

Close Reading of The Problem We All Live With

Overview:

Students view Norman Rockwell's 1964 illustration, *The Problem We All Live With*. Students learn about Ruby Bridges and her story. They look closely at the details within the painting, and after sharing their observations, make inferences about the painting, including the artist's purpose and message.

Enduring Understandings/ Essential Questions:

1. People have not always been treated equally.
2. People of all ages, races, and backgrounds help to bring about change in our country.
3. We can learn about the history of our country not only from people who study the events that took place in the past, but also from people who participated in these events.
 - Why are some people treated differently than others?
 - In what ways can people help to bring about change?
 - How do we learn about events that happened in the past?
 - Are all accounts of a historical event the same?

Objectives:

- Students will closely examine Norman Rockwell's painting, *The Problem We All Live With*.
- Students will make inferences related to the details and the title.
- Students will reflect on how some people were treated differently in the past.
- Students will participate in discussions about the illustration.

Background:

In the 1960s, particularly following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and the intensification of American military activity in Vietnam, long-held beliefs and cultural norms shifted dramatically in America. Attitudes about race, sexuality, and gender roles were challenged as diverse social groups united to fight for civil rights and protest the Vietnam War.

After resigning his forty-seven year tenure with *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1963, Norman Rockwell embraced the challenge of creating imagery that addressed the nation's pressing concerns in a pared down, reportorial style. *The Problem We All Live With* for *Look* magazine is based upon an actual event, when six-year-old Ruby Bridges was escorted by U.S. Marshals to her first day at an all-white school. While the neutral title of the image invites interpretation, Rockwell's depiction of the vulnerable but dignified girl clearly condemns the actions of those who protest her presence and the issue of desegregation. Letters to the editor were a mix of praise and criticism, but that did not stop Rockwell from pursuing his course.

In September 1960, years after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling stating that separate was not equal in America's public schools, four African American students were selected to begin the integration process in the public elementary schools of New Orleans, Louisiana. One six year old, Ruby Bridges, was assigned to a first grade class at the William Franz Elementary School. The integration of the schools was not welcome by many white Americans in the south, and parents refused to have Ruby in their child's class. As a result, she was the only student in the first grade class taught by Boston native, Barbara Henry. For many months, angry parents protested her attendance at the school.

Norman Rockwell's painting, *The Problem We All Live With*, shows a young African American girl symbolizing Ruby Bridges being escorted to school by U.S. Marshals despite the barrage of racial slurs and threats. The young girl who posed is Lynda Gunn, Rockwell's neighbor in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he lived for his last twenty-five years.

GRADE
3-5

THEME
Four Freedoms, Civil Rights

LENGTH
This activity will take one period, 30 to 45 minutes.

