One tiny six-year-old carried the burden of desegregation on November 14, 1960, in New Orleans. Ruby Bridges became the symbol of hope for some and the symbol of hate for others. That day she began an experience that would not only change her life but the lives of future generations. The adult Ruby Bridges has told her story of that eventful time in her book, Through My Eyes.

My mother took special care getting me ready for school. When somebody knocked on our door, my mother expected to see people from the NAACP. Instead, she saw four serious-looking white men, dressed in suits and wearing armbands. They were U.S. federal marshals. They had come to drive us to school and stay with us all day. I later learned that they were carrying guns.
She described the barricades and the shouting people outside the school. She described her walk toward the building. “As we walked through the crowd, I didn’t see any faces. I guess that’s because I wasn’t very tall and I was surrounded by the marshals. People yelled and threw things.” Her experience is the subject of a famous Norman Rockwell painting.

This was the first day in a strange school year for Ruby. Because the white children would not attend, she spent every day alone with her teacher. As an adult, she described the kind and caring teacher who read with her and played games with her. The teacher, Mrs. Barbara Henry, later described Ruby as a hero to other children who face difficulty because of her courage as she faced such hostility. Ruby Bridges now seeks to help struggling children through her foundation for inner city schools.
Focus on Skills

Interviewing

Defining the Skill

Throughout your study of Louisiana history, you may have been asked to interview people in order to collect specific information on a given topic. The suggestions that follow should be used as a guide when you are conducting an interview. The guidelines are intended to make the interview go more smoothly as well as to ensure that you get the information you want or need.

1. Before you schedule the interview, call or visit the person to get permission for the interview. At that time, review the purpose of the interview and describe what you would like the interviewee to be prepared to discuss with you.

2. Plan and write out the questions you will ask. You might want to start with who, what, and where questions.

3. Make careful notes or tape-record the person’s answers. If you plan to use a tape recorder, be sure to get permission from the person to tape the interview.

4. At the end of the interview, thank the person for her or his time.

5. Soon after the interview, go over your notes or listen to the tape recording. If you did not tape the session, your notes may help you to remember other information that you did not write down.

Try This!

Use the questions that follow to interview a person in your community about changes he or she has observed in your community over the last thirty years. Share your findings with the class.

1. Who is being interviewed?
2. How old is the person? How long has he or she lived in the community?
3. What changes have occurred in the community since he or she has lived there?
4. What changes does the person think have been the most significant?
5. What change has most directly affected the person?
6. What changes would the person predict for the future?

It’s Your Turn!

Identify someone from the chapter that you would like to interview. Write a series of questions you would ask the person if you had the opportunity.
Segregation

As you read, look for:
- early civil rights protests in Louisiana,
- the civil rights movement in Louisiana, and

Whites in Louisiana had long operated in a system that benefited them and deprived blacks. Most white southerners did not even consider this unjust. Segregation was just the unquestioned way of life. The white community and the black community lived parallel lives that crossed only under rigid, usually unspoken, rules.

Figure 30 Timeline: 1960–1985

1960 Jimmie Davis became governor; New Orleans school crisis
1964 John McKeithen became governor
1967 Thurgood Marshall became first black U.S. Supreme Court justice
1968 McKeithen became first governor to be re-elected
1969 Voting Rights Act
1968 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., assassinated
1970
1972 Watergate scandal
1974 Edwin Edwards became governor
1974 Voters ratified new constitution
1975 Superdome opened
1976 Louisiana celebrated Bicentennial
1976 Ernest Morial elected mayor of New Orleans
1977
1980
1985
1963 Civil rights march on Washington; President Kennedy assassinated; Lyndon B. Johnson became president
1965 Voting Rights Act
1974 President Nixon resigned; Gerald Ford became president
1981 Sandra Day O’Connor became first woman U.S. Supreme Court justice