts of the crowd outside.

Mrs. Bridges: This school is a lot bigger and nicer than your old school, Ruby.

Ruby: It sure is. But where are all the other kids?

N1: Ruby and her mother sit in the school office. The marshals stand in the hall.

Ruby: When will I meet my teacher and see my new friends?

Mrs. Bridges: I'm sure someone will show us to class any minute.

N2: The principal comes out of her office and glances in Ruby's direction. She says nothing.

N1: A woman bustles in, dragging a little boy by the arm.

Parent 1: I'm withdrawing Stevie from school.

N2: She gestures angrily toward Ruby.

Parent 1: I won't have him going to class with the likes of her!

Principal: I don't blame you.

N1: Another woman barges in.

Parent 2: I'm here to pick up Cynthia. I didn't know the black child would be startin' already.

N2: Ruby watches in silence as children of all ages are taken from school. She wonders where they're going.

Ruby: Mama, you think they're all gettin' out of school so they can watch the parade?

Mrs. Bridges: What parade, Ruby?

Ruby: Why, the one outside.

Mrs. Bridges: That's not a parade, honey. Those people are there because of you. They're angry that a black girl is going to their all-white school. But they'll get over it. Pretty soon they'll come to understand we're all just the same.

N1: After sitting in the office for over an hour, Mrs. Bridges addresses the principal.

Mrs. Bridges: Excuse me, ma'am. I was wondering when Ruby will be going to class.

Principal: Well that's just hard to say, isn't it? If she were going to her *own* school, she'd be in class right now, wouldn't she?

Scene Four – Later that Day



N2: It's 3 o'clock. Ruby is still sitting in the office. They've spent the whole day there.

Marshal 1: All right, Ruby, Mrs. Bridges, it's time to go.

Marshal 2: Remember, stay between us and do not look at the crowd.

Ruby: Mama, I thought going to a white school was going to be hard, but so far, this school is really easy.

N1: When the doors open, the crowd explodes with a new barrage of angry shouts.

N2:
Housewives hold protest signs.

Teenagers wave Confederate flags.

N1: And one woman holds a tiny coffin with a black doll inside.

N2: The marshals escort Ruby and her mother to a large black sedan as the crowd chants angrily.

Marshal 1: Quickly, Ruby, get inside.

N1: As they pull away, she listens to the chant and hears the thuds of rocks hitting the car.



To and from school, Ruby had to be protected by armed Federal marshals.

Scene Five – Ruby's Neighborhood



N2: Each day at school, Ruby endures the violent winds of change.

N1: Come the weekend, she's glad to be back on her own block jumping rope with her friends.

Yolanda:
What do you want to skip to?

Ruby: I learned a new rhyme at school this week. Wanna hear it?

N2: Ruby teaches them the same chant she's been

hearing each day. The girls begin skipping rope to it.

Kids (all): Two, four, six, eight, we don't wanna integrate."

Mr. Bridges: Ruby!

N1: Mr. Bridges appears on the stoop, a serious look on his face.

Mr. Bridges: What's that you girls are singin'?



Ruby: I learned it at school. "Two, four, six, eight..."

Mr. Bridges: Come here, girls.

N2: Mr. Bridges sits down on the steps as the kids gather around.

Mr. Bridges: I know it sounds like a good rhyme for skipping, but it's a mean thing those folks are saying.

Pamela: What does it mean?

Mr. Bridges: To integrate means to mix together. What they're saying is that they don't think black people and white people should be mixed together and treated equally.

Ruby: Is that why they're all out there saying all those nasty things?

Mr. Bridges: Yes, it is, Ruby. What they want is for you to give up so that things will go back to the way they used to be. They want you to give in so integration will fail.

Yolanda: We're sorry, Mr. Bridges. We didn't know.

Mr. Bridges: Of course you didn't.

N1: He takes Ruby's chin in his hands.

Mr. Bridges: You're just children. You're all just little children.

