



ROSA PARKS: MY STORY

NON-FICTION

Rosa Parks
1992

INTRODUCTION

studysync™

In 1955, racial segregation on buses was common throughout the American South. Municipal laws in many cities required that African Americans sit at the back of the bus, and, when requested, give up their seats to white passengers. In Montgomery, Alabama, where sixty-six percent of bus riders were black, no segregation law was more hated. When Rosa Parks challenged the law on December 1 and refused an order to give up her seat, her arrest sparked a year-long bus boycott that left the Montgomery public transit system financially crippled. Ms. Parks describes the simple act of civil disobedience that changed history.

“I saw a vacant seat in the middle section of the bus and took it.”



FIRST READ

NOTES

Excerpt from Chapter 8: “You’re Under Arrest”

- 1 When I got off from work that evening of December 1, I went to Court Square as usual to catch the Cleveland Avenue bus home. I didn’t look to see who was driving when I got on, and by the time I recognized him, I had already paid my fare. It was the same driver who had put me off the bus back in 1943, twelve years earlier. He was still tall and heavy, with red, rough-looking skin. And he was still mean-looking. I didn’t know if he had been on that route before—they switched the drivers around sometimes. I do know that most of the time if I saw him on a bus, I wouldn’t get on it.
- 2 I saw a vacant seat in the middle section of the bus and took it. I didn’t even question why there was a vacant seat even though there were quite a few people standing in the back. If I had thought about it at all, I would probably have figured maybe someone saw me get on and did not take the seat but left it vacant for me. There was a man sitting next to the window and two women across the aisle.
- 3 The next stop was the Empire Theater, and some whites got on. They filled up the white seats, and one man was left standing. The driver looked back and noticed the man standing. Then he looked back at us. He said, “Let me have those front seats,” because they were the front seats of the black section. Didn’t anybody move. We just sat right where we were, the four of us. Then he spoke a second time: “Y’all better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats.”
- 4 The man in the window seat next to me stood up, and I moved to let him pass by me, and then I looked across the aisle and saw that the two women were also standing. I moved over to the window seat. I could not see how standing up was going to “make it light” for me. The more we gave in and **complied**, the worse they treated us.



- 5 I thought back to the time when I used to sit up all night and didn't sleep, and my grandfather would have his gun right by the fireplace, or if he had his one-horse wagon going anywhere, he always had his gun in the back of the wagon. People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.
- 6 The driver of the bus saw me still sitting there, and he asked was I going to stand up. I said, "No." He said, "Well, I'm going to have you arrested." Then I said, "You may do that." These were the only words we said to each other. I didn't even know his name, which was James Blake, until we were in court together. He got out of the bus and stayed outside for a few minutes, waiting for the police.
- 7 As I sat there, I tried not to think about what might happen. I knew that anything was possible. I could be **manhandled** or beaten. I could be arrested. People have asked me if it occurred to me then that I could be the test case the NAACP had been looking for. I did not think about that at all. In fact if I had let myself think too deeply about what might happen to me, I might have gotten off the bus. But I chose to remain.
- 8 Meanwhile there were people getting off the bus and asking for transfers, so that began to loosen up the crowd, especially in the back of the bus. Not everyone got off, but everybody was very quiet. What conversation there was, was in low tones; no one was talking out loud. It would have been quite interesting to have seen the whole bus empty out. Or if the other three had stayed where they were, because if they'd had to arrest four of us instead of one, then that would have given me a little support. But it didn't matter. I never thought hard of them at all and never even bothered to criticize them.
- 9 Eventually two policemen came. They got on the bus, and one of them asked me why I didn't stand up. I asked him, "Why do you all push us around?" He said to me, and I quote him exactly, "I don't know, but the law is the law and you're under arrest." One policeman picked up my purse, and the second one picked up my shopping bag and escorted me to the squad car. In the squad car they returned my personal belongings to me. They did not put their hands on me or force me into the car. After I was seated in the car, they went back to the driver and asked him if he wanted to swear out a **warrant**. He answered that he would finish his route and then come straight back to swear out the warrant. I was only in **custody**, not legally arrested, until the warrant was signed.



