

Civil Rights on a City Bus

by ReadWorks



On the first of December 1955, the African American seamstress Rosa Parks helped change the course of history on a city bus. Rosa boarded the bus after a day's work at a Montgomery, Alabama, department store. She settled towards the middle, past the first several rows, which at that time were reserved for white people. After making a few stops, the bus became full. Then a white man boarded, but there was nowhere for him to sit. The driver ordered Rosa and the rest of the black passengers in her row to stand at the back of the bus and let the white man sit. In an act of defiance that would help intensify the American Civil Rights Movement, Rosa refused to give up her spot.

For violating the laws of segregation, referred to as the "Jim Crow laws" (which were meant to keep white people and black people separate), Rosa was arrested and fined. Her refusal to move was a quiet and simple action, but she took an enormous risk that evening. She also

became a hero and an inspiration to people all over the nation who were fighting for racial equality, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a young minister who would soon become a major civil rights leader. In response to Rosa's arrest, blacks in the city of Montgomery boycotted the public bus system for more than a year. Like her, they had had enough of being treated like second-class citizens. The Monday after Rosa's arrest, most black commuters walked to where they needed to go—some traveling more than 20 miles.

In her autobiography, *Rosa Parks: My Story*, Rosa writes of that day on the bus:

People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.

Finally, in November of 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Jim Crow laws that kept blacks and whites segregated were unconstitutional. Rosa Parks had challenged the law and shown people far beyond her own town how cruel and unjust segregation could be, and she had won. The boycott ended more than a month later, when the Montgomery buses were integrated, but the resistance to racial prejudice did not stop there. Rosa and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, as it has come to be known, sparked a series of nonviolent mass protests in support of civil rights. One woman's strength and commitment to change helped fuel a movement. Sometimes that is all it takes.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why was Rosa Parks ordered to give up her seat on the bus?

- A. because the driver disliked her
- B. because she wasn't allowed to sit
- C. so that a black man could sit
- D. so that a white man could sit

2. The cause of Rosa Parks' arrest was her refusal to give up her bus seat. What was a direct effect of her arrest?

- A. blacks in Montgomery boycotted the public bus system
- B. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. became a civil rights leader
- C. the U.S. Supreme Court ruled segregation unconstitutional
- D. Rosa Parks showed Americans that segregation was wrong

3. Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat because she was tired of accepting unjust treatment. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A. "Rosa Parks had challenged the law and shown people far beyond her own town how cruel and unjust segregation could be, and she had won."
- B. "Rosa and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, as it has come to be known, sparked a series of nonviolent mass protests in support of civil rights."
- C. "The Monday after Rosa's arrest, most black commuters walked to where they needed to go-some more than 20 miles."
- D. "'People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.'"

4. How can Rosa Parks best be described?

- A. tired
- B. brave
- C. smart
- D. sad

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. how Rosa Parks helped start the civil rights movement
- B. the unjust segregation laws called the "Jim Crow laws"
- C. the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- D. Rosa Parks' autobiography, *Rosa Parks: My Story*

6. Read the following sentences: "The driver ordered Rosa and the rest of the black passengers in her row to stand at the back of the bus to let the white man sit. In an act of **defiance** that would help intensify the American Civil Rights Movement, Rosa refused to give up her spot."

As used in this sentence, what does "**defiance**" mean?

- A. act of stopping something from happening
- B. permission to do something
- C. refusal to obey someone or something
- D. act of accepting the authority of someone

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The bus driver ordered Rosa Parks to give up her seat, _____ she refused to move.

- A. so
- B. but
- C. after
- D. like

8. What were the laws of segregation meant to do?

9. What were the effects of the Montgomery Bus Boycott?

10. How did Rosa Parks become "a hero and an inspiration to people all over the nation who were looking for racial equality"?
