

# ROSA PARKS: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

This lesson has material appropriate for history, social studies, civics, and social science classes.

## REQUIREMENTS

Materials

- *Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott*
- *Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Answer Key)
- pens/pencils, chart paper/markers (optional)

Time

45 minutes or one class period

Grade Level

Grades 6 & Up

## TECHNIQUES & SKILLS

critical thinking skills, large-group discussion, recalling factual information, writing skills

## KEY WORDS & PHRASES

boycott

*Brown v. Board of Education*

desegregate

Montgomery Bus Boycott

NAACP

racial justice

segregation

Sleeping Car Porters

Women's Political Council (WPC)

## RATIONALE

The purpose of this lesson is for students to examine their own and others' sources of information about historical events. Students also have an opportunity to examine how misrepresentation or omission of facts can lead to a less than complete understanding of events and issues.

## OBJECTIVES

- Students will determine if their knowledge of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott is a complete and accurate account of the events that took place.
- Students will identify common sources of information and misinformation.
- Students will examine the limits of having an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of an event or issue.

## PROCEDURES

1. Explain that the purpose of this lesson is for students to consider sources of information. To prepare for the lesson, have students consider the following questions:
  - How do we acquire our knowledge of people and events? How do we know what we know?
  - What are our sources of information?
  - How do we know if we have all the facts?
  - How do we know if the information is accurate?
  - Have you ever found out that the information you had about a topic was inaccurate? How did you learn it was inaccurate?
2. Tell students that you are going to distribute a handout designed to test their knowledge about Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
3. Instruct students to follow the directions on the handout.
4. Once all students have answered the questions on the handout, divide them into small groups to share their responses. Students should tally their responses to determine which questions, if any, revealed significant differences in students' responses and discuss what might account for such differences.
5. After students have shared their responses to the handout, provide them with the answer key and allow time so they can compare their answers to the

## SELECTED RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS ON ROSA PARKS

Brinkley, Douglas G. *Rosa Parks*. New York: Viking/Penguin, 2000. ISBN: 0670891606.

Brinkley writes an account of the act of civil disobedience that made Parks famous — but this biography of Parks also provides an informative history of Parks's earlier struggles against segregation and an exploration of her life after the Montgomery Bus Boycott. [Secondary]

Friese, Kai Jabir. *Rosa Parks: The Movement Organizes*. Glenview, IL: Silver Burdett, 1990. ISBN: 0382099273.

A biography of the Alabama black woman whose refusal to give up her seat on a bus helped establish the Civil Rights Movement. [Intermediate/Secondary]

Parks, Rosa, and Gregory J. Reed. *Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue with Today's Youth*. New York: Lee & Low, 1997. ISBN: 188000061X.

Correspondence between Rosa Parks and various children in which the "Mother of the Modern Day Civil Rights Movement" answers questions and encourages young people to reach their highest potential. [Intermediate/Secondary]

Robinson, JoAnn G. *Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of JoAnn Gibson Robinson*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987. ISBN: 0870495275.

This memoir provides new evidence on the origins and sustaining force of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–56). Robinson, a founding member of the Women's Political Council (WPC) of Montgomery, shows that the initial idea for boycotting buses in that city came from the WPC. [Secondary]

correct information.

6. Discuss the following questions with the class:

- Do you feel you had adequate knowledge about the topic you were responding to? If so, what has been your source of information? If not, what might account for gaps in your knowledge on the topic?
- What are some possible reasons for varying accounts of historical events?
- What is the danger in omitting factual information from accounts of historical events or in "diluting" history?
- What are our major sources of historical and contemporary information?

**Optional:** Chart all students' responses to the last two questions.

7. As a homework assignment, have students identify one of the items that they did not know on the handout. In a short essay, have students consider the implications of this lack of knowledge. For example, if students are unaware that the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a carefully planned community-wide effort, they will fail to recognize how the African-American community collectively mobilized to combat racism and racial segregation creatively and effectively.

8. If time permits, have students share their essays with the class the following day.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES & EXTENSIONS

1. Using a variety of sources, have students research Rosa Parks's role in the Civil Rights Movement. In particular, students should examine how various sources have interpreted Parks's role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and prepare a chart or write an essay outlining the differences and similarities between sources.
2. Have students compare accounts of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott from various textbooks and trade books in your classroom and school library. (Include texts from the *Selected Resources for Students on Rosa Parks*, which present more complete accounts than the typical textbook). Ask students to critique the versions that appear in their textbook and to write an alternative textbook narrative that can be shared with other classes.
3. Make connections between the past and present by exploring the legacy of segregation and studying contemporary examples of segregation. Implement one or more lessons from ADL's Curriculum Connections, *Looking Back Reaching Forward: Exploring the Promise of Brown v. Board of Education 50 Years Later* ([http://archive.adl.org/education/brown\\_2004](http://archive.adl.org/education/brown_2004)), which explores the history of school desegregation in the U.S. and examines current

patterns of resegregation in public schools.

