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Children making change

Stories for lockdown and after* (the first in a series)

Notes for parents, carers and teachers to accompany our slide presentation.



During the COVID-19 emergency, children (and carers) can feel trapped and powerless faced with the enormity of what is happening.

Here we share stories of children (and adults) who, faced with powerful forces of injustice, made a difference. We suggest activities and points to think about and discuss. We also make links with some of the experiences of lockdown you have shared and might talk about together.

We hope these stories will galvanise your understanding that, as teacher Barbara Henry said, **"One cannot underestimate... the power a child has."**

We hope these stories can help children feel stronger at a time when we can feel powerless.

The accompanying slide presentation is for your child. These notes are to help you give support. We hope you can work together: however, the slides are also designed to make it possible for children to work on their own.

Please stress to your child that they don't have to do every task. There are many ideas to choose from.

* aimed particularly at ages 8 to 14, though there are some suggestions for use with younger and older students

Ruby, Janie, Nasreen and Forest Gate Year 7



SLIDE 1: Title page

This is a guide to using four true stories about action taken by children for human rights connected with race, identity, migration and conflict. It accompanies a slide show (in red) of images to use with your child(ren). It includes links (in green) to online video clips and other resources.

We have used the stories in schools and youth groups and know young people find them engaging and inspiring. These notes give ideas to help you explore them with your child(ren).

We give suggestions of questions, points for discussion and activities. We also suggest ways in which each story connects with issues close to home during the coronavirus crisis.

The stories

Ruby Bridges	page 3
Janie Forsyth McKinney	page 12
Nasreen Saddique	page 13
Forest Gate Year 7	page 15

This resource was produced in April 2020 by Journey to Justice, a charity which galvanises people to take action for social justice through music, stories and the arts, in order to provide inspiring learning materials for young people out of school due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

In exchange, please consider making a small donation to J2J [at this link.](#)

Ruby Bridges

A. Starting with a painting

Firstly, look together at the painting *The Problem we all Live With* (1964) by Norman Rockwell (**SLIDES 2 and 3**).



Without any more information, look closely at the painting. Come up with ideas and suggestions.

- What do you think is happening?
- Where do you think the girl is going?
- Who are the men and what do you think they are doing?
- What is on the wall? Why do you think it is there?
- What do you think the girl is thinking?

B. Working out what happened at William Frantz School in New Orleans, USA, November 1960

SLIDES 4 to 7: Can you work out the story from these photos?



If possible, get hold of the book by Ruby Bridges *Through My Eyes* (Scholastic 1999) showing dramatic, contemporary photographs and including powerful quotes from writers and other adults as well as Ruby and Barbara.


C. Telling Ruby's story (SLIDE 8)

Now look more closely at the story of **Ruby Bridges and Barbara Henry**. Choose to share the story in whatever way you prefer:

- **You could read or listen to printed text together.**
 - For younger children, [Brave Ruby](#). Click on 'Listen and Read' and then the short clips about the civil rights movement and Ruby's reflections as an adult.
 - For slightly older ones, [Biography for Kids](#). Scroll down for an audio version.
- **You could tell the story to your child.** Here is an outline that you can build on:

Ruby Bridges and Barbara Henry, 1960, New Orleans

In 1960, a six-year-old girl named Ruby became a powerful symbol of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA when she began attending the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans. Until then schools had been **segregated**: children went to separate white and black schools and the conditions and resources were far worse for black children. But as a result of protests and court actions by black people and their white supporters, the government of New Orleans had been forced to **desegregate** schools. Ruby was the first black child to go to William Frantz School and when she did, white parents pulled their children out of the school. Protesters were trying to show that desegregation wouldn't work. When white teachers and parents boycotted the school, 28-year-old teacher Barbara Henry (who had recently come south from Boston) refused to join them. Instead, she taught Ruby Bridges alone for a year. In the end, Ruby was the only student in first-grade teacher Barbara Henry's class for more than one year.