- 10 As they were driving me to the city desk, at City Hall, near Court Street, one of them asked me again, "Why didn't you stand up when the driver spoke to you?" I did not answer. I remained silent all the way to City Hall.
- 11 As we entered the building, I asked if I could have a drink of water, because my throat was real dry. There was a fountain, and I was standing right next to it. One of the policemen said yes, but by the time I bent down to drink, another policeman said, "No, you can't drink no water. You have to wait until you get to the jail." So I was denied the chance to drink a sip of water. I was not going to do anything but wet my throat. I wasn't going to drink a whole lot of water, even though I was quite thirsty. That made me angry, but I did not respond.
- 12 At the city desk they filled out the necessary forms as I answered questions such as what my name was and where I lived. I asked if I could make a telephone call and they said, "No." Since that was my first arrest, I didn't know if that was more **discrimination** because I was black or if it was standard practice. But it seemed to me to be more discrimination. Then they escorted me back to the squad car, and we went to the city jail on North Ripley Street.
- 13 I wasn't frightened at the jail. I was more resigned than anything else. I don't recall being real angry, not enough to have an argument. I was just prepared to accept whatever I had to face. I asked again if I could make a telephone call. I was ignored.
- 14 They told me to put my purse on the counter and to empty my pockets of personal items. The only thing I had in my pocket was a tissue. I took that out. They didn't search me or handcuff me.
- 15 I was then taken to an area where I was fingerprinted and where mug shots were taken. A white matron came to escort me to my jail cell, and I asked again if I might use the telephone. She told me that she would find out.
- 16 She took me up a flight of stairs (the cells were on the second level), through a door covered with iron mesh, and along a dimly lighted corridor. She placed me in an empty dark cell and slammed the door closed. She walked a few steps away, but then she turned around and came back. She said, "There are two girls around the other side, and if you want to go over there with them instead of being in a cell by yourself, I will take you over there."

Excerpted from *Rosa Parks: My Story* by Rosa Parks, published by Puffin Books.





CLOSE READ

Reread the excerpt from *Rosa Parks: My Story*. As you reread, complete the Focus Questions below. Then use your answers and annotations from the questions to help you complete the Writing Prompt.



FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Based on paragraphs 1 and 2, analyze how Rosa Parks introduced herself. What additional information do you learn about Parks' character from the details she shares? Highlight evidence from the text and make annotations to explain your analysis.
2. In paragraph 5, Parks used the word *tired* repeatedly. Why does she repeat the word? What effect does this create? Discuss the denotations and connotations of this word as Parks used it. Highlight textual evidence and make annotations to explain your response.
3. In paragraph 13, Parks said that she was not frightened or angry but "resigned" to the consequences of the situation. Which details in previous paragraphs illustrate this attitude? Support your answer with textual evidence and make annotations to explain your response.
4. In paragraph 16, explain how Parks used word denotation and connotation to create the mood of the jail. Highlight evidence from the text and make annotations to support your explanation.
5. Based on the text, is Rosa Parks a hero? Why or why not? Highlight textual evidence and make annotations to explain your evaluation.

WRITING PROMPT

The excerpt you read from *Rosa Parks: My Story* is part of Parks's autobiography, a non-fiction narrative she wrote to tell about her life. In it, she introduces and elaborates on a time when she behaved in a very courageous way. Using the excerpt as a model, write a real-life story, or personal narrative, about a time when you responded to a conflict or problem in a brave, kind, or generous way. What was the problem or conflict? Was anyone else involved in the experience or situation? How was the problem or conflict resolved? Remember that your personal narrative should be told from the first-person point of view. Introduce and elaborate on your experience with details and examples, and use transitions to help readers follow the sequence of events. Include description, dialogue, and precise or sensory language to capture and hold readers' attention. Try to use words with connotations that support the overall mood and tone of your narrative. Finally, consider what you learned from your experience. What theme or message might you want to share with your readers in your personal narrative?



THINK QUESTIONS

1. Refer to one or more details in the text to explain how Rosa's previous interaction with the bus driver may have contributed to her actions on December 1—both from ideas that are directly stated and ideas that you have inferred from evidence in the text.
2. Use details from the text to explain other factors Parks believes contributed to her actions on December 1, 1955. What do other people seem to think contributed, and does Parks agree?
3. Based on the historical context, how do the law enforcement officials behave in expected and unexpected ways during Rosa's arrest? What inferences can you make from this behavior? Support your answer with textual evidence.
4. Use context to determine the meaning of the word **complied** as it is used in *Rosa: Parks: My Story*. Write your definition of *complied* and tell how you got it.
5. The Latin word *discriminare*, from which *discrimination* comes, means "to separate." Use this knowledge along with the context clues provided in the passage to determine the meaning of **discrimination**. Write your definition of *discrimination* and tell how you got it.

