

CHILDREN MAKING CHANGE

four true stories about antiracist action for human rights taken by children.



CHILDREN MAKING CHANGE

In this presentation you will find four stories of young people who took action for rights and justice in the UK and the USA.

There are lots of ideas of things to think about, activities you can do and questions you can respond to.

You can explore these with your parent or teacher or on your own, choosing which tasks to focus on.

Every time you find **brown text underlined**, a click will take you to videos or other helpful sites.

Look at the painting on the next slide.

- 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?





Norman Rockwell, *The Problem We All Live With* (1964)

Try to work out the story
from the photos on the
next three slides.

What is the story?



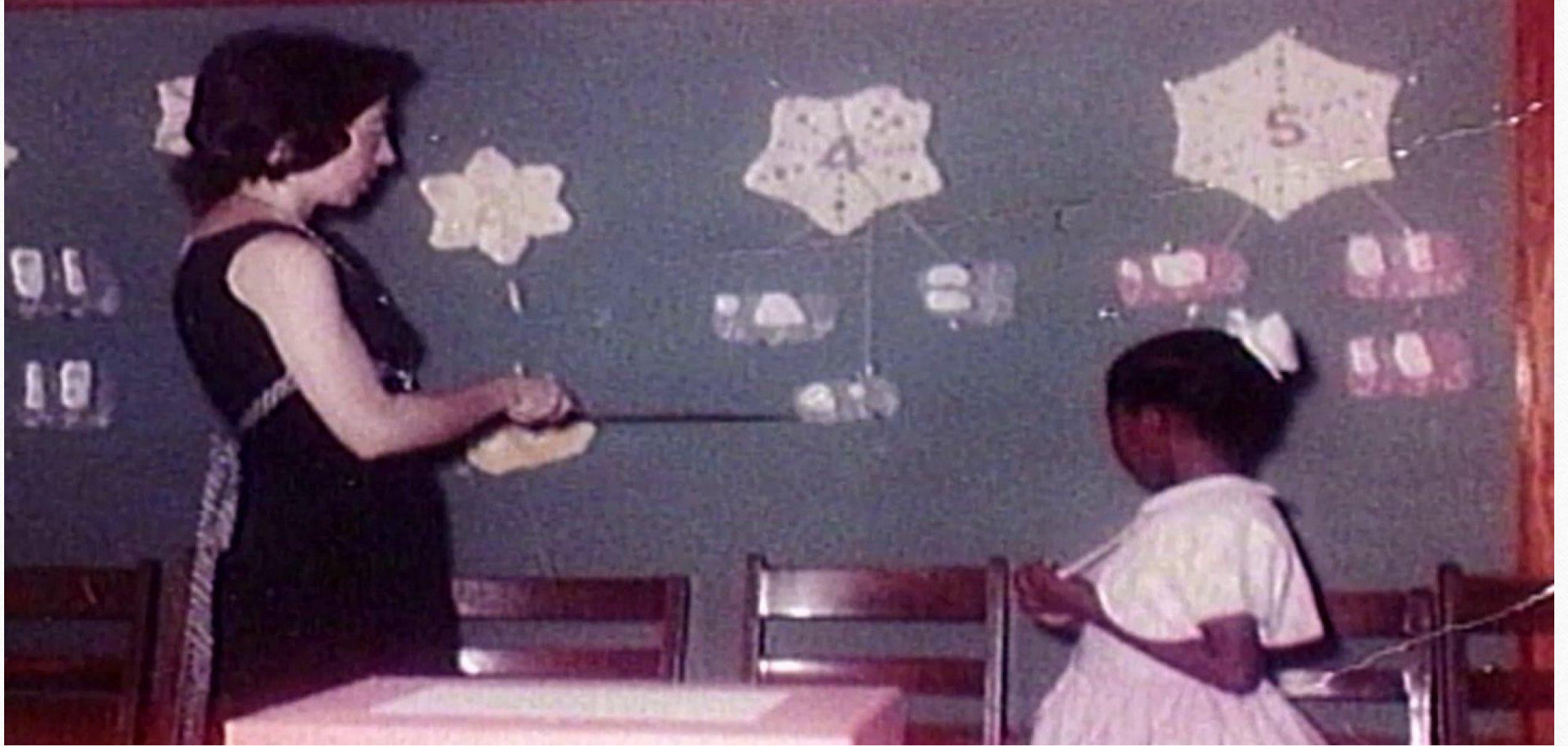
U.S. Deputy Marshals escort 6-year-old Ruby Bridges from William Frantz Elementary School, 1960 © AP/Shutterstock.com



What is the story?