- **You could use the slides [here](#)** (if they are not visible, click on 'Back to top').
For captions to each slide, click on this image )
- **Watch [this brief extract](#)** from the Disney film *Ruby Bridges* dramatizing her arrival at school on the first day: followed by Ruby as an adult talking powerfully about what that day was like, how she came to realise what was happening and why she chose to work with children: [here](#).
- **Points to note:**
 - the impact and memory of the enslavement of African Americans was strong
 - enslavement had ended after the American Civil War in the 1860s between the northern and southern states
 - individual states had the right to make their own laws
 - in the years after the 1860s southern states brought in segregation laws
 - the Civil Rights Movement aimed to end segregation laws
 - segregation was NOT legal in northern states of the USA including Boston, where Barbara came from, although racial discrimination and inequality were also strong in the north

D. Deeper discussion (SLIDES 9 to 13)

If you'd like to discuss the choices made by people in the story, here are some possible questions:

- What made Ruby's parents and grandparents take the risk they did putting her in the school, knowing what might happen to them? (In fact, her parents lost their jobs and her extremely poor grandparents were evicted from their homes as a result.)
- Four black children had been given places at the same school as Ruby, but the other black parents decided not to put their children through this. Why didn't they go?
- What makes someone like Barbara stand up and resist injustice?
- What made Ruby, then only six years old, able to face a hostile crowd of white people outside the school every day and walk through them, accompanied by armed US Marshals?
- What would you have done if you were Barbara? Ruby's parents? The parent of another child in the school? The school principal?
- What can we learn from their stories?
- What do you think of segregated schooling based on skin colour? How about the forms of segregated schooling we have in the UK today – by gender, by faith, by wealth and class?
- **SLIDE 13** shows a commemorative plaque outside the school today. Why do people believe this was an important story?



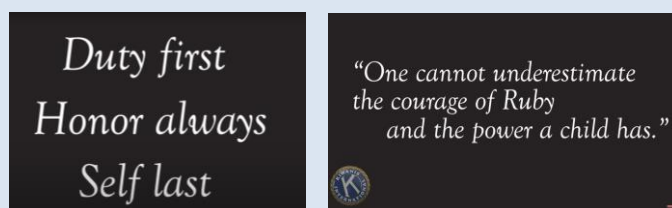
William Frantz Elementary School

E. Further research (SLIDES 14 to 18)

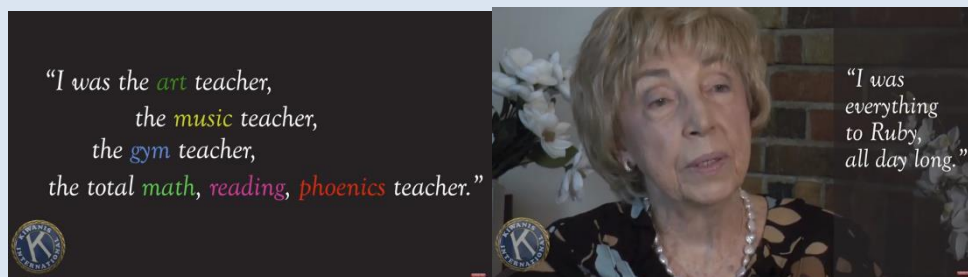
You could look more deeply at Ruby's response at the time. [Psychologist Robert Coles talks movingly about his observations of Ruby Bridges and how she acted at the age of six.](#) Why would Ruby perhaps not have been as afraid as we might think? You and your child could think about how you would act in Ruby's shoes. [Ruby herself reflects.](#)

Today Ruby is in her 60s and runs the Ruby Bridges Foundation which aims to give all children an equal opportunity to succeed. [Ruby and Barbara were reunited on The Oprah Show in 1996.](#) You could watch this and discuss why Ruby set up her foundation and why the reunion mattered so much to both her and Barbara.

You could focus on Barbara and what motivated her. There is a powerful interview with her [here](#). She talks of the impact of Ruby on her. (SLIDE 8)



Some of what she says may resonate with you as a parent in lockdown with your child!



Do **SLIDES 16 and 17** reflect your relationship with your child during lockdown? How are you both feeling about this experience? How is it affecting how you feel about each other? Perhaps this is something you can discuss. Are there similarities with Ruby and Barbara?

[Here's a link](#) to US President Barack Obama speaking to Ruby Bridges at The White House in 2011: He asked for the painting *The Problem We All Live With* to be installed there after his inauguration. What is he saying to Ruby Bridges?

F. Key Strengths (SLIDE 19)

You could consider what key strengths both Ruby and Barbara needed every day during that first year. Some are suggested on **SLIDE 19**. What do these words mean? Can you suggest other words?

Can we think of people today who are showing any of these strengths during this time of lockdown? How are they being strong? Draw pictures of these people.

G. Responses to Ruby (SLIDES 20 to 25)

Ask your child/children to create their own placard or drawing of a placard showing the positive messages Ruby **should** have seen as she walked into school every day, escorted by US Marshals – messages, perhaps, such as 'Freedom To Learn Together' and 'Black and White Unite'. Share a photo of their placard on Twitter and tag [@JtoJustice](#) so we can see it. There are some examples on **SLIDE 21**.