DISCIPLINE
Social Studies; Language Arts:
Reading

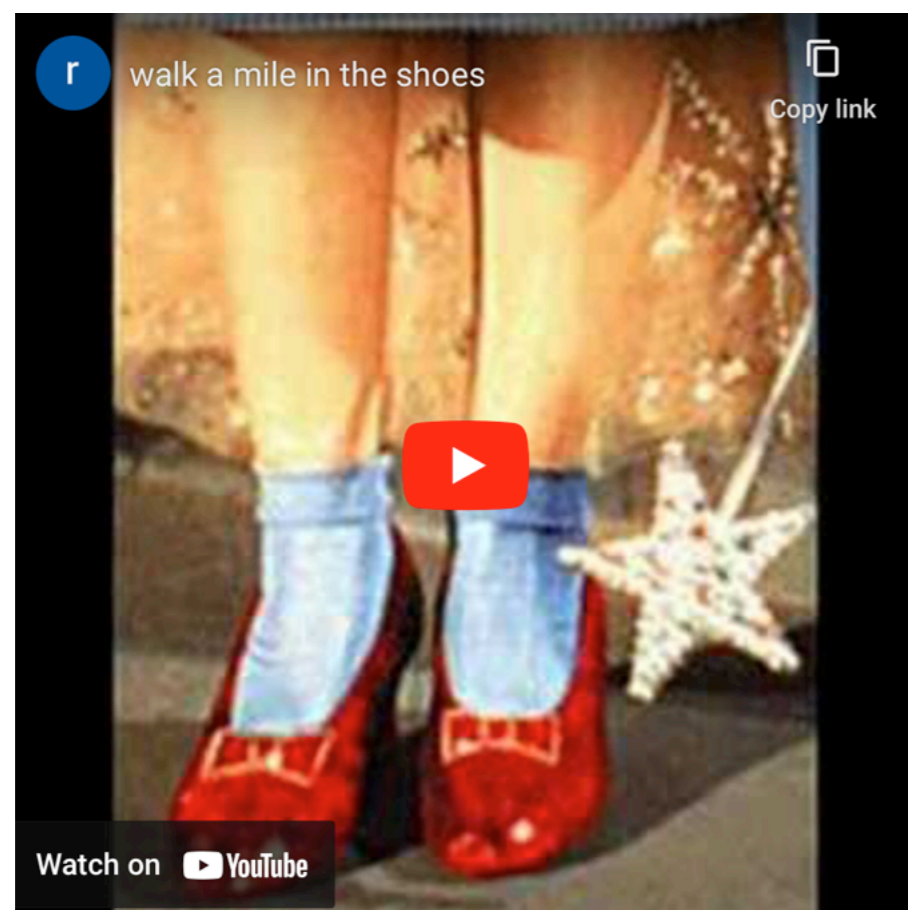
VOCABULARY Discrimination;
Segregation; Equal; Fair; Civil
Rights Movement; Jim Crow laws;
Rosa Parks; Martin Luther King, Jr.

Materials:

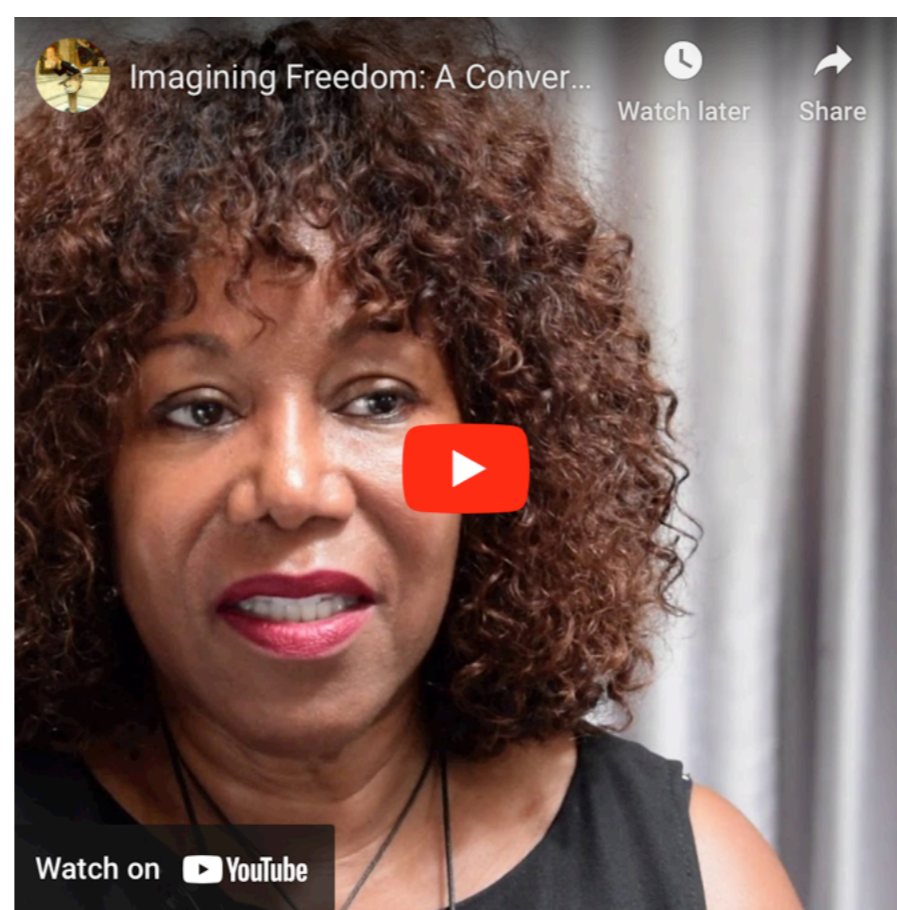
Multimedia Resources:



