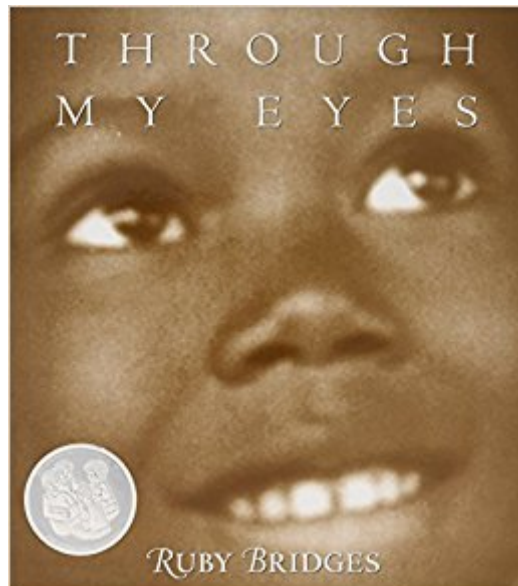




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Through My Eyes



Synopsis

In November 1960, all of America watched as a tiny six-year-old black girl, surrounded by federal marshals, walked through a mob of screaming segregationists and into her school. An icon of the civil rights movement, Ruby Bridges chronicles each dramatic step of this pivotal event in history through her own words.

Book Information

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Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Surrounded by federal marshals, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first black student ever at the all-white William Frantz Public School in New Orleans, Louisiana, on November 14, 1960. Perhaps never had so much hatred been directed at so perfect a symbol of innocence--which makes it all the more remarkable that her memoir, simple in language and rich in history and sepia-toned photographs, is informed mainly by a sort of bewildered compassion. Throughout, readers will find quotes from newspapers of the time, family members, and teachers; sidebars illustrating how Ruby Bridges pops up in both John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* and a Norman Rockwell painting; and a fascinating update on Bridges's life and civil rights work. A personal, deeply moving historical documentary about a staggeringly courageous little girl at the center of events that already seem unbelievable. (Ages 6 and older) --Richard Farr

With Robert Coles's 1995 picture book, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, and a Disney television movie, readers may feel they already know all about Bridges, who in 1960 was the first black child to attend a New Orleans public elementary school. But the account she gives here is freshly riveting. With heartbreaking understatement, she gives voice to her six-year-old self. Escorted on her first day by U.S. marshals, young Ruby was met by throngs of virulent protesters ("I thought maybe it was Mardi Gras... Mardi Gras was always noisy," she remembers). Her prose stays unnervingly true to the perspective of a child: "The policeman at the door and the crowd behind us made me think this was an important place. It must be college, I thought to myself." Inside, conditions were just as strange, if not as threatening. Ruby was kept in her own classroom, receiving one-on-one instruction from teacher Barbara Henry, a recent transplant from Boston. Sidebars containing statements from Henry and Bridges's mother, or excerpts from newspaper accounts and John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*, provide information and perspectives unavailable to Bridges as a child. As the year went on, Henry accidentally discovered the presence of other first graders, and she had to force the principal to send them into her classroom for part of the day (the principal refused to make the other white teachers educate a black child). Ironically, it was only when one of these children refused to play with Ruby ("My mama said not to because you're a nigger") that Ruby realized that "everything had happened because I was black.... It was all about the color of my skin." Sepia-toned period photographs join the sidebars in rounding out Bridges's account. But Bridges's words, recalling a child's innocence and trust, are more vivid than even the best of the photos. Like poetry or prayer, they melt the heart. Ages 8-12. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Such an interesting and informative book. Doesn't use one narrator, but includes stories about and from other people whose lives were impacted by Ruby and integration, like her teacher and other students who suffered ridicule for attending the school with Ruby. I haven't finished the book yet because every page is so moving, my heart feels like its going to explode and I have to put the book away for awhile.

This is one of the most powerful indictments of segregation I've ever read. The perspective of a little girl (now grown up, of course) who endured a brutal year of merciless isolation, taunting and threats just to get an education would be powerful enough. But Bridges' telling of her own story is almost the least powerful element of the book in some ways. After all, even under the best of circumstances, how many of us can remember events from when we were six? And Bridges' telling also shows some signs of possible repression and dissociation due to the traumatic nature of her

