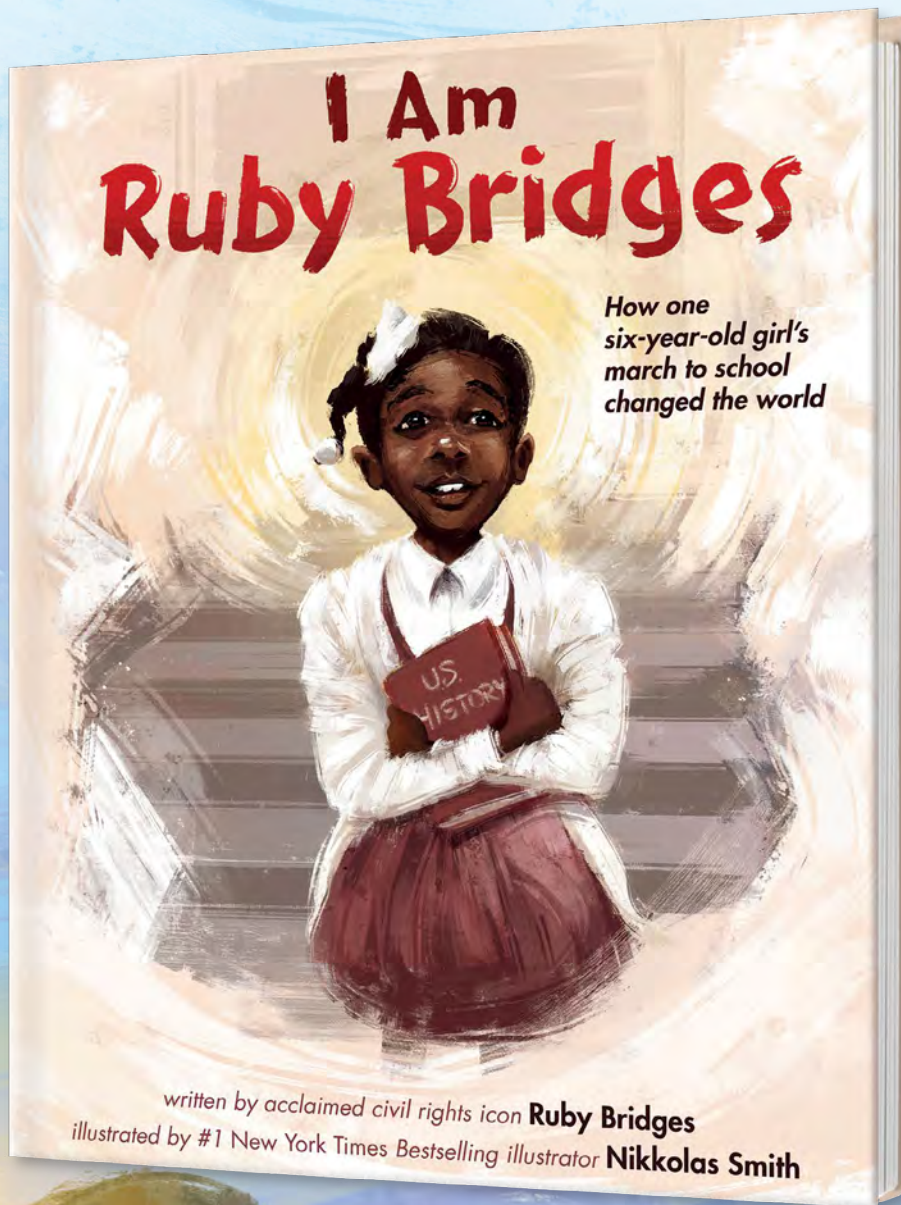


# READING GUIDE

# I Am Ruby Bridges

by **Ruby Bridges** • illustrated by **Nikkolas Smith**

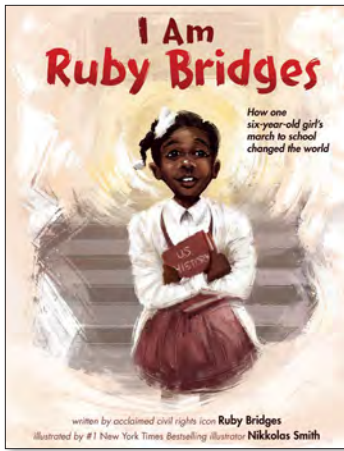
AGES 4-8  
GRADES P-3



The  
Power  
of Story

Building Equitable  
Bookshelves

 SCHOLASTIC



## About the Book

When Ruby Bridges was six years old, she became the first Black child to integrate the all-white William Frantz Elementary in Louisiana. Based on the pivotal events that happened in 1960 and told from her own point of view, this is a poetic reflection on her experience, which changed the face of history and the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement. Embracing the meaning of her name, Bridges reflects with poignancy and heart on the way that she, as a young girl, stood proud and tall to help build a bridge between all people and pave the path for future generations. *I Am Ruby Bridges* offers hope and confidence to all children.

## Discussion Questions and Prompts

Use these questions to preface, structure, and conclude a reading of *I Am Ruby Bridges* with young people. Encourage students to share their observations as you make your way through the book together, and take time to linger on pages or spreads that generate more discussion.

### Before Reading

1. Take a close look at the cover of this book. How would you describe the expression on the child's face? What does her "body language" say? How do you think she is feeling? Can you guess what she might be thinking about? Why? Based on the picture, what do you think this book might be about?
2. Let's read the subtitle together. Why do you think this six-year-old girl is "marching" to school? How is "marching" different from "walking"?
3. Let's peek under the book's dust jacket and examine the book's front and back endpapers. What do you see? What clues might these parts of the book offer us about the story inside?

### While Reading

4. In books, a symbol is a word, picture, color, object, person, or place that is used to represent, or mean, something else. As we read this book together, see if you can find any examples of symbols. What examples of symbols can you find as we read this book together? How do the text and illustrations give us clues about what these symbols might mean?
5. What is Ruby thinking about before she starts attending her first school? What are Ruby's parents thinking about when they choose where Ruby will go to school? What does Ruby think about and discuss with her parents when she's switching schools?