Examples of positive placards

Children have been inspired by Ruby's story to write poems, either about Ruby and Barbara or about their struggles for justice in their own lives. On **SLIDES 23 to 25** are three examples of poetry by UK children that may inspire your children to do their own writing.

The writers think Ruby was afraid. Do you think she was afraid?

Ask your child to write their own poem and share on Twitter and tag [@JtoJustice](#) so we can see it.

Dear Ruby Bridges, this is a poem I wrote for you. I hope it impresses you. Even though you were a little girl, you were fierce.

As I walked through the resentful crowd
My heart is beating fast like a deer being chased by a cheetah
I want to run away from all this.

I am heartbroken. I have no friends at school.
The other teachers won't teach me
Every day people shout at me in the street
I want them to stop.

Will the other children come back?
I feel sorry for Mrs Henry,
All alone as well.

I am anxious and worried

"Why do you hate a six-year old so?" **By Izabella**

(I come from China and live with my grandma. She is very nice. I am 9 years old)

Ruby's Ordeal

As I leave home,
I am very nervous.
I wonder what will happen?

As I get near the gates
I can hear the angry crowd.
My heart is thudding very, very loudly.

All the way through the crowd,
The angry parents are shouting at me.
I feel really terrified.
I just wish they didn't hate me so.

As I enter the classroom

Mrs Henry asks me if I am alright.
And I say, "Yes, Mrs Henry, I'm fine."

But I am not
In the inside I am not OK.
I feel so sad and upset.

Too upset to cry.

By Carol aged 9.

(My parents are from Ghana)

Dried Flower by Alexandra, Year 8

(Alexandra was born in Romania. At school in London she was bullied for being overweight - an effect of the drugs she took for leukaemia. Inspired by Ruby's story and courage, she worked through her own struggles. *'The project has built up my confidence in speaking about my fears and experiences I have gone through in the past. It has made me a little bit stronger and happier about who I am and how I look like, I don't care what people think of me anymore.'*)

I'm fat, but do you know why?

It doesn't matter if I'm fat, large or big,
I will never lose my soul.
Just maybe my heart at times.

I'm innocent, fresh like a blossomed flower.
The nature protects me but you
Look at me and insult me,
'Fat elephant, ugly whale, fat shit'

Have you ever looked in my eyes?
Have you seen the sea reflecting in them?
Have you noticed the sun disappearing in the darkness of my pupils?
How would you feel if your bones were aching every day?
Imagine your empty stomach, so hungry,
But your mouth makes everything taste lifeless.

I was thin as a tree branch, losing its leaves.
My bones were as fragile as a bird's bones, crushed by a lorry.
I was leukaemia, but leukaemia never beat me.

Children might like to write a letter to Ruby Bridges or Barbara Henry. The address of the Ruby Bridges Foundation is 3701 Canal St Apt U, New Orleans, LA 70119, USA.

The Foundation's motto is

"Racism is a grown-up disease and we must stop using our children to spread it."

H. People talking about Ruby

2011: Barack Obama as US President; the **legacy** of Ruby Bridges.

1999: Harry Belafonte: the **courage and bravery** of Ruby.

Ruby was **inspired by her mother** Lucille Bridges, “an unsung hero, for having the courage and faith to take a stand-not just for her own children but for all children”, RB.

Barbara Henry, white teacher at William Frantz Elementary School, New Orleans. **The importance of perseverance and stamina**

Dr Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist, who was stationed near New Orleans, who offered support to Ruby via the NAACP during her experience, writes of Ruby’s **moral stamina and courage**.

“If it hadn’t been for you (guys) I might not be here, and we wouldn’t be looking at this together.” President Barack Obama in the White House with Ruby Bridges and Barbara Henry, looking at the Norman Rockwell painting ‘*The Problem We all Live With*’.

“Nothing can be more moving than watching a small black child climbing the steps to her elementary school that historically and legally did not welcome her presence. Ruby Bridges had been called by her country to perform an act of profound bravery- to become the black child in an all-white school. By this simple act of courage, Ruby moved the hearts and opened the minds of millions of people. Her story was and is an inspiration”, Harry Belafonte in the introduction to ‘*Through My Eyes*’ by Ruby Bridges.

