



60th Anniversary of Ruby Bridges Desegregating a White School

By Educator Barnes – November 14, 2020

It has only been 60 years since Ruby Bridges was the first Black child to desegregate an all-white school. Six years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* which mandated the desegregation of school in the United States, Bridges was the first child to do so.

Thanks to the Children's Museum of Indianapolis many Indy students had the opportunity to listen to Bridges's story on Thursday, November 12 during a live webinar. Ruby Bridges is featured in the museum's Power of Children exhibit alongside Anne Frank and Ryan White. Malala Yousafzai will join the exhibit next year.

During the webinar, Bridges shared with students her story of integrating William Franz Elementary School in New Orleans. She explained that NAACP members went door to door looking for families who had a first grader they were willing to send to an integrated school. Over 100 families were identified, but then came a roadblock. Before any of the children could attend school, they would have to take a test to determine if they were smart enough. Only six children passed the test, and Bridges was one of them.

On November 14, 1960, Bridges was escorted to her new school by Federal Marshals. Crowds were chanting, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate!" Bridges shared she was not scared. Her parents told her to behave and when she arrived, she thought the crowd had gathered because of Mardi Gras. Her lack of understanding protected her on the first day at her new school.

Once she entered the school building, the crowd rushed in behind her. Families removed their children from the school because they did not want their white children attending the same school as a Black child. Over time, Bridges learned the crowd was not there for a celebration. The crowd showed up each day for the entire school year. On some days, members of the crowd brought a coffin with a Black doll inside. Bridges would see it on her way into the building. When working with the Children's Museum of Indianapolis on her exhibit, she insisted they include an image of the coffin. She wants visitors to truly understand what she experienced. Loneliness was also a struggle. Her first-grade teacher, Barbara Henry, was the person she spent the day with because the other children's parents would not allow them to be in her class.

Despite being white like the crowd that despised Bridges for attending William Franz Elementary School, Bridges shared she enjoyed school and could see through Mrs. Henry's actions that she was not like the white people in the crowd.

When legally segregated schools were declared unconstitutional, the mandate to integrate was supposed to give all children the opportunity to attend any school and ensure students had access to the same resources and quality and caring teachers. Bridge emphasized the difference a teacher could make. "If I was being taught by a teacher who didn't want to teach

me — and trust me, there were teachers who quit their jobs because they refused to teach Black kids — if I had been taught by one of those teachers, I think I would probably not be the person that I am today.”

Bridges encouraged the educators listening to her speak on to tell the truth when they are teaching. “It’s so important that we not keep everything from our kids. We need to be able to tell the truth ... History is sacred. None of us have the right to change or alter history in any way. When we do that, we are no longer telling the truth ... Most of the textbooks that we use in schools we omit so much in it that we are no longer telling the truth and we have to take a stand and face the fact that those textbooks need to be changed.”

Bridges was asked her thoughts on the viral picture of her shadow with Vice President Elect Sen Kamala Harris. Bridges said, “So very creative ... but it spoke volumes.” She mentioned that she made it to where she was because of the people who came before her.



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Congratulations to Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, the first woman and first American of Black and South Asian heritage to serve in this role! May this historic achievement be an inspiration to girls everywhere that they can be ANYTHING.

Artwork: Bria Goeller & Good Trubble.



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Although the coronavirus pandemic prevented students from being able to take a field trip to the museum to see the Ruby Bridges exhibit, they still were able to have this wonderful opportunity to listen to the Civil Rights icon and submit questions for her to answer.

Ruby Bridges paved the way for so many who came behind her. She reminded students that they can make a difference as a youth just as she did.