6. What are "opportunities"? Looking at the "opportunities" pages in the book, what do you notice? What do the items in these illustrations suggest about the kind of opportunities Ruby's parents want her to have?
7. What does it mean that Ruby is "the first"? How does she react when she realizes what it might mean to be the first? What is challenging about being the first, and what's exciting about it?
8. At Ruby's first school, all of her classmates are Black. When she gets to her new school, she realizes she's the first Black student there. What are some other differences between these two schools? What are some similarities between Ruby's schools and your school?

## Discussion Questions and Prompts (continued)

### After Reading

9. Let's return to the cover and endpapers. Do you notice anything that you didn't notice before? How would you describe Ruby now? How do you interpret the front and back endpapers now?
10. Why does six-year-old Ruby think it is good for all children to be able to go to school with people of other races and backgrounds?
11. How did Ruby Bridges help make it possible for children of different races to attend school together?
12. In your neighborhood and in your school, do people mostly look similar to each other or different? Have you seen neighborhoods or schools with mostly one kind of people? Why do you think there are some places where people look mostly the same as one another?
13. Ruby Bridges herself has become a symbol in American history. What does she stand for?

## Extension Activities

### Your Name, Your Story

In this book, Ruby Bridges finds value in the definitions of her first and last names. After looking together at the front endpapers where Ruby defines her first and last names, ask students to research the meaning of their own first, middle, and/or last names. Be prepared to help by doing some name research of your own to share on index cards for students to reference. Students can also ask other adults in their life about the meaning of their name(s). Once everyone has collected some information about the meaning of their name(s), hand out paper and drawing supplies. Invite students to craft a story in pictures and/or words about the meaning of their name(s) and what it means to them, or ask them to create and illustrate a new meaning for their name(s) based on their dreams and ambitions.