Scene Six – in Class:



N2: Days turn into weeks. Outside the school building, the howling crowd continues to torment Ruby.

N1: But inside, she's greeted by her teacher, Mrs. Henry.

N2: Ruby is the only student in class.

Mrs. Henry: Good morning, Ruby. How are you holding up?

N1: Ruby ponders the question.

Ruby: Well, I'm getting' better at countin' coins, but takeaway is still givin' me fits.

N2: Mrs. Henry laughs.

Mrs. Henry: I mean, how you holding up with all this commotion about you being here?

N1: Ruby seems saddened by the question.

Ruby: Well, I never get to have any soda pop cuz the market down our street won't let us shop there anymore. And my pa lost his job on account of all this.

Mrs. Henry: Oh Ruby. I'm so sorry.

Ruby: But I think what bothers me most is that I never get to go outside for recess. It'd be nice to play with some other children once in a while.

N2: Mrs. Henry tries to explain.

N1: What she doesn't tell Ruby is that there are only a handful of other children left in the school. The parents have all pulled their children out because of Ruby.



Scene Seven – The School Office:



N2: Ruby has been attending school for several months.

N1: Marshals no longer escort her to class. The protestors have disappeared.

N2: The storm is weakening.

Mrs. Henry: Come with me Ruby.

N1: She walks Ruby to the office and directs her to sit in a chair.

N2: Mrs. Henry speaks in punctuated tones with the principal.

N1: Ruby thinks she's in trouble.

Mrs. Henry: Pardon me, Ma'am, but I understand that other first graders have returned to the school. Ruby should be allowed to learn alongside them.

Principal: Tired of teaching her yourself?

Mrs. Henry: No ma'am. Integration means putting black and white children in the *same* classroom. You're breaking the law by keeping them separate.

Principal: That's your interpretation, Mrs. Henry.

Mrs. Henry: No. That's the Supreme Court's interpretation.

Principal: I won't force any of my teachers to instruct a black child against their will.

Mrs. Henry: They won't have to. The other children can come to *my* room for their lessons.

N2: The principal glares at Ruby, but she gives in to the request.

Principal: Very well. The other children may come to your room for an hour each morning.

Scene Eight – Back in Class:



N1: The next day, three children sit down in Ruby's classroom.

Mrs. Henry: Welcome children. This is Ruby. What are your names?

N2: The children introduce themselves.

Mrs. Henry: Let's open our primers to page 36, shall we?

N1: As Mrs. Henry writes on the chalkboard, Ruby whispers to one of the students.

Ruby: You wanna play at recess?

Boy: Naw. My mom says I can't.

Ruby: Why does she say that?

Boy: It's cuz your skin is black.

N2: Ruby leans toward another student, but the girl won't look back.



N1: She turns towards the third student.

Ruby: How about you?

N2: This one smiles faintly.

Mrs. Henry: Today's story is about making new friends on a rainy day. Ruby, would you like to read first?

Scene Nine – Second Grade:



N1: A year passes.

Mrs. Bridges: I'm proud of you, Ruby.

Ruby: Why's that, Mama?

Mrs. Bridges: Despite everything, you never missed a day of school. And here you are starting second grade!

Ruby: Do I really have to go back there?

Mrs. Bridges: Yes, it's a much better school than your old one.

Ruby: But I'm tired of being alone.

N2: Mrs. Bridges points out all the children entering the building.

Mrs. Bridges: Things will be different this year, Ruby. You just watch.

N1: She gives her a hug and sends her inside.

N2: Ruby trudges down the hall to her new classroom.

N1: She stops in the doorway. Her face brightens.

Ruby: Why hello everybody! My name is Ruby.

N2: She's surprised to see a classroom full

of students, both black and white, all smiling back at her.

N1: The winds of change had blown through New Orleans.

N2: Thanks to Ruby Bridges' simple act of courage. •



Eventually, Ruby's school might have looked something like this integrated classroom in Washington, D.C.