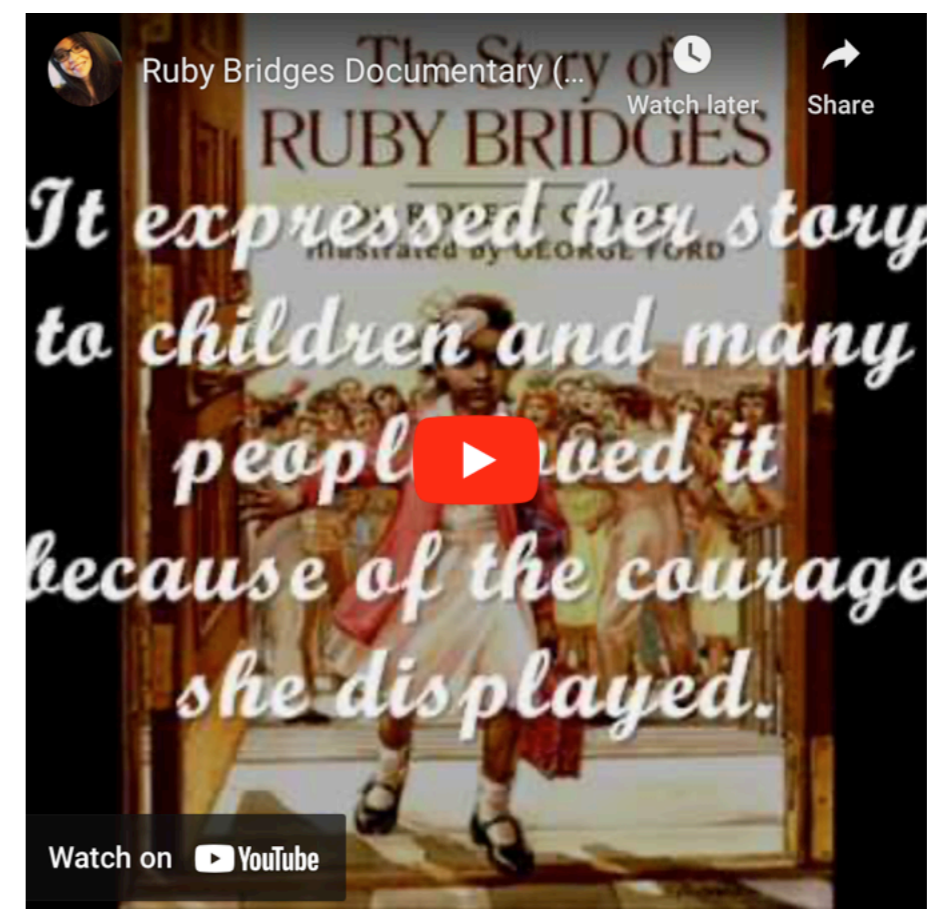
Norman Rockwell (1894-1978)
The Problem We All Live With, 1963
Illustration for *Look*, January 14, 1964, pp. 22-23
Oil on canvas
Norman Rockwell Museum Collection, NRM.1975.01



Ruby's Shoes by Lori McKenna



A Conversation with Ruby Bridges Hall
Norman Rockwell Museum



Documentary about Ruby Bridges

Civil Rights – Reading Guide

Chart paper with T-Chart labeled "What I See"/"What I think" (can infer)

Marker

[Jim Crow Laws](#) (These laws were enforced until 1965.)