“Sharecropping is hard work. On the day before Ruby was born, I carried 90 pounds of cotton on my back. I wanted a better life for Ruby”, Lucille Bridges p 7 in ‘*Through My Eyes*’ by Ruby Bridges

“I grew to love Ruby and to be awed by her. It was an ugly world outside, but I tried to make our world as normal as possible. Neither one of us ever missed a day (for over a year). It was important to keep going”, Barbara Henry p 22 in ‘*Through My Eyes*’

“Ruby had a will and used it to make an ethical choice; she demonstrated moral stamina; she possessed honor, courage”. Robert Coles: ‘*The Moral Life of Children*’.

Ruby Bridges: the importance of the **power of education and** literacy.

Ruby's mother's strong **faith** inspired and supported Ruby to be courageous and show fortitude.

"All our schools should be good enough to attract a healthy racial mix, which I believe leads to the most effective learning for everybody. If kids of different races are to grow up to live and work together in harmony, they are going to have to begin at the beginning- in school together. Nowadays I travel a lot, all across the country.In schools, I emphasize the importance of reading. I believe strongly in literacy and the power of education."

P 59 in *'Through My Eyes '*

When Ruby had nightmares, her mother told her to pray. "Kneeling at the side of my bed and talking to the Lord made everything okay. My mother and our pastor always said you have to pray for your enemies and people who do you wrong and that's what I did". P 48 in *Through My Eyes*

SLIDE 26:

You could listen together to some of the music of the US civil rights era, such as:

- Sam Cooke, *A Change is Gonna Come*
- Nina Simone, *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free*
- Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, *Wake Up Everybody*
- Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On*
- Phil Ochs, *Links on the Chain*
- Bob Dylan, *The Times They Are A'Changin'*
- Aretha Franklin, *Respect*
- The Staple Singers, *For What It's Worth*

Perhaps – together with your child – you could create a playlist of human rights and social justice tracks that spans from the 1960s to the 2020s, including songs from your own era and your child's.

COVID CONNECTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- **How it feels not to be at school with classmates**
- **Advantages and disadvantages of one-to-one learning**
- **Isolation and insecurity**
- **Strength through adversity**
- **Relations between children and their teachers**
- **Handling fear**

Janie Forsyth McKinney

I. Cups of water

SLIDES 27 to 29



Now compare Ruby's story with that of a 12-year-old white girl in Alabama one year later. Her name was Janie Forsyth McKinney. [A clip from Janie's story.](#)

The Freedom Riders were Black and white civil rights activists who rode long distance buses through the southern states in 1961, to protest against racial segregation. Janie's family ran a general store. Her father was a supporter of the racist organisation the Ku Klux Klan. Klan members, including her father, forced the bus to stop outside the store and then firebombed it.

At the age of twelve, by giving water to the victims, Janie made a brave decision that set her against her family and her whole community.

You could start by showing the clip. As you watch, make a list of questions it throws up, things you now need to understand.

You will need to know more about the Freedom Riders and the Ku Klux Klan. The story is [here](#).

Her story can lead into similar questions as those about Ruby and Barbara. Why did Janie do what she did? What values drove her? What experiences influenced her? What key strengths did she need?

If your children are older, the documentary film telling the story of the Freedom Riders is [here](#). The opening section sets the context of segregation and racism in the US south in the 1960s.

In the clip, Janie as an adult speaks about what happened. If you met her, what questions would you want to ask her?

COVID CONNECTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- **Risking safety to give care**
- **Inequality**

Three stories from the UK:

J. Nasreen Saddique - "Anne Frank with a telephone"

SLIDES 30 to 33



In 1982 when **Nasreen Saddique** was 12 years old, her dad decided to start a business.

"So he found a shop in Stratford. We moved in, all happy. A week later we get a knock on the door and as we opened the door there was, like, fifty youths outside. We shut the door, kept getting knocks at the door and got racist abuse thrown at us – 'Pakis get out!'.

We didn't have a phone, there was a phone box right across the road, we phoned the police, police didn't come. Dad went to the police station to complain, asked for the police to come round.

'We're in trouble, we don't know what to do, there's 40-50 youths outside.' The police didn't come.

Every night it was happening again and again. This went on from six o'clock as soon as it got dark, right until past midnight so we didn't really get any sleep.

My dad boarded up the shop and blocked the letterbox. We were frightened, we didn't know what to do. My mum and dad didn't speak good English so I had to speak for the family.

One day my dad was working from home and he heard a big bang and went out and saw a big bucket full of shit, and when we phoned the police they didn't come. We were making trips to the police station and saying 'we need help'. We had 'National Front' painted on our front door, my dad's van was stolen, we were frightened to go out.

Two weeks later my mum said, 'Let's go ask for help'. So we went to the Town Hall and they said

'Go to Newham Rights Centre' and they said

'Why don't you write down everything that happened?'

