

Rosa Parks

In the first part of the 20th century, African Americans were not allowed to eat at the same restaurants as white people. Bathrooms and drinking fountains were often only for white people. If there was one that African Americans could use, it was usually broken down and dirty and had a sign that said, “colored.” African Americans also had to sit at the back when they rode the bus. If the front of the bus where white people sat was full, black people had to stand up and move further back. A lot of people were very angry about this. It wasn’t fair.

In 1955, Martin Luther King was leading protests and demonstrations for equal rights and to end segregation. Segregation is when there are separate places for different kinds of people. One of the activists working in these civil rights campaigns was a woman named Rosa Parks who lived in the city of Montgomery, Alabama. The activists in Montgomery made a plan to start a big protest called a boycott to force their city to change segregation rules. Then on December 1, Rosa was coming home from work on a bus and there was no more room for white people to sit in the front. The driver told her to get up from her seat, so that a white man could have the entire row to himself. But Rosa just sat still and quietly said, “No.”

The bus driver got really angry at her. He yelled at her and called the police. But Rosa knew what was right and wrong. She was tired of having to give up her place or get what was worn out and broken just because of the color of her skin. She knew that she would get in trouble, but she also knew that nothing would ever change unless someone was willing to go through that trouble. Rosa sat quietly and spoke politely to the driver, even though she refused to get up. Finally, the police arrested her and took her to jail.

Other African Americans had refused to give up their seats before, but this time the activists were ready with a plan. They asked everyone in the city to stop riding busses to protest Rosa’s arrest. Almost all the black people and some white people in Montgomery stopped riding the busses and stopped paying for tickets. For a whole year, everyone walked miles to work and to school. But finally, the city busses lost so much money that the rules were changed. Rosa became one of the most important leaders of the civil rights movement.

1. Some people say Rosa Parks was just too tired to get up from her seat. Is that true? Why didn’t she get up when the bus driver told her to?

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2. What kinds of things were segregated for black people and white people?

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3. Do you think it mattered that Rosa spoke very politely to the driver and the police?
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