

Day 2

**Rosa Parks (1913-2005)****Seamstress, secretary, civil rights activist**

- 1 Rosa Parks knew what was coming when a white man stepped onto the bus. All the seats were filled, both the seats for whites at the front and those labeled "colored" for black people at the back. Rosa sat in the first row of seats for black citizens. At first no one moved when the driver told the black citizens sitting in the first row to give up their seats. "Y'all better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats." Three got up, but Rosa did not. She remembered thinking black citizens would not "make it light" on themselves by continuing to give in to injustice. She was tired of discrimination. The bus driver walked back and asked Rosa if she was going to stand. "No, I'm not," she replied. The driver called for two policemen and had her arrested. Rosa knew how dangerous her decision was. She knew that afternoon in December 1955 could change her life forever, but she was ready for whatever came.
- 2 When a friend of Rosa's heard what happened, he said, "They arrested the wrong woman." He knew how strong and determined Rosa was and saw her arrest as the example black citizens needed to unite to challenge segregation on a national level. After Rosa spent some lonely hours in jail, her husband posted bail and took her home. When friends gathered to discuss

her case, Rosa faced another big decision. Could her arrest be used to challenge the city law that segregated buses? Blacks could boycott (refuse to ride) city buses in protest. This would put the shy, 42-year-old Rosa at the center of a controversy. She had always been a respected member of the community; now, those who feared change might hate her. Her husband worried about her safety, but she felt prepared and agreed to the plan.

**Early Determination**

- 3 As a child, Rosa saw white children riding a yellow bus to a new school for whites only. Rosa had to walk to her school, which had no heat, water or indoor toilets. There were wooden shutters instead of windows, and on cloudy days it was dark inside. However, her mother and grandparents taught her to be proud and not to judge people by what they had or did not have.
- 4 Rosa had always displayed determination. Her education was delayed when she stayed home to care for her sick grandmother, but she returned to school and earned her diploma. When she was 19, Rosa married Raymond Parks, a man who was already active in the struggle for equal rights. Rosa gave credit for her determination to her family and faith in God, which gave her strength to stand up against discrimination.

## Activism

- 5 Rosa found a job as a tailor's assistant at a downtown department store. In 1943, she joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and worked in her free time as secretary for the president of the local chapter. The NAACP fought for equal rights for blacks.
- 6 Rosa was encouraged in 1954 when she heard the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools was illegal. The next year she attended a workshop on desegregation. For the first time, Rosa saw blacks and whites living and working together as equals. She saw that people of different backgrounds could enrich each other and enjoy life more. This experience gave her hope for the future. She became determined to end the daily insult of being treated like a second-class citizen.
- 7 Rosa was ready for her role in the bus boycott. She learned to speak before large crowds and how to answer reporters. She raised money to help buy cars to take blacks who had previously ridden the bus to and from work. Rosa and her husband faced hard times when both lost their jobs during the boycott. She received hate mail and death threats on the telephone, but she was not surprised by the hateful reactions of some and did not let them distract her from her cause. At last, the Supreme Court ruled that the law segregating city buses was unconstitutional. On Dec. 21, 1956, one year and 20 days after her arrest, Rosa

Parks climbed onto a Montgomery bus and rode in the front seat.

- 8 Rosa never wanted to be in the spotlight but was never able to leave it. She stayed active in the struggle for equal rights and said much work remained to be done. Rosa spent much of her time speaking with young people. She wanted them to be as ready as she was to use any chance life gave them to change things for the better. Her example of quiet strength convinced a nation that no one should be forced to take a back seat in life.

## Rosa Parks

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- 1) What did Rosa Parks predict would happen when a white man stepped onto the bus?
  - A. The white man getting on the bus would have to stand because all the seats were filled.
  - B. The blacks sitting in seats would voluntarily get up to allow the white man to sit down because all the seats were filled.
  - C. She would give up her seat to the white man because she was the last person to get a seat on the crowded bus.
  - D. The bus driver would tell the blacks sitting in seats to get up because all the seats for whites were filled.
- 2) What did Rosa credit for her strength to stand up to discrimination?
  - A. her husband and her education
  - B. her family and her faith in God
  - C. her pride and her ability to not judge people by what they had or did not have
  - D. her joy of being in the spotlight and her hope
- 3) In paragraph 1, what does the phrase "make it light" mean?
  - A. make it harder
  - B. make it more challenging
  - C. make it easier
  - D. make it more regular
- 4) On what date was Rosa Parks arrested for not giving up her seat on the bus to a white man?
  - A. December 1, 1955
  - B. December 21, 1956
  - C. December 1, 1943
  - D. December 21, 1954

### Short Answer

*Respond in two or three complete sentences.*

Rosa Parks never wanted to be in the spotlight. What caused her to ignore her fear of being the center of attention?

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**Extended Response**

*Respond in four or five complete sentences.*

How did Rosa Parks's action lead to the Supreme Court ruling that the law segregating city buses was unconstitutional? Discuss the events that Rosa Parks participated in to help overturn the law.

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**Writing Prompts**

- 1) Martin Luther King Jr. said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Write about two incidents that explain the content of your character. Consider character traits such as honesty, dependability, determination or cooperation.

- 2) Imagine you were on the bus with Rosa Parks on December 1, 1955. Write an entry in your diary describing what you saw and how you felt.