4. Have students research the work of JoAnn Gibson Robinson and the Women's Political Council (WPC). In 1949, Ms. Gibson was put off a bus in Montgomery and, along with her WPC colleagues, conceived of a bus boycott to be staged "when the time was ripe and the people were ready." The work of these women set the stage for the 1955 boycott.
5. Ask for student volunteers to forego public transportation and the use of their family's car for a significant period of time (one week or one month). Instruct them to record in a journal what the experience was like. Have students research what daily life was like for the Montgomery residents who did without public transport for 381 days, and to reflect on the sacrifices made by thousands of citizens for a cause in which they believed.
6. Ask students to identify a societal problem that they feel strongly about. Have them research organizations that are working on the issue and ways to get involved with social action around that issue. Encourage students to document their involvement and to share their experiences with the class.

This lesson adapted from "Sources of Information" in *A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Anti-Bias Study Guide (Secondary Level)*, New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1998. [www.adl.org/education-outreach](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach)

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECTIONS: Identify each statement as True or False. In the space provided after each item, rewrite false statements so they are accurate.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Rosa Parks was a single mother who worked as a seamstress.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Rosa Parks was well known in Montgomery, Alabama before December 1, 1955, the day when she decided not to give up her seat on a public bus.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Rosa Parks defied the segregation laws when she sat in the section of a public bus reserved for white riders.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. After Rosa Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955, people spontaneously rallied to her side in support.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus was the first action of its kind in U.S. history.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s idea.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The Montgomery Bus Boycott lasted for several weeks.

1. Rosa Parks was a single mother who worked as a seamstress.

**False.** Rosa Parks was married. Her husband was actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement in Montgomery. Rosa Parks's occupation was that of a seamstress.

2. Rosa Parks was well known in Montgomery, Alabama before December 1, 1955, the day when she decided not to give up her seat on a public bus.

**True.** Rosa Parks was one of the first women in Montgomery to join the NAACP and was its secretary for many years. She worked with chapter president E.D. Nixon, vice president of the Sleeping Car Porters, and with the youth division of the NAACP. Mrs. Parks also worked to desegregate the Montgomery schools after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling.

3. Rosa Parks defied the segregation laws when she sat in the section of a public bus reserved for white riders.

**False.** Rosa Parks sat in the front row of the "colored" section. When the white section of the bus filled up, the driver demanded that she and several other passengers give up their seats to white people, as required by the law at that time. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the "colored" section of the bus.

4. After Rosa Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955, people spontaneously rallied to her side in support.

**False.** Community leaders had long considered a boycott as a tactic to achieve racial justice. The Women's Political Council (WPC) was prepared to stage a bus boycott when the time was right and when they knew they had a respected leader in the African-American community as its focal point.

5. Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus was the first action of its kind in U.S. history.

**False.** In the months before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, at least three other people were arrested for the same reason.

6. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s idea.

**False.** The boycott was first suggested to E.D. Nixon and others in Montgomery on the evening of Rosa Parks's arrest by members of the Women's Political Council. Although it was not his idea, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a relatively new member of the community, was contacted that same evening and was among those who organized and supported the boycott.

7. The Montgomery Bus Boycott lasted for several weeks.

**False.** The Montgomery Bus Boycott lasted 381 days.

# A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROSA PARKS (1913–2005)



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Rosa Parks became the “Mother of the Modern Day Civil Rights Movement” when she transformed the nation on December 1, 1955 by defying racist policies in defense of her human right to dignity and equal treatment.

Rosa Parks was born Rosa Louise McCauley in Tuskegee, Alabama on April 2, 1913. She was the granddaughter of former slaves and the daughter of James McCauley, a carpenter, and Leona McCauley, a rural schoolteacher. Upon the separation of her parents at the age of two, she moved to her maternal grandparents' farm in Pine Level, Alabama with her mother and younger brother, Sylvester.