### Make a Bridge

In the front endpapers, the word "bridge" is defined as a "means of connection or transition." As a group, brainstorm some of the ways in which groups of people in your shared environment are separate. Try to focus on neutral groups as you lead the brainstorm. Perhaps the children don't feel connected enough to the teachers, or to the students in other classes. Perhaps there are gender divisions during free play. Have the children think about a shared activity that could make a bridge between separate groups for a time. Plan the activity together. Give invitations or an announcement, and have fun with it! Afterward, talk with the children about how it felt to spend time with different people in a new way.

### Parade of Kindness

Six-year-old Ruby Bridges is alone when she walks into her new school. What would it feel like to be supported and accepted instead? Have children make small signs with words they would like to see when they walk into a new place. Have them create and practice a cheer using welcoming words. Then have children form a crowd around the classroom door and encourage them to take turns walking through the crowd, being cheered on with kindness. Afterward, invite student feedback about how it felt to participate in the parade of kindness. Would they like to make this a regular practice, perhaps when new students join the class, when guests visit, when someone's been out sick, or for everyone on the first day back from vacations?

## Extension Activities (continued)

### Words That Heal

Words have power, as we know from Ruby's experience of her first and last name, as well as her relationship with the word "first," and her understanding of the word "opportunity." As a group, come up with words and phrases that heal. For a week, everyone should practice saying some of these words as often as they can—at home, at school, and everywhere they go. At the end of the week, come together to talk about how it felt. Was it difficult to remember to be kind? Was it easier to be kind to some people over others? Why? How can we extend our healing words to people we might not normally think about?

### We All Belong

Have each child draw a miniature self-portrait. Allow them to take turns putting their portraits up on a shared wall to create a constellation of the group. Facilitate a discussion about how it feels to be part of a group.

### Heroes You Know

Tell children to interview a grown-up they admire, and to ask them about their life. They can ask any questions they like, but they should be sure to ask what was the bravest thing the person ever did. They should gather as many details as they can about that brave action and what it meant to the person, to the person's family, and to their community. In class, have each child draw and/or write a story of the brave act they learned about. Have each child share their story with the group, and allow the group to help brainstorm titles for each story that show how important the act was. After sharing in class, children can give the completed project to the interviewed person as a gift.



## Further Reading and Resources

### More about Ruby Bridges

"7 Things You Didn't Know About Civil Rights Icon Ruby Bridges." Scholastic.  
[scholastic.com/teachers/teaching-tools/articles/7-things-you-didn-t-know-about-civil-rights-icon-ruby-bridges.html](https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/teaching-tools/articles/7-things-you-didn-t-know-about-civil-rights-icon-ruby-bridges.html)

"Brave Ruby." Magazine Issue and Lesson Plan. *Scholastic News*.  
[sn1.scholastic.com/issues/2018-19/020119.html](https://sn1.scholastic.com/issues/2018-19/020119.html)

"Ruby Bridges Goes to School." (3 min. video). PBS.  
[pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/video/ruby-bridges-goes-to-school](https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/video/ruby-bridges-goes-to-school) (warning: offensive language)

*Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story* by Ruby Bridges (Cartwheel Books, 2009)

*This Is Your Time* by Ruby Bridges (Delacorte Press, 2020)

*Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges (Scholastic Press, 1999)

*The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles, illustrated by George Ford (Scholastic Press, 1995)

"The Unstoppable Ruby Bridges" Historical Fiction Play and Lesson Plan. *Scholastic Storyworks*.  
[storyworks.scholastic.com/issues/2016-17/020117/The-Unstoppable-Ruby-Bridges.html](https://storyworks.scholastic.com/issues/2016-17/020117/The-Unstoppable-Ruby-Bridges.html)

### More picture books about the civil rights movement

*The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko and Sean Qualls (Arthur A. Levine Books, 2015)

*The First Step: How One Girl Put Segregation on Trial* by Susan E. Goodman, illustrated by E. B. Lewis (Bloomsbury, 2016)

*Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* by Duncan Tonatiuh (Abrams, 2014)

*Someday Is Now: Clara Luper and the 1958 Oklahoma City Sit-ins* by Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich, illustrated by Jade Johnson (Seagrass Press, 2018)

*We Shall Overcome* by Bryan Collier (Orchard Books, 2021)

### More picture books about African American heroes

*Because of You, John Lewis* by Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Keith Henry Brown (Scholastic Press, 2022)

