

Lesson 2

Service Pioneers

Social Studies/History • Grades 3–5

CONTRIBUTOR TO
NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE



Teacher Instructions

Goals: Learn how civil rights pioneer Ruby Bridges and Congressman John Lewis helped to improve their communities

Time Required: 40 minutes, plus an additional 30 to 60 minutes for a small service project

Materials: [Legacy of Service](#) video and [Ruby Bridges' Story](#) video

Getting Started:

1. Ask: *What do you think makes someone a great person?* Moderate a short, lively discussion about what makes a person great. **Ask:** *Do you think Dr. King would have included words like fame or power in his definition of greatness? Why or why not? Do you agree or disagree?*

2. Explain that Dr. King felt being of service to others made someone great. He valued qualities like bravery, selflessness, and caring. Encourage students to deepen their understanding of service by listening to how Ruby Bridges and John Lewis turned personal challenges into opportunities to serve and improve their communities. Watch interviews with [Ruby Bridges](#) and [John Lewis](#).

3. Discuss these questions after watching the videos. ([Click here](#) for more teaching resources about Ruby Bridges and John Lewis.)

a. Explain that when Ruby Bridges went to school as a little girl in 1960, she was one of the first students to integrate her local school. **Ask:** *What does this mean?* Discuss how there was a time when children of different skin colors couldn't attend the same schools. When the laws changed, it was children like Ruby who had to be brave enough to walk through the school doors each morning to make the change a reality.

b. Ask: *How do you think Ruby felt each day when she had to walk past mobs of people just to get inside her school building? Do you think she ever felt*

scared? Do you think she ever didn't want to go to school? Discuss how sometimes serving our community and making the world a better place means not giving up on what we believe in.

c. Ask: *When other people were making Ruby feel unwelcome at school, was there someone who did make her feel welcome? What did Ruby learn from this person?* Discuss Dr. King's message of not judging others by the color of their skin.

d. Ask: *When John Lewis wanted to attend a local college, why wasn't he allowed? Did he feel this was fair?* Discuss how realizing something doesn't seem fair can inspire people to take action and work to make change.

e. Ask: *When John Lewis met Dr. King, how did he feel? Is there a person in your life who inspires you to be a better person?* Invite students to talk about people in their lives who are inspirational. These people could include parents, teachers, community leaders, and even other kids.

f. Ask: *How did Ruby Bridges's and John Lewis's experiences help their communities?*

Taking Action:

4. Explain that all communities can use a little help. **Ask:** *Do you think students at our school feel welcome and happy when they come through the doors each morning? Do you think everyone feels included and valuable? How could we make our school an even better place?*

5. Brainstorm a list of ideas for ways students could make their school or local neighborhood a better place for everyone.

6. Select a project idea from your brainstorming session that can be completed in 30 to 60 minutes.

7. Implement your idea!

Wrapping Up:

8. Share and celebrate your service project by interviewing each student about the experience. Create a short video to show to your school community or write up an article to submit for publication in a local paper.

Quick Project Ideas!

- Clean up the playground
- Put on a personal safety skit to teach younger kids about fire prevention, stranger awareness, or bullying
- Paint over graffiti
- Volunteer for a PTO/PTA event as a student representative
- Donate books from home to the school library
- Volunteer to help younger students learn to count or read
- Ask an AmeriCorps member or someone involved in service to share his or her experience with the class

