



**ROBERT F.  
KENNEDY  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS**

# **SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER**

**HUMAN RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS WHO  
ARE CHANGING  
OUR WORLD**

**RUBY BRIDGES AND AARON MAYBIN: CIVIL  
RIGHTS AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION**



# AARON MAYBIN

(HE/HIM/HIS)

Football superstar, artist, and activist Aaron Maybin was born in Baltimore, Md., in 1988. He competed as an All-American linebacker at Penn State University and then played five seasons for the NFL. In 2014, he left football to pursue activism through art.

Maybin's journey from football to philanthropy has been told in an HBO documentary and widely covered by the media. His paintings, photographs, and poetry, drawn from his experiences as a pro athlete and a young Black man in America, have been exhibited in the United States and internationally. He has used his public platform to push for racial and economic equality, arts education, and recreational youth programming in underprivileged communities across the country. In 2009, Maybin established Project Mayhem to provide personal and economic aid to help at-risk youth excel. Through Project Mayhem and in his work as a teacher, Maybin has brought art workshops and innovative programs into many schools in the Baltimore area.

Aaron Maybin advocates for public policy that will protect art programs in schools and for economic opportunities that will help those who need it most.



Ruby Bridges was born on September 8, 1954, the year that also marked *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark ruling that ended racial segregation in public schools. Southern states continued to resist integration, and in 1959, Bridges attended a segregated New Orleans kindergarten. When a federal court ordered Louisiana to desegregate, the school district created entrance exams for African American students to see whether they could compete academically. Ruby passed the test.

Ruby Bridges and her mother were escorted by federal marshals to William Frantz Elementary School every day that year. Crowds screamed vicious slurs, and she spent her first day in the principal's office due to the chaos. She ate lunch alone, but she never missed a day of school. In 1964, artist Norman Rockwell celebrated Bridges' courage with the iconic painting "The Problem We All Live With."

Bridges graduated from a desegregated high school, became a travel agent, married, and had four sons. In 1999, she established the Ruby Bridges Foundation to promote tolerance and create change. A statue of Bridges in the courtyard of William Frantz Elementary honors the young girl who opened a door for generations of students to enter.

# RUBY BRIDGES

(SHE/HER/HERS)

# CIVIL RIGHTS AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Robert F. Kennedy’s work to advance the civil rights of African Americans was evident in a number of areas, perhaps no more so than in education. As U.S. attorney general, he demonstrated his commitment to civil rights during a 1961 speech at the University of Georgia School of Law: “We will not stand by or be aloof. We will move. I happen to believe that the 1954 [Supreme Court school desegregation] decision was right. But my belief does not matter. It is the law. Some of you may believe the decision was wrong. That does not matter. It is the law.”

In September 1962, Kennedy sent U.S. marshals and troops to Oxford, Miss., to enforce a federal court order admitting James Meredith, an African American, to the University of Mississippi, which had previously been a bastion of segregation. The riot that had followed Meredith’s registration at Ole Miss left two dead and hundreds injured.

In June 1963, he sent Deputy Attorney General Nicholas de Belleville Katzenbach to escort Vivian Malone and James A. Hood as they enrolled in the University of Alabama, where Governor George Wallace attempted to block their attendance. That night, President John F. Kennedy delivered a speech calling civil rights “a moral issue,” a phrase that his brother had urged him to use.

In this lesson plan, we explore Robert F. Kennedy’s legacy of fighting for quality education for all. As we build a bridge between the past and the present and reflect on the work of the advocates of then and now, we should keep one question in mind: What do we do next?

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Why is education important?
- How are education, politics, and the criminal justice system related?
- Can quality education for all help overcome economic inequality?

## OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Know who Ruby Bridges is and understand why she is a human rights defender.
- Understand the importance of education.
- Identify barriers to education.
- Compare and contrast the educational experiences of Ruby Bridges and Aaron Maybin.

## CONCEPTS

- Segregation
- Education
- Supreme Court
- Separate but equal
- Underprivileged
- Children’s rights

## VOCABULARY

- Desegregation
- U.S. marshals
- Riot
- All-white school
- Unequal
- Inequality
- Integration

## GETTING FROM THEN TO NOW: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND EDUCATION

### 1965

Elementary and Secondary Education Act  
Provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers of students from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.

[Learn more](#)

### 1971

Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education  
A Supreme Court case that ruled that busing programs to facilitate integration were constitutional.

