

Civil Rights  **Answers**

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

Directions: Read about the Montgomery Bus Boycott below. Using what you've learned, answer the questions on the next page.

One of the first big events in the fight for civil rights was the Montgomery Bus Boycott. For many years, segregation laws existed in Alabama. This meant that white people and black people couldn't use the same schools, restaurants, hotels, restrooms or drinking fountains. Public places were separated according to race.



Civil rights activist Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was a seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama. One evening, after a long day at work, she sat down on a section of the bus where everybody was allowed to sit — however, the rule was that, if a white person got on the bus and there was nowhere to sit, black riders must give up their seat for them. When a bus driver ordered Rosa Parks to give up her seat to a white passenger that had just boarded, she refused to do so. Because she disobeyed the bus driver, she was sent to jail. However, Rosa was the secretary of the local chapter of the NAACP! When her friends heard about Rosa's arrest, they organized a boycott of city buses. Instead of taking the bus, people who supported Rosa walked or carpooled to work and school. The strike lasted for over a year. People from other parts of the country even sent coats and shoes to the boycotters in Montgomery. Some taxi drivers reduced their fares so that they would be the same cost as a bus ticket.

At the time of the boycott, about three fourths of the city's regular bus riders were African American. The longer the boycott went on, the more money the bus company lost. They realized how damaging it could be to their business and their reputation. In 1956, the federal court ruled that segregation on buses was unconstitutional.

“Each person must live their life as a model for others.”

— Rosa Parks

Name _____

Date _____

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The Later Years of the Movement

Why do you think the boycott was so successful?

Student answers will vary, but should include ideas about the solidarity and persistence of the boycotters, along with their collective financial power.

Why do you think people sent warm clothes and shoes to people in Montgomery, even though they were not from there?

Student answers will vary, but should include ideas about Americans around the country opposing racism and identifying with the anti-segregationist ideals of the movement.

For many years after, the bus that Rosa Parks sat on that evening ended up abandoned in a field. When it was discovered that it was the famous bus that started the Montgomery boycott, it was put up for auction. A museum bought it, and a federal grant was given to them to have the bus restored. Why do you think people wanted so badly to preserve this bus?

Student answers will vary, but should include ideas about the bus being a powerful symbol of the collective power of people to rise up against injustice.