



**TACOMA
ARTS LIVE**

Introduction to Learning Resources

In 1960, a six-year-old's courageous steps echoed across a nation. Ruby Bridges was not the first, nor is she the last person to challenge our nation to deliver on its stated values of equality and opportunity. But, her story represents a critical moment when images of a little girl trying to go to school, facing down angry mobs with a bow in her hair and a lunch pail in her hands, forced Americans to face its segregationist past and to consider its future.



Ruby Bridges is one of a series of dramatic works in Tacoma Arts Live's Civil Rights Legacy program. A series of plays and performances that tour schools and community organizations, accompanied by K12 curricula, the program challenges its audiences – especially students – to reflect on the actions of people in the past even as they make connections to their own decisions today.

Written by Milo Mowery, **Ruby Bridges** centers on the story of the New Orleans six-year-old who was escorted into William Frantz Elementary School each day by federal marshals as vitriolic crowds of

white segregationists shouted her down. Chosen as one of the first black students to integrate New Orleans schools, six years after *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, Ruby not only endured the shouting, taunting mass, she spent that entire school year alone with her teacher, Barbara Henry, the only white teacher at the school who agreed to teach a black child. Iconic photos and newsreels, along with the famous Norman Rockwell painting, *The Problem We All Live With*, would sear the image of innocence facing down hate for the entire nation.

Though focused around Ruby's story, the play also explores other chapters of the classic Civil Rights Era, most notably the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the students who launched the sit-ins at lunch counters across the South. In this way, the play provides students with an opportunity to explore many different perspectives in this essential era of American history. Specifically, students come face-to-face with the ways that young people played an active role in social change, reflect on the impact of media on civil issues and contrast various tactics and priorities of those engaged in the movement.

Learning resources for Ruby Bridges include primary, intermediate and secondary activities, as well as short and long lessons. Most activities stand alone and do not require students to see a live performance of the play, but can enhance learning as pre and post viewing experiences. The lessons draw on different learning modalities and use primary and secondary sources.

Our approach to civic education focuses on three major goals:

- 1.) Introduce students to **crucial characters, events and places**, which have shaped the story of American civil life and whose impact continues to shape our experiences today.
- 2.) Weave civics education with **social emotional learning**, by inviting students to integrate these stories in their own social development as they shape concepts of justice, fairness, opportunity, equality and equity. To challenge students to see and respond to issues of both individual and collective interest.
- 3.) Challenge students to make connections between stories of the past and their own lives today. To **encourage students to see themselves as activist-participants** in on-going issues, not passive spectators of history.

We work toward these goals by incorporating both a conventional history-based approach as well as building on social emotional learning strategies and calls to action. Drawing on social emotional learning is essential to a personalized experience of civics because it challenges students to refine a sense of empathy and to experience civic issues as on-going questions that relate to themselves and their own era as much as to historical figures in black and white photos. Secondly, it is an appropriate lens through which to introduce our youngest students to the concepts of American democracy, equality and opportunity. Rather than taking a “heroes and holidays” approach, the learning resources seek to tap into young students’ emerging sense of fairness, self and other.

[Civil rights are never static.](#)

We hope that these learning resources will spark lively discussion and reflection at all levels. Civil rights are never static. They expand and contract with the decisions of every generation. Our actions and inactions in the public arena, at work, in the marketplace and at the ballot box, shape rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Students are the emerging characters in this story, and we can’t wait to see how they will shape it!

For questions or requests for learning resources, please visit tacomaartslive.org or contact:

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