– Ruby's Shoes by Lori McKenna - Lyrics (See attached)



■ Ruby's Shoes by Lori McKenna - Lyrics

Ruby's shoes would take her
A mile or so to school every day
Where the white people hated her
They'd scream and hold signs and tell her to go away

But Ruby's will was stronger
Than the bigots with the signs could ever know
She stopped every morning on the corner
And prayed that someday the pain would go

And she'd stop and she'd pray
That all the hatred would go away
She was only six years old but she knew
Walk a mile in Ruby's shoes

Ruby sat alone in the classroom
She never dreamed the other children wouldn't come
They hated her for the color of her skin
Well color is such an amazing illusion

She'd stop and she'd pray
That all the hatred would go away
She was only six years old but she knew
Walk a mile in Ruby's shoes

Now Ruby knew about Dorothy
And the ruby shoes that she wore
She wondered about Oz sometimes
Well, well no other child ever walked her shoes before

Activities:

- Display Norman Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With*.
- Ask students to look carefully at the illustration. Give them a few minutes to do this.
- **Turn and Talk:** When you feel enough time has passed, invite students to turn to a person sitting beside them. Ask them to share with each other some of the things they notice in the illustration. As they are sharing, listen in to their conversations.
- Have partners share some of the things they noticed in the picture. Record their responses on chart paper. Elicit observations students made during partner talk which will support the whole class conversation.
- **Turn and Talk:** When everyone has an opportunity to share, ask students to turn to face their partners again. Tell them to discuss their thoughts based on the new information which came up in conversation.
- Have partners share their thoughts. Record responses on the T-chart. Elicit details from the picture to support their thinking. Some questions you might ask are why don't we see the guard's heads? Who is the main character? Why might Rockwell have placed Ruby tilting forward and closer to the guards in front of her?
- New observations may be contributed as they look closer and are thinking about the details. Add them to the appropriate column on T-Chart.
- If you have not already done so, share the origin of the painting and its name. Have students reflect on the message that Rockwell would want them to understand and what the message means to them.
- **Additional Materials:** The media resources include documentary and the full movie telling the story of Ruby Bridges' life. In addition, Lori McKenna's song, "Ruby's Shoes" is included. The link for the lyrics of the song are also available.

Assessment:

- Did everyone participate?
- Was everyone respectful during the discussions?
- Are students supporting their thoughts and ideas with details seen in the illustration?
- Do student responses to the illustration reflect an understanding of how society is different today from in the past? How it is the same?

Standards:

This curriculum meets the standards listed below. Look for more details on these standards please visit: [ELA](#) and [Math Standards](#), [Social Studies Standards](#), [Visual Arts Standards](#).

– Reading: Literature

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.7

Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.7

Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1

Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.7

Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

– Speaking & Listening

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.2

Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.3

Ask and answer questions about information from a speaker, offering appropriate elaboration and detail.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.6

Speak in complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification. (See grade 3 Language standards 1 and 3 [[link to="CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3"](#)]here[/link] for specific expectations.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.2

Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.3

Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.6

Differentiate between contexts that call for formal English (e.g., presenting ideas) and situations where informal discourse is appropriate (e.g., small-group discussion); use formal English when appropriate to task and situation. (See grade 4 Language standards 1 [[link to="CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.4"](#)]here[/link] for specific expectations.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.2 Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.3

Summarize the points a speaker makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate to task and situation. (See grade 5 Language standards 1 and 3 [[link to="CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5"](#)]here[/link] for specific expectations.)

– Applied Standards

D1.1.3-5

Explain why compelling questions are important to others (e.g., peers, adults).

D1.2.3-5.

Identify disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question that are open to different interpretations.

D1.3.3-5.

Identify the disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a supporting question that are open to interpretation.

D1.4.3-5.

Explain how supporting questions help answer compelling questions in an inquiry.

D1.5.3-5. Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration the different opinions people have about how to answer the question.

D2.Civ.10.3-5.

Identify the beliefs, experiences, perspectives, and values that underlie their own and others' points of view about civic issues.

D2.Civ.14.3-5.

Illustrate historical and contemporary means of changing society.

D2.Civ.7.3-5.

Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school settings.

D2.Civ.9.3-5.

Use deliberative processes when making decisions or reaching judgements as a group.

D3.1.3-5.

Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, structure, and context, to guide the selection.

D3.2.3-5.

Use distinctions among fact and opinion to determine the credibility of multiple sources.

D3.3.3-5.

Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources in response to compelling questions.

D3.4.3-5.

Use evidence to develop claims in response to compelling questions.

D4.2.3-5.

Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with relevant information and data.

D4.5.3-5.

Critique explanations.