What is the story?



Ruby Bridges

- You can find Ruby's story at [Biography for kids](#). If you'd rather hear the text, scroll down for the audio file.
- [This film trailer](#) from the Disney film *Ruby Bridges* shows Ruby's arrival at school on the first day.
- [Ruby as an adult](#) talking about what the day was like and how it affected her.

Some things to think about

On the next ten slides there are many questions to help you think about Ruby's story.

- You could discuss some of them with your family and friends
- You could choose one or more to write about, or record your thoughts
- You could use a question to inspire artwork or creative writing
- You could just think about the questions

You don't have to answer all the questions! Choose the ones that interest you.

Some things to think about (1)

- 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 made Ruby's parents and grandparents take the risk they did putting her in the school, knowing what might happen to them?
- What would you have done if you were Ruby's parents?

Some things to think about (2)

- 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?
- What made Barbara stand up and resist injustice?

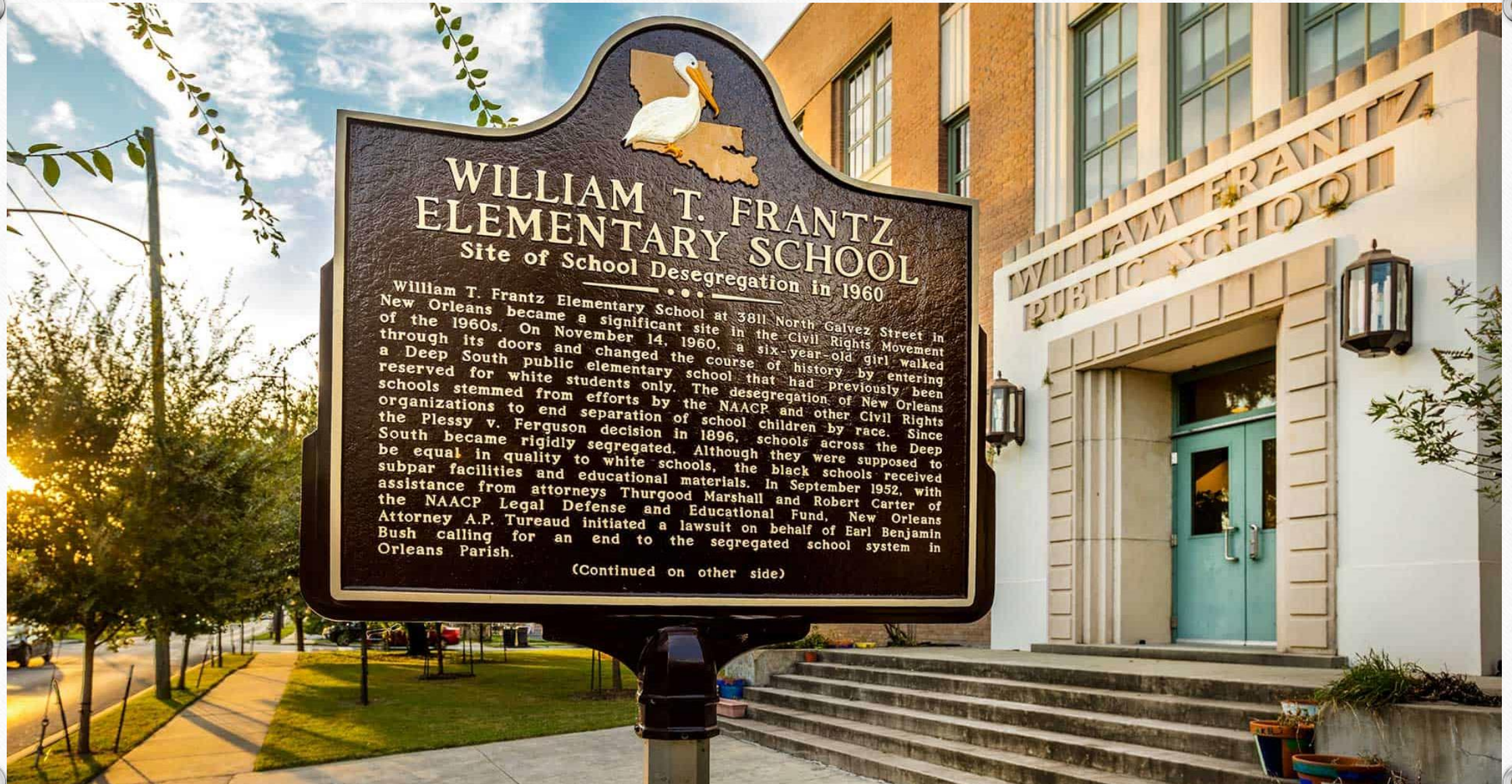
Some things to think about (3)