Rosa attended the Montgomery Industrial School for Girls, a private school founded by several liberal women from northern states. She then went on to a laboratory school set up by the Alabama State Teachers College for Negroes (now known as Alabama State University), but was forced to drop out when her grandmother, and later her mother, fell ill.

In 1932, Rosa married Raymond Parks, a barber, who had long been active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). While Rosa worked with the organization's state president, Edgar Daniel Nixon, to mobilize a voter registration drive in Montgomery, Raymond Parks worked to help free the defendants in the famous Scottsboro case, in which nine young black men were accused of raping two white women. An all-white jury convicted the nine boys and sentenced eight of them to death, despite strong evidence of their innocence. All of the Scottsboro boys eventually gained their freedom, but the process took nearly twenty years.

Rosa Parks recalled in an interview, “I worked on

numerous cases with the NAACP, but we did not get the publicity. There were cases of flogging, peonage, murder, and rape. We didn't seem to have too many successes. It was more a matter of trying to challenge the powers that be, and to let it be known that we did not wish to continue being second-class citizens” (Academy of Achievement, 2006).

By 1955, the segregated seating policies on public buses had long been a source of resentment within the black community. Black citizens were required to pay their fares at the front of the bus only to re-board the bus through the back door. Sometimes white bus drivers would drive away before African-American passengers were able to re-board the bus. When a bus was crowded, typically during peak travel hours, black people riding in the reserved “colored” section in the back of the bus would be forced to give up their seats to white people, or if there was no standing room left, would be forced to leave the bus.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks took her seat in the back of the bus, just behind the “whites-only” section. When she and three other African-American bus riders were told to relinquish their seats to white passengers, Rosa Parks refused. The bus driver had Rosa arrested and taken to police headquarters. She was released later that night on \$100 bond. Parks detailed her feelings at this moment in her autobiography *My Story*:

*“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.”*

The Montgomery chapter of the NAACP had been looking for a case to challenge the legality of segregated bus seating and decided to mount a protest in Rosa Parks's name. In addition, the Women's Political Council (WPC) led by JoAnn Robinson, had the idea of a one-day bus boycott and wanted to initiate the boycott in protest of Rosa Parks's arrest.

Within 24 hours, the WPC distributed more than 52,000 fliers asking Black Americans — who comprised 75

## A Brief Biography of Rosa Parks (1913–2005)

percent of Montgomery's bus business — to boycott the city buses on the day of Rosa Parks's trial. On December 5, Montgomery buses went empty, and Rosa Parks was convicted by the local court and ordered to pay a fine of \$14, which she refused to pay. What was planned as a one-day bus boycott became a 381-day protest, during which time 42,000 protesters walked, carpooled, or took taxis instead of riding the segregated Montgomery buses.

Shortly thereafter, the newly appointed president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), Martin Luther King, Jr. filed a case in a United States district court on behalf of the organization to desegregate the public buses in Montgomery. The district court ruled for the plaintiffs, declaring segregated seating on buses unconstitutional. When the case was taken to the Supreme Court, the segregation of Montgomery public buses was declared illegal, and on December 20, 1956, the Montgomery buses were officially desegregated.

Due to constant harassment by white people following the Supreme Court decision, and lack of employment, Rosa Parks and her husband relocated to Detroit, Michigan in 1957. Mrs. Parks worked as a seamstress in Detroit until 1965 when U.S. Representative John Conyers (D-Michigan) hired her to serve as an administrative assistant in his Congressional office in Detroit. She held this position until she retired in 1988.

Ten years after the death of her husband in 1977, Mrs. Parks founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development which sponsors an annual summer program for teenagers called Pathways to Freedom. Select youth groups tour the country in buses and learn about the history of the civil rights movement and Underground Railroad sites. In 1992, Rosa Parks published her autobiography *Rosa Parks: My Story* for young people to learn about her real life story.

Rosa Parks received numerous awards and tributes in her lifetime, including the NAACP's highest honor, the Spingarn Medal, in 1970, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Award in 1980. In 1996, President Bill Clinton awarded Rosa Parks the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor given to a civilian, and in 1999 the United States Congress honored Rosa Parks with the Congressional Gold Medal.

Rosa Parks resided in Detroit until her passing at the age of 92 on October 24, 2005. On October 27, the United States Senate passed a resolution to honor Rosa Parks by allowing her remains to "lie in state" in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. Rosa Parks became the 31st person so honored, and the first woman to ever lie in state in the Rotunda. She was also the second black person, after Jacob J. Chestnut, who was one of the two United States Capitol Police officers fatally shot in 1998.

