

Through a Child's Eyes: Two Little Girls and The Civil Rights Movement

AHTC Book Discussion – May 6, 2010

Books:

- *A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School* by Carlotta Walls LaNier with Lisa Frazier Page
- *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges
- *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles
- *Freedom Summer* by Deborah Wiles

- 1) The stories of Ruby Bridges and the Little Rock Nine are two of the most well known school integration stories from the Civil Rights Movement. What new information stood out to you as you read the autobiographies of Ruby Bridges and Carlotta Walls LaNier?
- 2) On page 16 of *A Mighty Long Way*, and again on page 40, Carlotta Walls LaNier talks about “playing by the rules” and staying in her “so-called place.” What were the rules? What are some examples of how Carlotta and her family played by and later challenged the rules?
- 3) In 1954 the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was made, and in 1955, the Supreme Court delegated the task of carrying out school desegregation to district courts with orders that desegregation occur "with all deliberate speed." As a student, what expectations did Carlotta have following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision? (She describes finding out about the decision on page 32 of *A Mighty Long Way*.)
- 4) Weaving all four books together is the idea that **it takes more than new laws to change people's hearts**. In what ways did adults in powerful positions stand in the way of smooth integration for the children in each book? In what ways did some adults help work to make integration smooth for Ruby Bridges and the Little Rock Nine?
- 5) Discuss the role the families of Carlotta Walls and Ruby Bridges played in the decisions the girls made during their integration experiences. How were their families affected when the girls integrated into their new schools?
- 6) In the preface to *Through My Eyes*, Ruby Bridges states, “Young children never know about racism at the start. It's we adults who teach it.” What is your reaction to this statement? What experiences from the lives of the children in these stories support Ruby's statement?
- 7) On page 120 of her book, Carlotta Walls LaNier begins to talk about the different categories students at Central fell into: the tormentors, the sympathetic, the silent, and the openly kind. What examples of these groups do we also see in *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, *Through My Eyes* and *Freedom Summer*? In what places and situations do we see these groups today?
- 8) In what ways were the integration experiences of Carlotta and Ruby different due to their ages? In what ways were their experiences the same in spite of their different ages?
- 9) What do you currently teach about integration? How can you incorporate one or more of these books in future lessons? How might you use the information gained from *A Mighty Long Way* with your classes in conjunction with one or more of the children's books?
- 10) Discuss the following statements:
 - On page 260 of *A Mighty Long Way*, Carlotta Walls LaNier writes, “It distresses me to see that the nation's public schools have largely become resegregated. But even more, I'm disturbed by the low regard for education in many of these schools.”
 - On pages 57-58 of *Through My Eyes*, Ruby Bridges writes, “As is true of most inner-city schools, there's never enough funding to keep William Frantz up to current standards... The kids are being segregated all over again.”