experiences. But still, the other voices and especially the pictures in the book augment and amplify Bridges' own voice creating a resounding cry for decency and justice. Bridges mingles her personal story with the story of Civil Rights in general. She was born in the same year as the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. The Board of Education*, but even by the time she reached six years old, less than two percent of southern schools had been integrated. Ruby, up to that point, had had a loving and stable childhood, spending summers with her sharecropping grandparents and looking after her younger siblings. That love and responsibility, as well as the unquestioning obedience that had been drilled into her, probably account for a large part of the reason Bridges was able to survive her ordeal as well as she did. Bridges, supplemented by excerpts from her mother, her teacher, the *New York Times*, and other newspapers, and author John Steinbeck, then tells of that brutal first year in which she was the only black child at William Frantz Public School. She was escorted by U.S. Marshalls every day for most of the year. Most of the other parents pulled their children out of school after she showed up. Crowds of protestors gathered around the school each day shouting things too obscene to be printed in the newspaper, holding up illiterate signs, and threatening death in various forms. Much of the crowd was made up of "housewives" - women who presumably had children of their own. A small handful of white children did continue to attend the school. They too were met with protesters who threw rocks and eggs at them. Some parents were forced to give up sending their children to that school. In any case, little Ruby didn't even know they were there for most of the year because the prejudiced principal would not allow them in the same class. And so tiny Ruby learned all by herself with only her heroic teacher, Barbara Henry, for company. Eventually things did get better. Child psychologist Robert Coles began meeting with Ruby to give her an outlet for her experiences. Teacher Barbara Henry was able to prevail and have the other white children come to her class part of each day. Gradually the protests died down and the Marshalls went away. By the time Ruby started second grade she arrived to find the white children back in school and even several other black children. But no more Barbara Henry who had essentially been driven back north, a *persona non grata*. Bridges concludes by bringing us up to date on her largely successful and happy life since those infamous days. She basically has no regrets for being the one to pave the way for other black children, but at the same time there is a hint of mourning for a lost childhood. Possibly even more than the voices in the story, the pictures provide the power of the story. There's the pictures of tiny little Ruby in her fresh white dress and the bow in her hair being led by her mother and the Marshalls. On the other hand, there are the pictures of the protesters - hoards of teenage boys laughing like it's a carnival, a grown man holding a black doll in a casket, people throwing rocks and eggs at white children who continued to attend the school, a woman

threatening to strangle the Methodist minister who continued to bring his daughter to school, the cute little white girl holding up a cross, another cross burning while white-hooded men look on. Pictures to be proud of for sure. I wonder what those participants think of now when they look back on those pictures? What do their children think? But amidst the ugly and horrifying pictures there are some beautiful and heartening ones too. There are photos of Civil Rights marches with black faces mingled with white faces. There's the picture of Ruby with her teacher, and a picture of a smiling Eleanor Roosevelt who sent an encouraging letter to the Bridges family. But the most heartening photos are the two showing a smiling Ruby with her white classmates after she was finally allowed to meet them, and therein lies the seed of hope for the generation to come. The South, we are told, was and is not racist. The Civil War was fought over "states' rights". The struggles surrounding Jim Crow laws, lynching and segregation were about preserving the "Southern Way of Life". Read this book and think about that phrase a moment. Is a "way of life" that involves threatening a six-year-old girl because of the color of her skin a "way of life" worth fighting for?

A powerful story. It is a little longer than some other books and a little more challenging for my 6 yr old granddaughter to read on her own. But we read it over a couple of days. We also did not read it at bedtime since some of the things that happen to Ruby are upsetting. We read it in afternoon so we could have time to talk about it and process the information. The last chapter, the story of the grownup Ruby, was uplifting.

Beautiful story beautifully told. Fabulous photos from that period. I'm so glad Ruby Bridges wrote this book; surely a story that must be remembered!

Ruby Bridges' immediate family are to be honored. Her mother was bold and taught Ruby to be so. The changes that took place during this particular timing of America, was traumatic! I purchased this book to remember all of the turmoil we as a nation went through and still continue to go through! I often wonder what Dr. Martin Luther King would say if he were able to come back

When this book arrived it looked too thin to me and I thought that perhaps my daughter was not going to be interested in it (she's 12 years old) well I was wrong! she said "mom it was a beautiful story, I'm glad you got this for me"...

Beautiful, moving book. I recommend it highly for people from age 7-107.

In the book *Through My Eyes* the author, Ruby Bridges, shares with us her life growing up in New Orleans as a young African American just wanting a good education that she deserves. She is entering the first grade when the public schools are forced to start integrating. She ends up being the only African American in her school, so she thinks. She and her teacher Mrs. Henry are the only ones in her classroom for most of the first year of school. When Ruby enters school she always has a police escort because there are always mobs of people yelling obscenities at her and threatening her. She never pays the people any mind. For longest time Ruby had no idea what she was doing was so important and that it would change so many things forever. This book portrays a very brave African American girl going after what she wants, and that is an education.SLC3301

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