So we would keep the upstairs lights off and we'd be sitting on the bed near the window – my mum would be looking out – and I had to decide then to keep a diary in candlelight because obviously we couldn't have the lights on."

Nasreen started writing her diary when she was 12, hoping it could be used as evidence to stop the racist attacks. Night after night they carried on. Her story was covered in a national newspaper (*The Daily Mirror*) and in magazines. She became known as 'Anne Frank with a telephone'. But that didn't stop the attacks.

The racists met every night to play games in a minicab office next door, and to abuse her family. Newham Council offered to move Nasreen's family but they refused to go, saying they wanted the racists dealt with.

The attacks went on for six years. Nasreen was still writing her diary when she was 18. As Nasreen says now:

"I never had a childhood."

It only finished when the family took the next-door minicab office to court and got it closed down.

"We had a solicitor and decided to fight this case ... and if we hadn't won, we'd still be fighting."

(all quotations from a Journey to justice interview with Nasreen)

THINKING ABOUT THIS STORY:

- Why did it take so long for something to be done?
- Newham Council offered to move Nasreen's family to live somewhere else. Were the family right to refuse?
- What should the police have done?
- Here are some opinions: what do you think?

"When a family are being harassed and abused, it is more important to get the family to safety than to take on the abusers."

"If you are a victim of abuse or hate crime and the authorities do nothing to help, it is right to take matters into your own hands."

- Think of one relevant question you would like to ask Nasreen.

COVID CONNECTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- **Isolation**
- **Fear, not feeling safe**
- **Failure of the authorities to provide security**
- **Resilience, family strength**

K. Forest gate School Year 7: “Let Natasha Stay”

SLIDES 34 to 37



In 1996 Year 7 students at Forest Gate School in Newham saw that their friend Natasha Matambile was crying.

She told them she was being forced to leave this country.

Natasha came from Angola in Southern Africa. Angola was in the middle of a violent civil war. Her father had been badly beaten and her four-year-old brother had been killed. The family had been forced to leave in 1991 and find safety here.

But now the British government wanted to send her and her family back during half term. The class decided to start a campaign to keep Natasha here but they had only two days left. **Shamima Patel**, Natasha’s friend, said:

“We thought it was unfair that she would have to leave her school and friends. We called ourselves The Friends of Natasha. We wanted to show that children like Natasha could depend on their school for support.

I think this country should welcome people of all cultures, particularly if they are escaping from danger at home.

If Natasha leaves our classroom will be silent. Natasha is part of our community – I can’t see why she has to leave us. We should all have the chance to live in safety with our families. Refugees like Natasha have already suffered enough – why should we make them suffer more?”

They got 800 people to sign a petition and two hundred school students marched in the local park. They contacted their MP and the Home Office. They managed to get a few weeks delay on the deportation. And eventually, after students put pressure on Newham Council and the government, Natasha and her family got the right to stay here permanently on May the First 1997.

(To see the ITV report by Shamima and her class in 1996, click [here](#) and play from 02:40 until 04:01. The clip includes Forest Voices from Newham singing about the Friends of Natasha in 2018. Quotations are from the video.)

THINKING ABOUT THIS STORY:

- What values were the Year 7 class upholding?
- The government who wanted to deport Natasha's family were democratically elected and following the law. Does that mean the Year 7 campaign was wrong?
- Why was the 'Let Natasha Stay' campaign successful?
- Campaigns like 'Let Natasha Stay' are very rare. In 2017 nearly 13,000 people were deported from the UK, some of them children. If Natasha's classmates hadn't organised a campaign to let her stay, would they have been to blame for her family being deported?
- Here are two opinions. What do you think?

"Everyone coming to the UK because they are in fear for their lives should be allowed to stay."

"The right people to decide who should stay or leave are not the local community. Only the government has access to all the facts of a case."

- Think of questions you would like to ask Shamima

COVID CONNECTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- **Collective community action, working together**
- **Looking out for the needs of friends and neighbours**
- **The importance of solidarity**

FINALLY

Going to school, offering a cup of water, writing a diary, keeping a schoolfriend safe ... these simple acts became actions for justice taken by children ready to stand up for values important to them.

Actions that seem small can be big.

Think together of ways that you and people you know have been taking action during the coronavirus crisis. Some people are putting themselves at risk every day to help others to live. We have all been called on to be health activists.

As we eventually come out of lockdown, how can you continue to be an activist for your community, the people around you and the health of the planet?

Perhaps you can start planning now...