- What do you think of segregated schooling based on skin colour?
- What about these forms of segregated schooling in the UK today?
 - by gender (single-sex schools)
 - by religion (faith schools)
 - by wealth and class (private schools)

Some things to think about (4)

- The next slide shows a commemorative plaque outside the school today. Why do people believe this was an important story?

Why was this commemorated?



Some things to think about (5)

- 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?
 - How would you act in Ruby's shoes? Ruby herself reflects.

Some things to think about (6)

- 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.
 - Why did Ruby set up her foundation?
 - Why did the reunion matter so much to both her and Barbara?

Some things to think about (7)

- There is a powerful interview with Barbara Henry [here](#). She talks of the impact of Ruby on her.

*Duty first
Honor always
Self last*

*“One cannot underestimate
the courage of Ruby
and the power a child has.”*



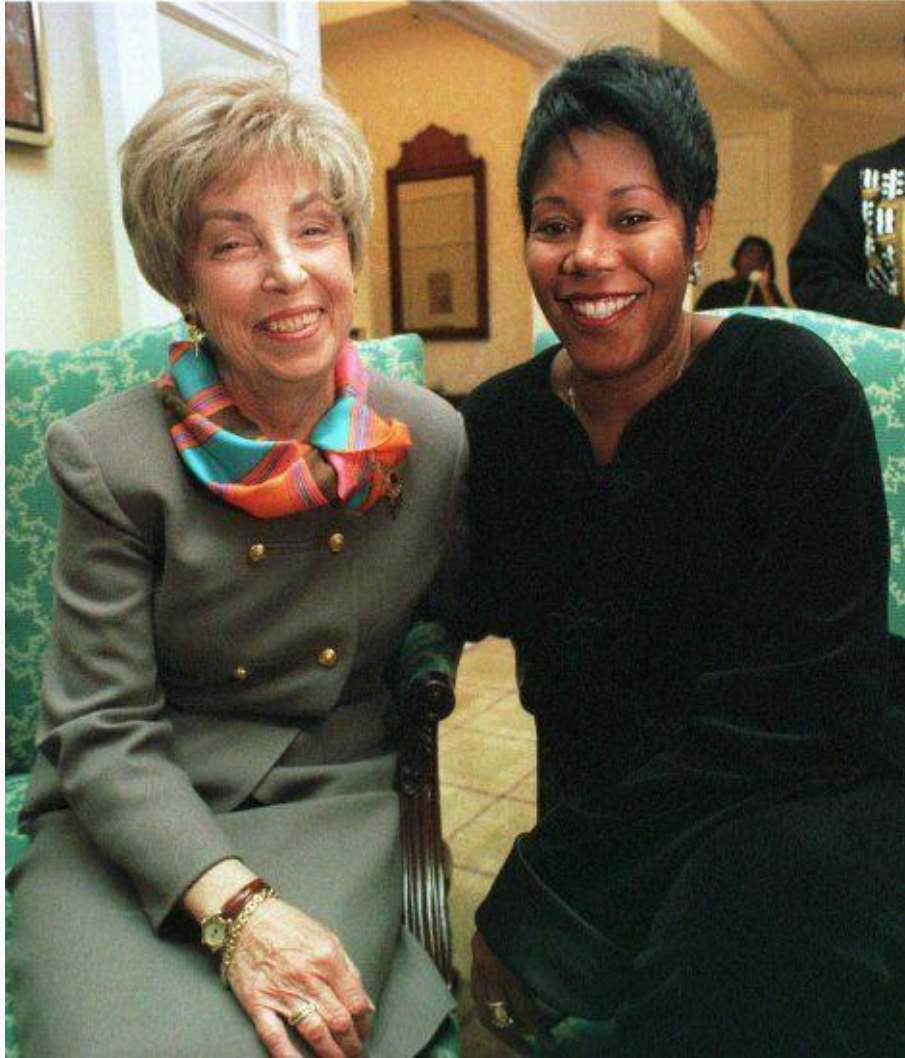
- How did these values from her school influence Barbara?
- What was Ruby's impact on Barbara?