Source Material:

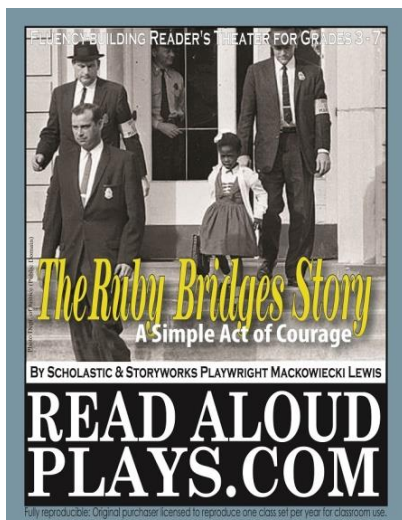
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Ruby Bridges in 2010



A Simple Act of Courage tells the story of Ruby Bridges, who at just six years of age became one of the first black students to integrate New Orleans public schools. “Nothing can be more moving than watching a small black child climbing the steps of her elementary school that historically and legally did not welcome her presence,” said actor and civil rights crusader Harry Belafonte. This play is based on those events—as depicted in Ruby’s own book, *Through My Eyes*. In 1960, a federal court mandated that New Orleans Public Schools be desegregated, meaning they would have to make sure black students attended schools that had previously been designated for whites only. Ruby Bridges was one of four African-American children selected to attend. Though escorted by federal marshals, she faced daily mobs of angry parents who withdrew their children rather than have them attend school with a black child. This continued for much of the year, and even when the “protests” subsided, Ruby remained largely ostracized. She was one of only 13 students in the

school. Imagine a first grade year like that! Parts from 9 to 21 students (parts can be doubled or tripled). Suitable for reader’s theater, podcast, or discussion-oriented classroom reading.



Instructions: 1. Print a class set and assign parts. 2. Have students use highlighters to mark their individual roles. 3. Meet regularly for guided reading practice while having students practice their individual parts independently (such as for homework). 4. When ready, practice “on stage.” 5. Perform in front of an audience. 6. Hold a feedback and self-assessment session. 7. Make use of the comprehension and extension activities.

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Bubble Test Comprehension Activity (CCSS Literature items 1, 2, 3, 4, 10; RI 1,2, 8). Have students cite evidence from the text when completing and reviewing. **Key:** 1. C; 2. B; 3. C; 4. D; 5. A; 6. D; 7. B; 8. *all are correct provided evidence can be cited*. **Short Answer Topics:** #1: Expect students to express key lines in Scenes 3, 5, 6, 8, and/or 9 where Ruby expresses interest in friends and other children. #2: Expect students to draw inferences from specific text in which Mr. Bridges worries about Ruby’s safety, Mrs. Bridges wants her to get a good education; the marshals are doing their job of protecting her; the protesters want society to stay the same, the principal doesn’t want to deal with the issue; and so on. #3: Answers will vary, but expect students to cite passages from the play. #4: Reasons against attending might include safety, friendships, retribution; reasons for attending might include a better education, closer to home, important for society.

Key Vocabulary (recommended to introduce before reading the play): **hurl, sedan, interpretation, torment, punctuated, “cuz.”** The words **jeers, taunt,** and **integrate** are subjects of the comprehension activities.

Extension Activities:

- **Read** from Ruby Bridges book, *Through My Eyes* (1999), for excellent compare & contrast activities.
- **Watch** Disney’s *Ruby Bridges*, the 1998 movie depicting Ruby experience.
- **View** Norman Rockwell’s classic painting, “The Problem We All Live With,” which portrays Ruby walking to school. Have students discuss or write responses by asking questions such as “How does the picture make you feel?”, “What’s happening in the picture?”, and “What thoughts and emotions might Ruby have had?”