[Learn more](#)

### 1996

Sheff v. O’Neill  
This Connecticut Supreme Court ruling addresses unequal access to resources.

[Learn more](#)

# STUDENT ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY 1 UNDERSTANDING THE DEFENDER

- Have your students read and analyze a primary source and then answer the following questions:
    - Identify three aspects of Ruby Bridges and Aaron Maybin’s lives that shaped their work as defenders.
    - What about Bridges and Maybin, the people, stood out to you?
    - Who were some of the people who influenced Bridges and Maybin?
    - How did their individual journeys from childhood to leading the movement to advance the right and access to a quality education inspire their communities?
    - What was the primary problem Bridges and Maybin sought to address?
    - What were some of the specific issues they faced?
    - What were their desired outcomes?
    - What tactics did they use to seek resolution?
    - What were the political contexts in which they were working? Social contexts?
    - How does their work intersect with the work of Robert F. Kennedy?
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## ACTIVITY 2 PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

- Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the timeline events. Have students research the events and address these questions:
  - Who were the key players in the event?
  - What was the political/social/economic context in which this event took place?

- How does the THEN/NOW defender fit into this event?
  - How does the THEN/NOW defender’s work intersect with RFK’s?
  - How did this event/piece of legislation help or hinder progress in this area? What was the aftermath of this event?
  - How has this issue evolved over time?
  - Have students present their findings to the rest of the class, then moderate a discussion about how the events fit together to create a narrative about this issue. Use the following questions as a guide:
    - How do these events fit together?
    - Did one event affect or lay the groundwork for another?
    - What common threads or themes are present in each of these events/pieces of legislation?
    - How has this issue evolved over time?
    - What needs to happen now to create change in this area?
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## ACTIVITY 3 COMPARE AND CONTRAST

- Building on what students have learned about the two defenders and the context, have them create a visual representation of one of the following:
  - Analyze the similarities and differences in the tactics and approaches of these two defenders. Why do you think these similarities/differences exist?
  - How would Ruby Bridges react to the work of Aaron Maybin defender? What would they say about the work that is being done surrounding this issue? If the defender did not work directly with RFK, how do you think RFK would react to their work and activism?

- How did THEN's activism pave the way for NOW?
- What are the similarities and differences between the political/social/economic contexts in which they worked/are working?
- Is this issue still a problem, and if so, why?
- Which aspects of RFK's legacy are present in the work of each of these defenders?

## ACTIVITY 4 CONTINUING THE LEGACY

- This activity is designed to help students think about how they can contribute to efforts to increase and protect access to education. The key to becoming effective human rights defenders is turning what we find interesting, what resonates with us, and what we consider to be our assets into our own personal vehicles for change.
  - Have students make a list of their skills, passions, or hobbies.
  - For each activity or skill on their list, have them create a plan of action that uses that activity or skill to help bring about change in the area of education.
  - Ask each student to choose and complete one of those plans.



# INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

The **UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS** was adopted in 1948 following World War II and stems from the Charter of the United Nations. This document articulates the rights and freedoms to which every person is entitled. Although not legally binding, it is the framework for both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

This particular lesson plan relates directly to:

- **ARTICLE 26:** Right to education

*For more information, visit the United Nations website: [www.un.org/en/udhrbook/](http://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/).*

The **INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS** (ICCPR) is an international human rights treaty that gives legal force to the themes of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Since this treaty came into force in 1976, it has protected issues related to the freedom to protest and the right to political participation.

*For more information, visit the UN website: [www.treaties.un.org/](http://www.treaties.un.org/).*

The **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS** (SDGs) are a group of 17 goals set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 that aim to improve social and economic development in a variety of areas, including poverty, education, gender equality, and the environment. The SDGs offer a global plan to combat systemic problems and provide indicators to help track their successes.

The SDGs relevant to this lesson plan are:

- **GOAL 1:** No poverty
- **GOAL 4:** Quality education
- **GOAL 8:** Decent work and economic growth
- **GOAL 10:** Reduced inequalities
- **GOAL 11:** Sustainable cities and communities
- **GOAL 12:** Responsible consumption and production

*For more information, visit the United Nations website: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>.*

## BECOMING A DEFENDER

Below are suggested activities that show students how they can become human rights defenders in their classroom and beyond

- What are key issues affecting civil rights and the right to education today?
- Research issues such as access, allocation of resources, quality of resources, scope of courses and extracurricular activities available, and safety.