“I was the *art* teacher,
the *music* teacher,
the *gym* teacher,
the total *math, reading, phoenics* teacher.”



- For a whole year, Ruby and Barbara were in a kind of lockdown. Was Barbara's situation similar to your parent or carer?
- How are you and your parent both feeling about this experience? How is it affecting how you feel about each other? Perhaps this is something you can write about, or discuss.

How does it feel?



Barbara Henry and Ruby Bridges, Boston 1998.
©AP/Shutterstock.com



Some things to think about (8)

- [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?

Positive placards

What placards *should* Ruby have seen on her way to school?

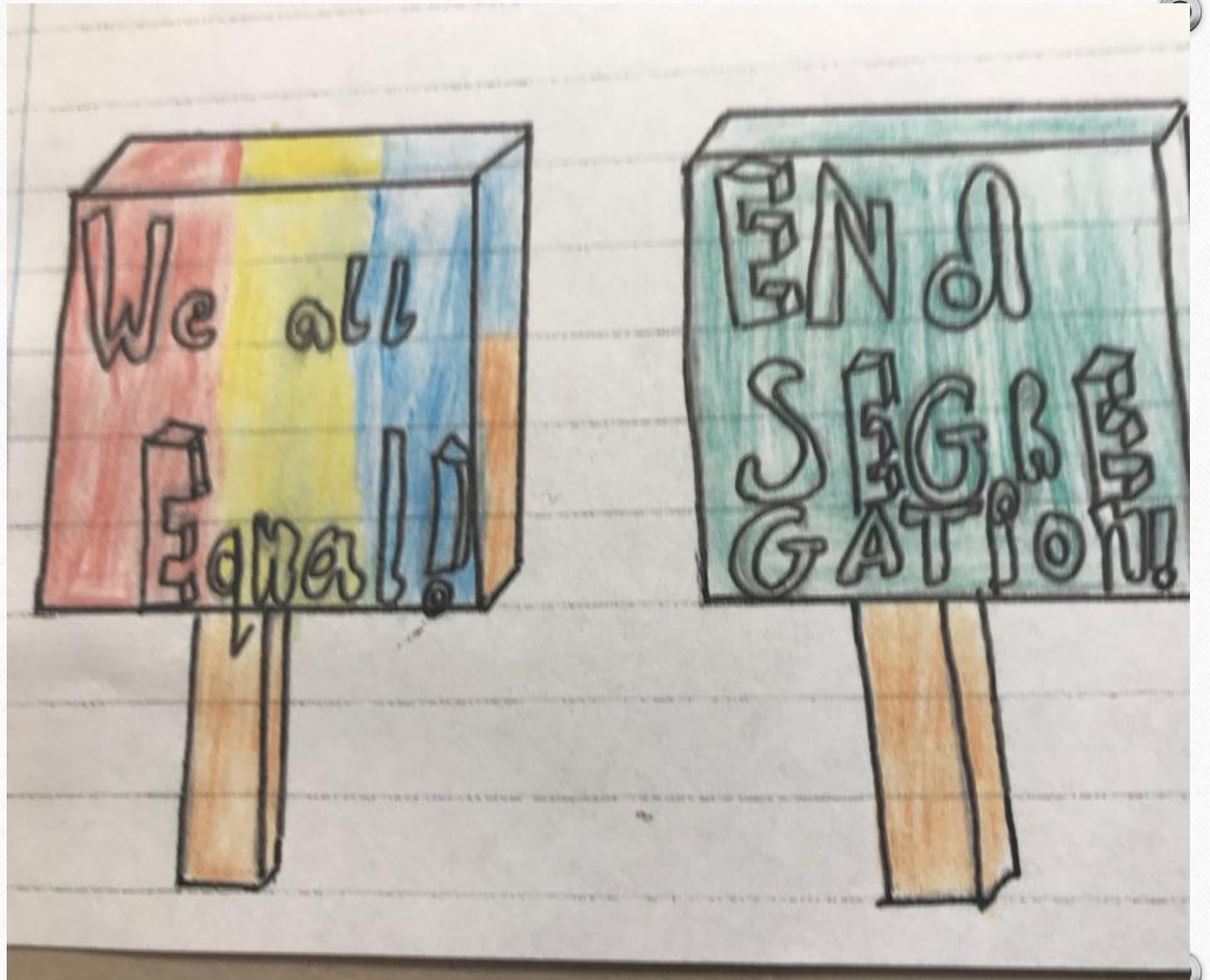
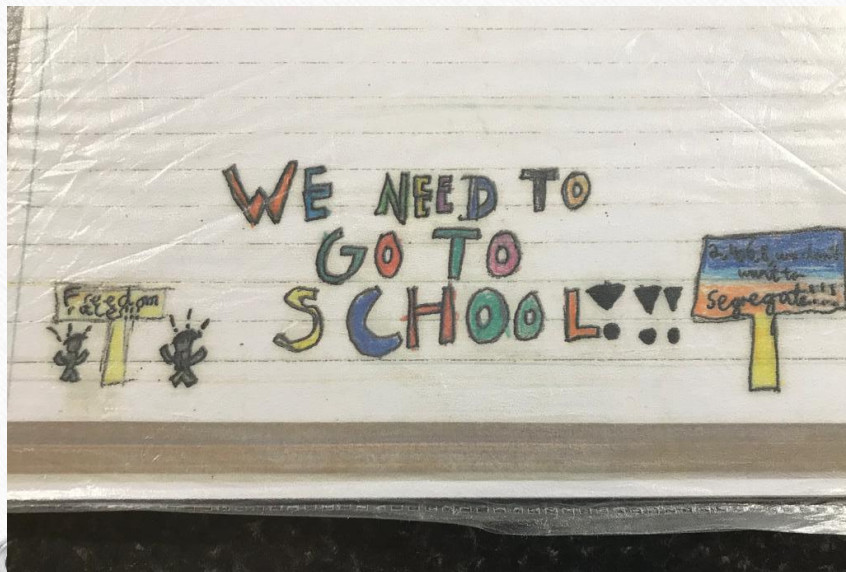
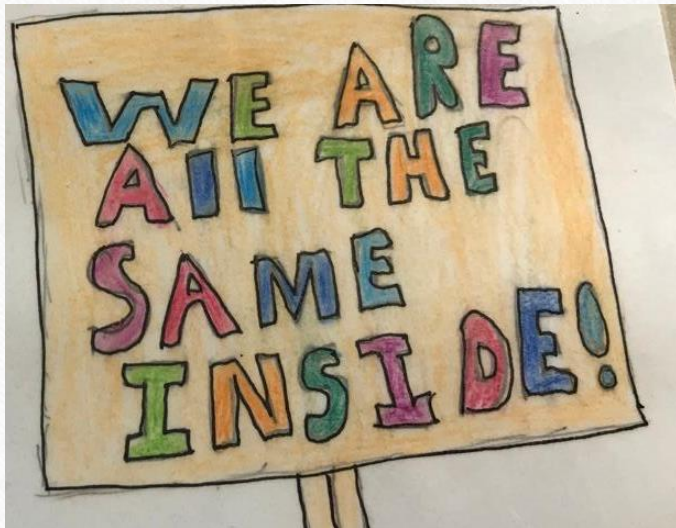
What positive messages could have been on them?