*Bessie the Motorcycle Queen* by Charles R. Smith Jr., illustrated by Charlot Kristensen (Orchard Books, 2022)

*Just Like Jesse Owens* by Andrew Young, as told to Paula Young Shelton, illustrated by Gordon C. James (Orchard Books, 2022)

*Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History* by Vashti Harrison (Little Brown, 2017)

*Little Legends: Exceptional Men in Black History* by Vashti Harrison (Little Brown, 2019)

*Stand Up!: 10 Mighty Women Who Made a Change* by Brittney Cooper, illustrated by Cathy Ann Johnson (Orchard Books, 2022)

### More picture books about contemporary Black life

*All Because You Matter* by Tami Charles, illustrated by Bryan Collier (Orchard Books, 2020)

*Dream Street* by Tricia Elam Walker, illustrated by Ekuia Holmes (Anne Schwartz Books, 2021)

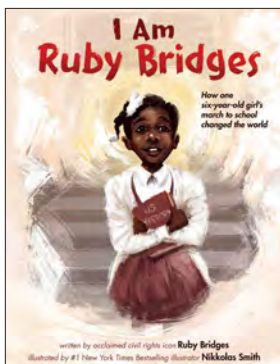
*I Color Myself Different* by Colin Kaepernick, illustrated by Eric Wilkerson (Orchard Books, 2022)

*When We Say Black Lives Matter* by Maxine Beneba Clarke (Candlewick, 2021)

# RUBY BRIDGES WALK TO SCHOOL DAY is November 14!

Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day is an annual day of dialogue to commemorate Ruby's historic steps as the first Black student at William Frantz Elementary. This initiative began with a question from a group of AAA School Safety Patrollers from Martin Elementary in South San Francisco: "Why isn't there a day named after Ruby Bridges?" These fifth grade students took their idea to the California State Legislature and now, the state of California recognizes November 14 each year as a day to commemorate Bridges's courage and the power of young people. The Ruby Bridges Foundation encourages young people, schools, and communities all over the world to participate in a day of dialogue, reflect, and take action on a topic or goal that is important to their communities.

Learn more and sign up to participate at [rubybridges.foundation/#walk-to-school-day](https://rubybridges.foundation/#walk-to-school-day).



HC: 9781338753882 • \$18.99  
Ages 4–8 • Grades PreK–2  
Also available in ebook and audio

## Praise for *I Am Ruby Bridges*

★ "This jewel of a book, written by a Civil Rights icon and engagingly illustrated by Smith, transports young audiences to Bridges's own thinking and experience as she recalls her six-year-old self . . . Any picture book collection tackling the Civil Rights Movement has to start here."

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

"A unique angle on a watershed moment in the civil rights era."

—*Kirkus Reviews*



Photo by Tom Dumont

### About the Author

**Ruby Bridges** is a civil rights icon, activist, author and speaker who at the age of six was the first Black student to integrate an all-white elementary school in Louisiana.

Bridges is the recipient of numerous awards, including the NAACP Martin Luther King Award, the Presidential Citizens Medal, and honorary doctorate degrees from Connecticut College, Columbia University Teachers College, and Tulane University. Bridges is also the author of *Ruby Bridges Goes to School*, *Through My Eyes*, and *This Is Your Time*. Find out more at [rubybridges.com](https://rubybridges.com).

About the Writer of This Guide: Autumn Allen is an educator and an editor, a reviewer and an author of books for children and young adults. She consults with parents and educators on using diverse literature with children, and she teaches children's literature at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Find out more at [autumnallenbooks.com](https://autumnallenbooks.com).



Photo by Vanessa Crocini

### About the Illustrator

**Nikkolas Smith**, a native of Houston, Texas, is a Master of Architecture recipient from Hampton University. He is an ARTivist, concept artist, children's

books author, film illustrator, and movie poster designer. He is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling illustrator of the acclaimed picture book *Born on the Water* by *The 1619 Project* author Nikole Hannah-Jones and author Renée Watson. He lives in Los Angeles, California. Find out more at [nikkolas.art](https://nikkolas.art).