### REFERENCES:

- Academy of Achievement. (2006). Biography: Rosa Parks. Retrieved from Web: <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/par0bio-1>. Last Revised November 2, 2005.
- AfricanAmericans.com, <http://www.africanamericans.com/RosaParks.htm>
- Africana Online, [http://www.africanaonline.com/rosa\\_parks.htm](http://www.africanaonline.com/rosa_parks.htm)
- Africa Within, [http://www.africawithin.com/bios/rosa\\_parks.htm](http://www.africawithin.com/bios/rosa_parks.htm)
- Parks, Rosa, and Jim Haskins. *Rosa Parks: My Story*. New York: Puffin, 1999.
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa\\_Parks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_Parks)



# CLASSROOM & TEACHER RESOURCES ON ROSA PARKS

Kohl, Herbert. "The Politics of Children's Literature: What's Wrong with the Rosa Parks Myth?" In *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching* by Deborah Menkart, Jenice View, and Alana D. Murray, eds. Washington, D.C.: Teaching For Change and PRRAC, 2004, 25–31. ISBN: 1878554182.

Kohl points out the subtle, but real, racism inherent in the usual telling of the Rosa Parks story and offers another, more truthful version. [Teacher Resource]

— *She Would Not Be Moved: How We Tell the Story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott*. New York: The New Press, 2005. ISBN: 1595580204.

Kohl has expanded and updated his essay on dispelling the myths about Rosa Parks and added a number of complementary pieces in this book. Beginning with a new introduction by Marian Wright Edelman, *She Would Not Be Moved* also includes an original essay by Cynthia Brown on civil rights activists Septima Clark, Virginia Durr, and Rosa Parks; an extensive teachers' resource guide to educational materials about Rosa Parks and the Civil Rights Movement; an appendix explaining how to evaluate many of the textbooks written for young people about this period; and a half dozen historical photographs. [Teacher Resource]

Hampton, Henry, and Steve Fayer. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*. New York: Bantam Books, 1991. ISBN: 0553352326.

The section on the Montgomery Bus Boycott provides powerful first-person testimonies appropriate for classroom use with middle and high school students. [Intermediate/Secondary]

*Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks*. 40 min. Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2002.

This Teaching Tolerance video has accompanying classroom activities and a curriculum kit on the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955. <http://www.tolerance.org/kit/mighty-times-legacy-rosa-parks>. [Intermediate/Secondary]

Murray, Alana D. "The Montgomery Bus Boycott — Organizing Strategies and Challenges." In *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching* by Deborah Menkart, Jenice View, and Alana D. Murray, eds. Washington, D.C.: Teaching For Change and PRRAC, 2004, 96–105. ISBN: 1878554182.

Lesson plan that has intermediate level students learn about many of the challenges faced by Rosa Parks and the other organizers of the 381-day Montgomery Bus Boycott. [Intermediate]

Raines, Howell. *My Soul Is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered*. New York: Penguin Group, 1983. ISBN: 0140067531.

This oral history contains first-hand accounts from Rosa Parks and covers events from the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 until the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. [Teacher Resource]

"Remembering Rosa Parks: 1913–2005." Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, October 25, 2005.

This short article in *Teaching Tolerance* can be used as an introductory reading on the life of the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement." <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/news/remembering-rosa-parks-1913-2005>. [Intermediate/Secondary]

Smith, Jessie Carney. ed. *Black Heroes of the 20th Century*. Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press, 1997. ISBN: 1578590213.

This book details the lives of 150 black individuals who have made a lasting and profound impact on American culture



## Classroom & Teacher Resources on Rosa Parks

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— W. E. B. Du Bois, Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou, and more. [Teacher Resource]

“The Story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott Revisited.” In *Should We Burn Babar?: Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories* by Herbert Kohl, New York: The New Press, 1996, 30–56. ISBN: 1565842596.

Kohl's retelling of the Rosa Parks story illustrates how Mrs. Parks's actions were part of an organized struggle for freedom, not a mere personal act of frustration. [Teacher Resource]

*Voices of Civil Rights: Ordinary People. Extraordinary Stories.* Joint project of AARP, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), and the Library of Congress, 2004.

Contains first-hand accounts, historical timelines, music videos, and a bus tour that can be used as part of a Web quest, an interactive class activity, or as a good source for an independent research project on Rosa Parks and other early civil rights activists. [Intermediate/Secondary]