

# Close Reading of The Problem We All Live With

## Overview:

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

*These activities can be completed in one 30 minute session.*

## Enduring Understandings/ Essential Questions:

1. People have not always been treated equally in the United States according to the law.
2. People of all ages, races, cultures, and walks of life have helped to bring about change in our country.
3. We can learn about the history of our country not only from documents and historians – people who study the events that took place in the past – but also from the first-hand accounts of people who participated in these events. We can also learn from illustrations.
  - 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?
  - Why are all accounts of a historical event not the same?

## Objectives:

- Students will close read the illustration, *The Problem We All Live With*, by Norman Rockwell, sharing the observations about the painting.
- Students will make inferences supported by the details in the illustration.
- Students will think about how people treat each other today, and how they have treated each other in the past.
- Students will discuss the purpose and message of this painting.
- Students will be introduced to the Civil Rights Movement.
- Students will generate questions to explore the contributions that Ruby Bridges Hall has made to the Civil Rights Movement.

## 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. Marshalls 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

k-2

### THEME

The Problem We All Live With; Civil Rights; Ruby Bridges

### LENGTH

These activities can be completed in one 30 minute session.

### DISCIPLINE

Social Studies; Language Arts: Reading; Language Arts: Speaking and Listening

### VOCABULARY

Discrimination; Segregation; Equal Rights; Race; Protesters; Fairness

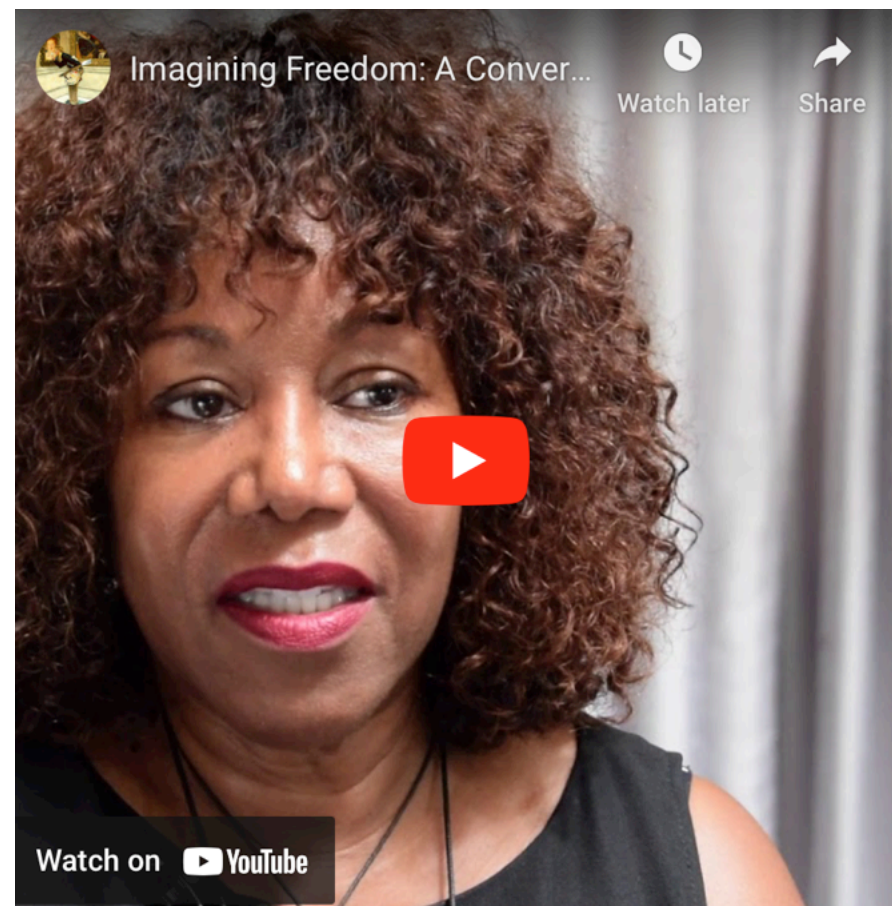


# Materials:

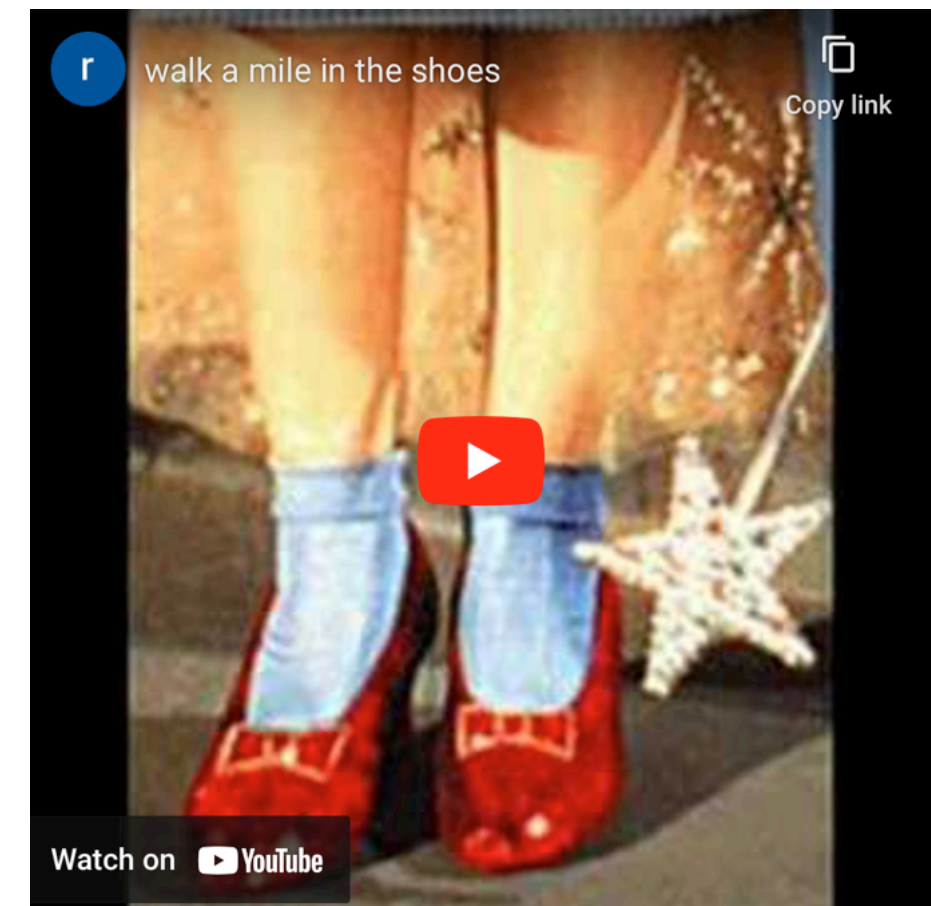
## Multimedia Resources:



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



A Conversation with Ruby Bridges Hall  
Norman Rockwell Museum



Ruby's Shoes by Lori McKenna

## Classroom Supplies

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

## Activities:

- Display the illustration of *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, have students 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 what was heard during partner talk that are not shared or share them for the students)
- New observations may be contributed as they look more closely 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 purpose of Rockwell's illustration, what he would want them to understand, and what the message means to them.
- Listen to the song, *Ruby's Shoes*, by [Lori McKenna](#), which reflects upon Ruby Bridges' experience. Invite children to learn the song and sing along.
- View images of two sculptures inspired by Ruby Bridges, *Remember Them* by Mario Chiado, in Oakland, CA; and another at the site of her former elementary school in New Orleans, now known as Akili Academy.
- The following books about Ruby Bridges are appropriate for young students:
  - [Ruby Bridges \(A Rookie biography by Scholastic\) by Simone T. Ribke](#)
- The following two books are in follow-up activities:
  - [Ruby Bridges Goes to School By Ruby Bridges](#)
  - [The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles](#)

