SOFTWARE & TECH

The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795581868718893

Introduction: A Pivotal Story of Courage in a Child's World

Few moments in American history capture the raw intersection of childhood innocence and adult prejudice as powerfully as the integration of William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans in 1960. At the center of that storm stood a six-year-old girl named Ruby Bridges. Her story, immortalized in the classic children's book **The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles**, remains one of the most inspiring narratives of the civil rights movement. Originally published in 1995 and illustrated by George Ford (with later editions illustrated by Kadir Nelson), this book does more than recount a historical event—it offers a profound meditation on courage, forgiveness, and the quiet strength that can come from a child's faith. This article explores the book, its background, its major themes, and its enduring relevance in today's world.

The Historical Context: New Orleans, 1960

To fully appreciate **The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles**, one must first understand the volatile atmosphere into which Ruby stepped. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education*that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Yet compliance was slow and fiercely resisted, especially in the Deep South. By November 1960, a federal court ordered the desegregation of two elementary schools in New Orleans: William Frantz and McDonogh 19. Ruby Bridges was one of only six black students in the city to pass a rigorous test that allowed them to attend an all-white school. On November 14, 1960, escorted by four federal marshals, Ruby walked past a raging crowd of protestors shouting racial slurs and threats. She did this day after day, for an entire school year.

About the Book: A Portrait of Quiet Bravery

The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Colesis a children's picture book that tells this story with sensitivity and grace. Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist and writer who had developed a close relationship with Ruby during that tumultuous year, was uniquely positioned to write the narrative. Rather than focusing on the violence and hatred of the mob, Coles centers the story on Ruby's perspective—her prayers, her simple daily routines, and her remarkable ability to see the best in others even as she endured daily torment. The book's language is accessible and direct, making it a powerful tool for introducing young readers to complex themes of racism, resilience, and moral courage.

Robert Coles: The Author Behind the Story

Robert Coles was not simply a journalist who happened to witness these events; he was a prominent child psychiatrist who had studied children's responses to crisis. He volunteered to counsel Ruby Bridges during her first year at William Frantz, and from those sessions came a remarkable bond. His earlier work, including the

Children Of Crisis series, had already established his reputation for giving voice to children facing social upheaval. **The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles** was his first children's picture book, and it was praised for its careful handling of a heavy subject without losing its childlike wonder. The book's message is clear: even in the face of hatred, love and forgiveness can prevail.

Key Themes in the Book

Coles weaves several important themes throughout the pages of **The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles**. These themes make the book much more than a simple historical account; they provide a moral and emotional framework for readers of all ages.

Innocence Under Siege

One of the most poignant aspects of the narrative is Ruby's innocence. She does not fully comprehend the racist hatred directed at her. She tells Coles that she prayed for the people who shouted at her because they were "just scared." Her perspective challenges readers to see racism as a learned behavior, not an inherent trait. The book highlights how children can often display a kind of wisdom that adults have lost.

Forgiveness and Prayer

A recurring element in the story is Ruby's daily prayer. As she walked past the mob each day, she would pause to pray for them. This detail, which Coles learned from Ruby's mother, becomes the emotional center of the book. It teaches young readers that forgiveness is an act of strength, not weakness. The book does not preach religion but instead shows how faith gave Ruby a framework to process injustice without becoming bitter.

The Role of a Single Teacher

Barbara Henry was the only teacher willing to teach Ruby after every other teacher at William Frantz refused to do so. For that entire school year, Ruby and Mrs. Henry sat alone in a classroom, learning together. Coles gives this relationship significant attention, showing how one committed adult can change a child's life. The book illustrates that small acts of courage—like showing up to teach—are just as important as high-profile protests.

Summary of The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles

The book follows Ruby Bridges from her early childhood in Tylertown, Mississippi, to her family's move to New Orleans. It describes how she passed a test to attend a better school, unaware of the controversy surrounding her admission. The narrative describes the first day of school: the marshals arriving at her home, the mob shouting and throwing things, the small girl dressed in her white dress and carrying her lunch box. Inside the school, she meets Mrs. Henry, and together they create a classroom of two. The mob continues outside for months, and some white parents pull their children out permanently. Yet Ruby continues to attend, and she learns to read and write. Coles uses simple language to describe the emotional toll—Ruby's sleepless nights, her moments of fear, and her gradual understanding of what was happening. The story closes with the integration eventually succeeding and Ruby reflecting on her experience without anger. It is a story of victory through endurance.

The Illustrations: Bringing the Story to Life

The visual component of **The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles** deserves special attention. The original illustrations by George Ford were done in a warm, painterly style that captured the emotional weight of the story without being graphic. Later editions featured paintings by Kadir Nelson, whose rich, luminous artwork added even greater depth. Nelson's illustrations portray Ruby as a small but determined figure against a hostile backdrop, her white dress often the brightest element in the frame. The imagery helps children grasp the tension and the heroism without exposing them to disturbing photographs of actual mobs. The book's illustrations serve as a bridge between text and emotion, making history feel immediate and personal.

Impact and Educational Use

Since its publication, **The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles**has become a staple in elementary classrooms across the United States. It is frequently used as a read-aloud during Black History Month, during lessons on civil rights, and in social-emotional learning curricula. Teachers praise the book for its ability to spark conversations about fairness, courage, and empathy. Many students are moved by Ruby's story and find parallels in their own experiences with bullying or exclusion. The book has won several awards, including the Jane Addams Children's Book Award for promoting peace and social justice. In 2020, to mark the 60th anniversary of Ruby's first day at William Frantz, the book experienced a resurgence in popularity, as new generations of parents sought to teach children about the history of desegregation.

Ruby Bridges Today: An Enduring Legacy

Ruby Bridges herself has become a lifelong activist and speaker. She established the Ruby Bridges Foundation to promote tolerance and unity. She often references the book when speaking to young audiences, noting that Robert Coles captured her childhood experience accurately. In 2021, Ruby Bridges published her own picture book, *Ruby Bridges: A Talk with My Teacher*, but **The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles**remains the definitive account for elementary readers. The book's longevity is a testament to its universal message: that courage can come from anyone, regardless of age or size, and that love is stronger than hate.

Why This Book Matters Today

In an era of renewed debates about race, education, and social justice, **The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Coles**offers a timeless lesson. It does not shy away from the ugliness of racism, but it also does not leave readers in despair. Instead, it provides a model for resilience and forgiveness that is desperately needed. The book demonstrates that history is not just a series of dates and statutes but a collection of real human stories—stories that can teach empathy. For parents and educators looking to discuss difficult topics with children, this book is an essential resource. It acknowledges the pain of the past while offering a hopeful path forward.

Conclusion: A Must-Read for All Ages

The Story Of Ruby Bridges By Robert Colesis more than a children's book; it is a document of moral clarity. Its sparse, gentle text and powerful illustrations combine to create an experience that stays with readers for a lifetime. By focusing on Ruby's inner strength and her ability to forgive, Coles elevates the narrative from a simple history lesson to a meditation on what it means to be human. Whether you are a parent, a teacher, or simply someone looking for a story of hope, this book deserves a place on your shelf. Ruby Bridges walked into a school and changed the world. Robert Coles helped tell that story so that every generation can remember how courage begins with a single, small step.

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