On the next slide are some students' ideas.

Create your own placard (or drawing of a placard) showing the positive messages Ruby might have wanted to see on her way to school every day - messages, perhaps, such as 'Freedom To Learn Together' and 'Black and White Unite'.

Share a photo of your placard on Twitter and tag @JtoJustice so we can see it.

Placards for Ruby



Poems

On the next few slides are some poems by UK children inspired by Ruby's story.

Izabella and Carol write about Ruby and Barbara. They think Ruby was afraid - but was she?

Alexandra writes about a struggle for justice in her own life.

Maybe you can write your own poem. Share it on Twitter and tag @JtoJustice so we can see it.

Dear Ruby Bridges, by Izabella

This is a poem I wrote for you. I hope it impresses you.

Even though you were a little girl, you were fierce.

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

|

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?"

Ruby's Ordeal, by Carol aged 9

My parents are from Ghana

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.

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
flowered.

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.

If you want to write a letter to Ruby Bridges or Barbara Henry ...

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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."

Music from the civil rights era - try listening and catching the lyrics

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*

Which artists sing about the human rights issues of our own time? Create a playlist - maybe one that brings together music of the 2020s and the times when your parents and grandparents were younger.

What did she choose to do, and why? What values drove her?



Janie Forsyth McKinney

Janie Forsyth McKinney

A clip from Janie's story.

This is the true story of a 12-year-old white girl in Alabama one year after Ruby's story. Her name was Janie Forsyth McKinney.

The Freedom Riders were Black and white civil rights activists. They rode long distance buses through the southern states of the USA in 1961. It was a 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.

By giving water to the victims, Janie made a brave decision that set her against her family and her whole community.

You can find out more about the Freedom Riders and the Ku Klux Klan [here](#).

Some things to think about (9)

Remember: You don't have to answer all the questions!
Choose the ones that interest you.

- Why did Janie do what she did?
 - What values drove her?
 - What experiences influenced her?
 - What key strengths did she need?

Some things to think about (10)

- There is a documentary film telling the story of the Freedom Riders [here](#). The opening section describes 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?

Nasreen
Saddique:
"Anne Frank
with a
telephone"

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.



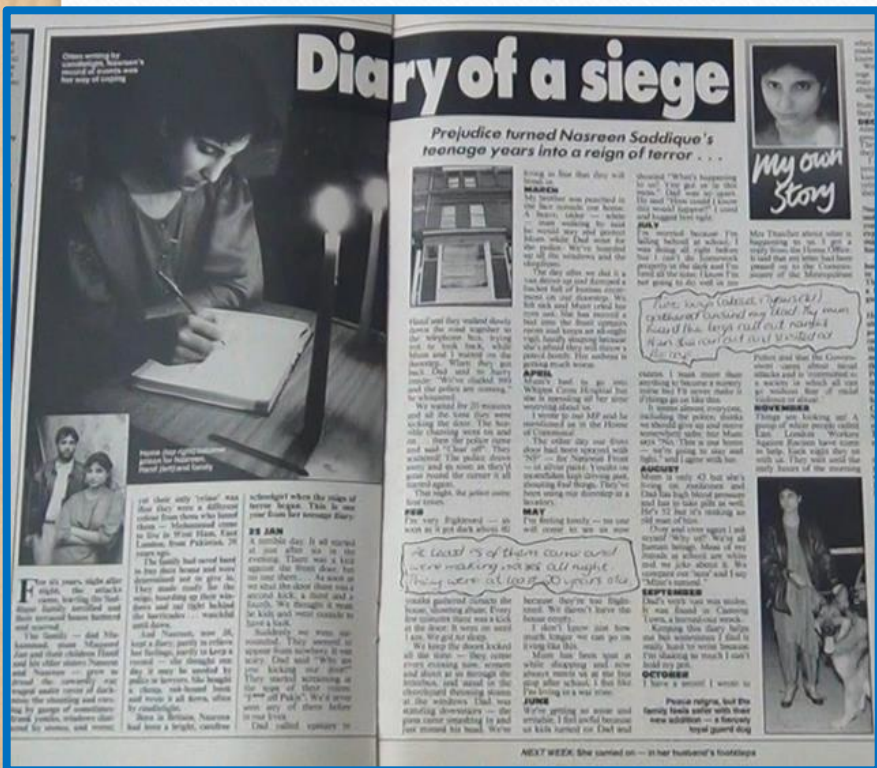
Two weeks later my mum said, 'Let's go ask for help'. So we went to the Town Hall and they said