A Simple Act of Courage

Bubble Quiz



Name: _____ Date: _____

Select the best answer for each question. Be prepared to support your answers by locating evidence in the story. (CCSS Literature items 1, 2, 3, 4, 10; RI 1,2,8)



1. In Scene 1 the playwright uses words such as “thundered” and “hurricane.” Why?

- A. ☐ Because the weather in New Orleans was stormy.
- B. ☐ Because Ruby stormed into her new school.
- C. ☐ Because the process of desegregating the schools created an emotional storm.
- D. ☐ Because Mrs. Henry had a stormy personality.

2. A synonym is a word that has the same meaning as another. In Scene 1, the protesters hurl “jeers” at Ruby. In what other scene is there a synonym for *jeers*?

- A. ☐ “Thuds” in Scene 4
- B. ☐ “Taunts” in Scene 3
- C. ☐ “Shouts” in Scene 4
- D. ☐ “Chants” in Scene 5

3. In Scene 4 Ruby says that going to a white school is easy. What does she mean?

- A. ☐ The classwork was simple.
- B. ☐ She was having trouble with “takeaway.”
- C. ☐ She didn’t have to do any school work the first day.
- D. ☐ It wasn’t difficult to be the only black student.

4. What was a consequence of Ruby attending the William Frantz School?

- a. ☐ The corner market wouldn’t sell to food Ruby’s family anymore.
- b. ☐ Ruby’s father lost his job.
- c. ☐ Ruby didn’t get to go to school with her friends from the neighborhood.
- d. ☐ All of the above.

5. According to the play, what does it mean to *integrate*?

- A. ☐ To mix black and white people together and treat them equally.
- B. ☐ To give black people special privileges.
- C. ☐ To separate people based on their skin color.
- D. ☐ The play doesn’t say what integration is.

6. How does Ruby show that she really doesn’t understand how serious the events were?

- A. ☐ When asked how she’s holding up, she focuses on things such as “takeaway.”
- B. ☐ She says she thinks all the commotion outside is a parade.
- C. ☐ When skipping rope, she uses the mean chant shouted by the protestors.
- D. ☐ All of the above.

7. Where in the play does it explain how Ruby was selected to attend the all-white school?

- A. ☐ Scene One
- B. ☐ Scene Two
- C. ☐ Scene Six
- D. ☐ Scene Nine

8. What’s this play really all about? Be ready to defend your answer with evidence from the play.

- A. ☐ Friendship—Ruby wasn’t worried about integration; she just wanted to make friends.
- B. ☐ Integration—children shouldn’t be separated based on the color of their skin.
- C. ☐ Sacrifice—Ruby and her family sacrificed for the benefit of others.
- D. ☐ Change—Ruby’s actions changed America for the better.

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A Simple Act of Courage

Written Response

Name: _____ Date: _____

Respond in detail on a separate sheet to one or more of the following. Be sure to support your answers by locating evidence in the play.



Original Source: In her book, *Through My Eyes*, Ruby states, “When it was time for me to start kindergarten, I went to Johnson Lockett Elementary School. My segregated school was fairly far from my house, but I had lots of company for the long walk. All the kids on my block went to Johnson Lockett. I loved school that year...” How is this idea represented in the play? (RL 1, 2; RI 1, 5, 6, 8; W 9, 10)

Perspective: Each of the people depicted in the play is concerned about something different. Imagine you’re one of the characters *other than Ruby*—Mrs. Bridges, marshal, principal, or someone else. Explain what he or she might be thinking and feeling during the events and why. (RL 1,3,6; RI 1,3,8; W9, 10)

So what? Why was this event important? How would the world be different today had Ruby not gone to the all-white school? What if she had gone to the Frantz School but was ill-behaved or did poorly on her work? (RI 1, 2, 3, 8; W 9, 10)

Debate: Imagine you’re sitting at the table the day the people from the NAACP visited. Mr. Bridges doesn’t want Ruby to go to the Frantz School. Looking at it from his perspective, give 3 reasons she shouldn’t go, and then talk him into it by giving him 3 good reasons she should. (RL 1,3,6; RI 8; W 9,10)

I think Ruby should not go to the Frantz School:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

I think Ruby should go and here’s why:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

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