## Assessment:

- Did everyone participate?
- Are students basing their thinking on the details?
- Did the students' contributions during the discussion reflect an understanding of civic virtues? Democratic principles?
- Are the students generating reasonable questions about Ruby Bridges?







## ■ 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

# 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.1.1

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.1

Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.1

With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

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## Speaking & Listening

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.1

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.2

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.3

Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather additional information or clarify something that is not understood.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.6

Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation. (See grade 1 Language standards 1 and 3 [[link to="CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.1" here](#)] for specific expectations.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.2

Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.3

Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.6

Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification. (See grade 2 Language standards 1 and 3 [[link to="CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.2" here](#)] for specific expectations.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.1

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.2

Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.3

Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.6

Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

## Applied Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.1

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.2.1

Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.K.1

With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

D1.3.K-2.

Identify facts and concepts associated with a supporting question.

D1.4.K-2.

Make connections between supporting questions and compelling questions.

D1.5.K-2.

Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions.

D2.Civ.1.K-2.

Describe roles and responsibilities of people in authority.

D2.Civ.10.K-2.

Compare their own point of view with others' perspectives.

D2.Civ.7.K-2.

Apply civic virtues when participation in school settings.

D2.Civ.8.K-2.

Describe democratic principles such as equality, fairness, and respect for legitimate authority and rules.

D2.Civ.9.K-2.

Follow agreed upon rules for discussions when responding attentively to others when addressing ideas and making decisions as a group.

D2.His.2.K-2.

Compare life in the past to life today.

D2.His.3.K-2.

Generate questions about individuals and groups who have shaped a significant historical change.

D3.1.K-2.

Gather relevant information from one or two sources while using the origin and structure to guide the selection.

D3.2.K-2.

Evaluate a source by distinguishing between fact and opinion.

D4.2.K-2.

Construct explanations using correct sequence and relevant information.

D4.5.K-2.

Ask and answer questions about explanations.