'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. A well known journalist called John Pilger heard about her. He told her story in a national newspaper (*The Daily Mirror*) and in magazines. He called her '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.

Find out who Anne Frank was. Why do you think John Pilger compared Nasreen with her?

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)



Nasreen today

The interview with Nasreen is [here](#).

Some things to think about (11)

Remember: You don't have to answer all the questions!
Choose the ones that interest you.

- 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?

Some things to think about (12)

- 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.

"Let Natasha Stay"

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.



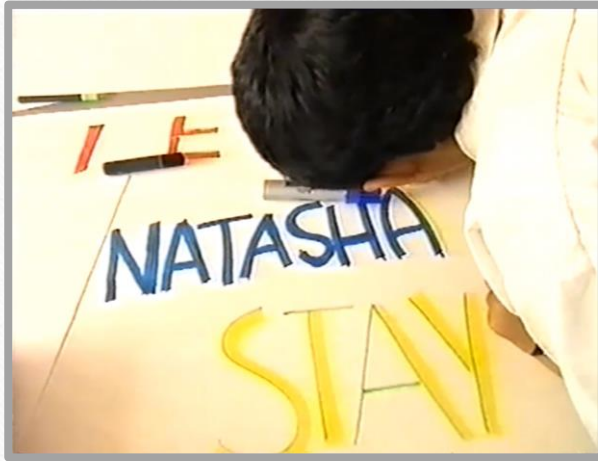
Shamima Patel, Natasha's friend, said:

"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.

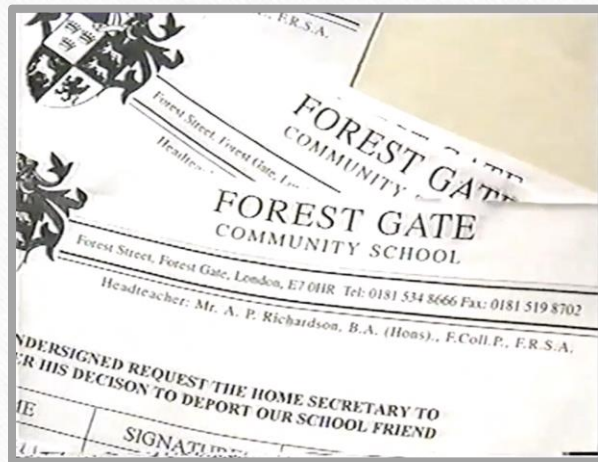
I think this country should welcome people of all cultures, particularly if they are escaping from danger at home...

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.)



Some things to think about (13)

- 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?

Some things to think about (14)

- 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 and Natasha

Here are some possible connections between all these stories and what we are going through with the coronavirus.

How many of these connect with how you feel?

Ruby and Barbara:

How it feels not to be at school with classmates.
Relations between children and teachers.
What is good and bad about one-to-one learning.
Feeling isolated.
Getting stronger in hard times.

Janie:

Handling fear.
Risking safety to give care.
Inequality.

Nasreen:

Fear, not feeling safe.
Resilience.
Family strength.

Forest Gate Year 7:

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

THINKING ABOUT OURSELVES

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 just by staying at home.

FINALLY

- 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...

Photos

SLIDES 4, 6, 7, 8: taken from www.nps.gov, www.amightygirl.com, www.biography.com, www.rarehistoricalphotos.com and stated as being in the public domain

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SLIDE 15: www.civilrightstrail.com

SLIDES 18, 19, 20: stills from *Barbara Henry, A civil rights crusader* on YouTube

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