Civil Rights on a City Bus
By ReadWorks

On the 1st 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, settling toward the middle, past the first few rows, which at that time were reserved for white people. After making several stops, the bus became full; a white man had boarded, but there was nowhere for him to sit. The driver ordered Rosa and the rest of the black passengers in her row to move to the back of the bus to let the white man sit. In an act of defiance that would set off 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 in fact 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, a young pastor 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 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 (including on public buses) 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, 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 non-violent mass protests in support of civil rights. A revolution had begun, fueled by one woman’s strength and commitment to change. Sometimes that is all it takes.
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 non-violent 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 move to the back of the bus to let the white man sit. In an act of **defiance** that would set off 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?

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9. What were the effects of the Montgomery Bus Boycott?
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10. How did Rosa Parks become “a hero and an inspiration to people all over the nation who were looking for racial equality”?
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Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1090

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   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.  
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   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.”

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

Suggested answer: The laws of segregation were meant to keep white and black people separate.

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

Suggested answer: The Montgomery Bus Boycott sparked a series of non-violent mass protests in support of civil rights, and indirectly led the Supreme Court to declare segregation unconstitutional.

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

Suggested answer: Answers may vary and should be supported by the passage. Students should indicate that Rosa Parks became a hero of the civil rights movement because of her defiance of the laws of segregation when she refused to give up her bus seat. This act prompted the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which sent the message to all Americans that African Americans were tired of being treated as second-class citizens, and eventually led to the segregation laws being declared unconstitutional.