

## Civil Rights – Lesson 3

### Why didn't Rosa Parks give up her seat on the bus?

#### Subject Knowledge Notes

Rosa Louise McCauley Parks (February 4, 1913 – October 24, 2005) was an American activist in the civil rights movement best known for her pivotal role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The United States Congress has called her "the first lady of civil rights" and "the mother of the freedom movement".

On December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Parks rejected bus driver James F. Blake's order to relinquish her seat in the "colored section" to a white passenger, after the whites-only section was filled. Parks was not the first person to resist bus segregation, but the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) believed that she was the best candidate for seeing through a court challenge after her arrest for civil disobedience in violating Alabama segregation laws. Parks' prominence in the community and her willingness to become a controversial figure inspired the black community to boycott the Montgomery buses for over a year, the first major direct action campaign of the post-war civil rights movement. Her case became bogged down in the state courts, but the federal Montgomery bus lawsuit *Browder v. Gayle* succeeded in November 1956.

Parks' act of defiance and the Montgomery bus boycott became important symbols of the movement. She became an international icon of resistance to racial segregation. She organized and collaborated with civil rights leaders, including Edgar Nixon, president of the local chapter of the NAACP; and Martin Luther King, Jr., a new minister in Montgomery who gained national prominence in the civil rights movement and went on to win a Nobel Peace Prize.

At the time, Parks was secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP. She had recently attended the Highlander Folk School, a Tennessee center for training activists for workers' rights and racial equality. She acted as a private citizen "tired of giving in". Although widely honored in later years, she also suffered for her act; she was fired from her job as a seamstress in a local department store, and received death threats for years afterwards.

Shortly after the boycott, she moved to Detroit, where she briefly found similar work. From 1965 to 1988 she served as secretary and receptionist to John Conyers, an African-American US Representative. She was also active in the Black Power movement and the support of political prisoners in the US.

After retirement, Parks wrote her autobiography and continued to insist that the struggle for justice was not over and there was more work to be done. In her final years, she suffered from dementia. Parks received national recognition, including the NAACP's 1979 Spingarn Medal, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Congressional Gold Medal, and a posthumous statue in the United States Capitol's National Statuary Hall. Upon her death in 2005, she was the first woman to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda, becoming the third of only four Americans to ever receive this honor. California and Missouri commemorate Rosa Parks Day on her birthday February 4, while Ohio and Oregon commemorate the occasion on the anniversary of the day she was arrested, December 1.

*Taken from Wikipedia*

#### Lesson Three: Why didn't Rosa Parks give up her seat on the bus?



5 mins

- Display the key question for the lesson (Slide 2)?
- Display the retrieval quiz and give pupils five minutes to complete it independently (Slide 3).
- Circulate to gather information about common misconceptions or mistakes.
- Display the correct answers and allow pupils to self-mark (Slide 4).



10 mins

- Tell the story of Rosa Parks and how she refused to give up her seat on a bus to make way for a white person (Slide 5).
- Remind them, through answering question one, that the buses were segregated, and that white people would always take priority if there weren't enough seats.
- You may wish to use pupils to act out the scene as you tell the story, or have them retell the story after you have told it using the text.








5 mins

- Display the quote from Rosa Parks and read aloud (Slide 6).
- Ask pupils to discuss with their partners why Rosa Parks corrects people who said that she was just tired after a long day.
- Explain that Rosa Parks was making a hugely principled and very risky choice by peacefully refusing to follow an unfair rule.
- Therefore, the idea that she was just tired misses the point. It suggests she just couldn't be bothered.
- Ask pupils to write down their answers in the booklet in their own words.

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### Why didn't Rosa Parks give up her seat on the bus?

 5 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read about the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Explain what a boycott is, and how this is an example of civil disobedience.</li><li>• Draw attention to the role of Martin Luther King and the NAACP. Note how MLK explicitly told people to take weapons home and only protest peacefully.</li></ul>
 10 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facilitate a class discussion/debate about the use of violence in protest movements (Slide 7).</li><li>• Why might some people have wanted to use violence?</li><li>• Why would Parks and King Jr have argued against this.</li><li>• As pupils discuss, jot the key arguments on the board.</li></ul>
 5 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read the remaining text about Rosa Parks.</li><li>• Note that although she is most famous for her bus protest, Parks had a long and distinguished career as a civil rights activist.</li><li>• She particularly defended women who had been badly and unfairly treated.</li><li>• Draw attention to the fact that the fourteenth amendment (seen in the last lesson, in the yellow box) says that all people have to be treated equally (slide 8).</li></ul>
 15 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask the pupils to retell the story of Rosa Parks in six sentences (Slide 9).</li><li>• They may like to have a final sentence on Parks receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom.</li><li>• Pupils can then act out the story.</li><li>• You may like to show some of these back.</li></ul>
 5 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask pupils to return to page 3, and answer the question: Why didn't Rosa Parks give up her seat on the bus '?</li></ul>