



Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional Resource 107.A



Engage

The story of Ruby Bridges

Ruby Bridges is famous for doing something most of us take for granted today: going to school. But that simple act by one small girl played an important part in the Civil Rights Movement in the USA.

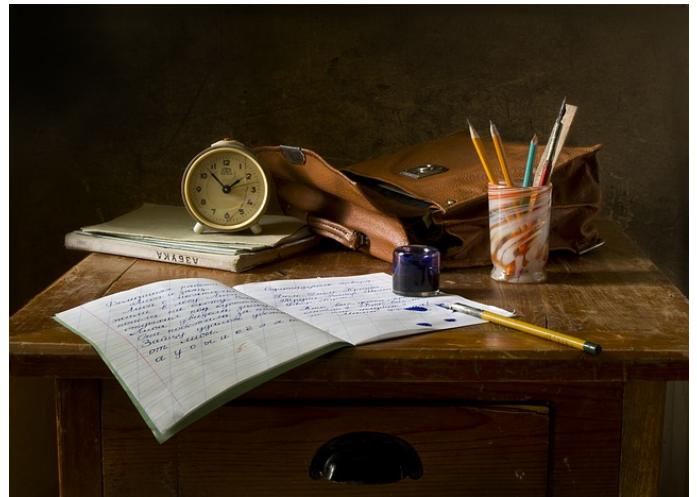
Ruby was born on September 8, 1954 in Tylertown, Mississippi. A year later, her family moved to New Orleans, Louisiana. At that time, people wanted to keep African American people and white people separate because white people didn't think that they were as good as them. For example, they had separate drinking fountains, and had to sit in the back of buses and their own separate schools.

All that changed with Ruby, who was one of the first African American children to go to an all-white school. Her dad didn't want her to go to the all-white William Frantz School. He feared that angry people, who wanted to keep African Americans and white people separate would hurt his family if Ruby went to the all-white school.

But Ruby's mother wanted her to go to the school because she wanted her child to have a better education than she did, and to have a good job when she grew up and for Ruby to have an easier life. Ruby's mum had to work hard even when she was pregnant. The day before Ruby was born, her mum had to carry ninety pounds of cotton on her back. She knew that if Ruby went to William Frantz School, she would have a better life.

Some white people didn't want African American people going to their schools because they thought they shouldn't be treated as equals. They didn't want them to have it as good because they were a different colour. People threatened to poison Ruby and hurt her if she went to their school. Her dad even lost his job because his boss didn't think that someone should be working for him if his child was going to an all-white school.

Ruby's mother got six year-old Ruby into the William Frantz School because Ruby passed a very hard test. When Ruby started first grade, U.S. marshals took her to and from school and protected her from the angry people. On the first day of school in 1960, Ruby and her mum sat in the office. Some adults took their children to school but most others did not. Ruby saw some people dragging their children out of the classrooms because they didn't want their children going to the same school as an African American. Ruby and her mum stayed in the office for the whole day of school. Many of the white parents and their children were outside the school protesting. They were shouting and holding signs. The teachers still tried to teach the few students at school that day.



The second day Ruby, her mother, and her teacher sat in the classroom. No white parents would allow their children to be in the same classroom with Ruby. Her teacher, Mrs. Henry, started to teach and was very loving toward Ruby. She supported and helped Ruby through the difficult time. On the third day of school, her mum didn't go with her. For the rest of the year, she was the only one in her class and she was taught on a different floor from all the other children. The principal and many teachers also didn't think Ruby should be taught with the white children. At first this didn't bother Ruby, but after a while she wondered why she couldn't be with the other children.

The abuse wasn't limited to only Ruby Bridges; her family suffered as well. Her father lost his job at the filling station, and her grandparents were sent off the land they had sharecropped for over 25 years. The grocery store where the family shopped banned them from entering. However, many others in the community began to show support in a variety of ways. Gradually, many families began to send their children back to the school and the protests and civil disturbances seemed to subside as the year went on.

What Ruby did so bravely paved the way for other African Americans, making it easier for other children to go to white schools, get a better education and help improve relations between all people. She didn't think it was much of an accomplishment until years later.



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Children's work

Additional Resource 107.B

Respond

Examen for children



Examen for children

This has been adapted for use in children's meeting. Gather the children in a circle and invite them to look back on their week, using the wondering questions that follow. Children may or may not speak out their 'wonderings'. If no one speaks, just move on to the next wondering question.

Children have deep spiritual lives, but may not have adequate vocabulary or tools for expressing them. There are numerous ways to help, including the regular use of Examen, a variation of which will be described here. Examen is an Ignatian (Jesuit) daily examination of conscience and reflection on the movements of the Spirit. Asking "wonderings" instead of pointed questions can help greatly.



Here is a suggested format using wonderings inspired by those used in Godly Play® stories. With very young children you might want to use only two or three of these. Experimentation will let you know whether this model needs any adaptation for your particular situation.

I wonder what you liked best about this week.

I wonder what is most important to you about this week.

I wonder if there was any part of the week we could leave out and still have all the week we needed.

Depending on the age of the child and how the wondering is going, you might add:

I wonder if there was anything about this week that you

want to keep in your heart and remember.

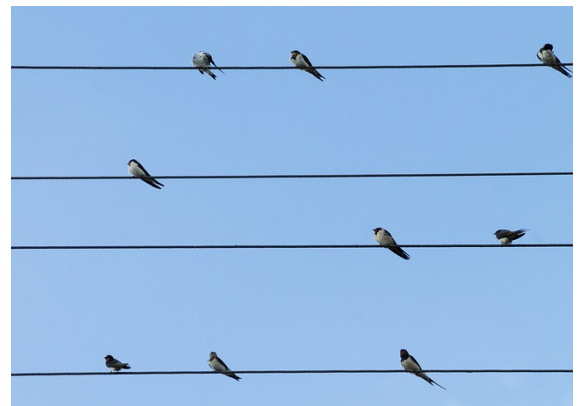
Wonder one or more of these: *I wonder where God was in your week.*

I wonder if you felt God this week.

I wonder how you listened for God this week.

I wonder if there is anything we might say to God about this week.

Depending on the age of the child, the energy level, and the mood of the moment, you might consider adding a period of silence. Children are often able to be more contemplative than we think. Initially, it is helpful to give the child something to do in the silence, such as feel and listen to their breath, listen to all the little sounds in the silence that we don't usually notice, or simply enjoy God. The child might even suggest something for all to do in the silence. The adult or the child may decide on the length of the silence.



Adapted from *Examen for children and parents in the home* by Michael Gibson, FGC Faith & Play Coordinator. With kind permission from Friends General Conference: <http://www.fgcquaker.org/>