

# Rosa Parks: Sources of Information

**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.

**Age Range:** Grades 6 and up

## **Requirements:**

### Handouts/Supporting Documents:

- Rosa Parks and Montgomery Bus Boycott
- Rosa Parks and Montgomery Bus Boycott (Answer Key)

Other Materials: pens/pencils, chart paper/markers (optional)

Time: 45 minutes or one class period

**Techniques and Skills:** critical thinking skills, large-group discussion, recalling factual information, writing skills

**Key Words:** boycott, desegregate, diluting, historical, information, overt, rallied, reluctant, segregation, sources, spontaneously, tactic

## **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 to complete this part of the assignment.
  4. Once all students have answered the questions on the handout, divide students 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. Allow approximately 10 minutes for this exchange.
  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 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 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)
9. 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.
  10. If time permits, have students share their essays with the class the following day.

***Additional Activities and Extensions:***

1. Using a variety of sources, have students research Rosa Parks' role in the Civil Rights Movement. In particular, students should examine how various sources have interpreted Parks' 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 *Children's Bibliography on Rosa Parks* below, 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 the ADL curriculum unit, *Looking Back Reaching Forward: Exploring the Promise of Brown v. Board of Education 50 Years Later* (at [http://www.adl.org/education/brown\\_2004](http://www.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 Jo Ann 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.

## Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott

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, AL 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' 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.

## Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott Name: \_\_\_\_\_

(Answer Key)

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' occupation was that of a seamstress.*

2. Rosa Parks was well known in Montgomery, AL 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' 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' 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.*