

Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was an African-American woman who made history with her comparatively small action of sitting still on a bus, which went on to spark major changes in American society.

Early Life

Rosa Parks was born on 4th February, 1913 and grew up mainly on a farm with her mother, brother and grandparents in Montgomery, Alabama, USA. Rosa Parks grew up at a time when African-American people and other people of colour were treated as second-class citizens. They did not have the same rights as white people.

Segregation in America

When Rosa Parks was growing up, black people were not allowed to use many of the same public places as white people. This was called 'segregation'. The laws in many American states enforced segregation between white people and black people in public places such as schools, transport, toilets and restaurants. Usually, the schools, hospitals and bathrooms that white people used were in much better condition than the ones that black people had to use. The laws at the time also made it difficult for black people to vote. Many white people did not respect black people and treated them very badly.

The Bus Ride That Changed History

On 1st December, 1955, Rosa Parks was travelling home from work on a bus and sitting – as she had to – in the section allocated for black people at the back of the bus. The bus companies always moved black people further back or made them stand if the section allocated for white people was full and a white person needed to sit down. This happened to Rosa and she was told to move further back to give her seat to a white person...but she did not move. She was threatened with police action but she stayed put. Eventually, the police arrested, charged and fined her for breaking the law.

What Happened Next?

Amazingly, Rosa's behaviour unleashed a wave of protest and 40 000 black people in the area (and some white people) supported a bus boycott (a refusal to use the bus services in Montgomery). The bus companies lost a lot of money and the amount of people involved could not be ignored. The newspapers reported it and the boycott went on for 381 days, before it came to the attention of the government and just over a year later, in December 1956, the segregation on buses was lifted.

Rosa's actions made history as they sparked a movement to make a change. Even though it wasn't the end of segregation and civil rights still had a long way to go, it was a victory.

"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."



Parks, Rosa; James Haskins (1992). Rosa Parks: My Story. Dial Books. p. 116

Rosa Parks Questions

Try and answer the questions using full sentences.

1. Where did Rosa grow up?

2. What is 'segregation'?

3. How were the facilities provided for black and white people different?

4. How old was Rosa when she did not move on the bus?

5. If you boycott something, what are you doing?

6. In 1955, how were the buses in Montgomery segregated?

7. In 'The Bus Ride That Changed History' section, why has the author used an ellipsis?

Rosa Parks Questions

8. Near the end of the text, the author writes that 'it wasn't the end of segregation'. When the bus laws were changed, why wasn't it the end of segregation?

9. In Rosa's quote, what was Rosa tired of and why do you think this was?

10. What sort of characteristics and qualities do you think Rosa Parks had? Give reasons for your answers.

Rosa Parks Answers

1. Where did Rosa grow up?

Rosa grew up in a place called Montgomery in America.

2. What is 'segregation'?

Segregation means the separation of people by law usually by race, gender or religion.

3. How were the facilities provided for black and white people different?

The facilities provided for black people were not up to the same standard as the facilities provided for white people. They were not as clean or as modern.

4. How old was Rosa when she did not move on the bus?

Rosa was 42 years old when she did not move on the bus.

5. If you boycott something, what are you doing?

If you boycott something, you are refusing to go there or take part in it or have anything to do with it.

6. In 1955, how were the buses in Montgomery segregated?

In 1955, there were separate sections on buses allocated to white and black people. If the section allocated to white people was full, the black people on the bus were as to move back or stand to make way for the white citizens to have their seat.

7. In 'The Bus Ride' section, why has the author used ellipsis?

The author has used ellipsis to show a pause as there was a pause in real life as people waited for Rosa to move.

8. Near the end of the text, the author writes that 'it wasn't the end of segregation'. When the bus laws were changed, why wasn't it the end of segregation?

Even though the bus laws had been changed, it was not the end of segregation because there were still laws on segregation for many other places in the community, such as schools and churches.

9. In Rosa's quote, what was Rosa tired of and why do you think this was?

Rosa was tired of 'giving in'. I think that she had enough of things not being fair and being told what to do whilst feeling like a second-class citizen. She wasn't being treated fairly and up until then had been following the rules and not fighting back but she knew she couldn't do it anymore.

10. What sort of characteristics and qualities do you think Rosa Parks had? Give reasons for your answers.

Open-ended and for discussion. Example answers might include:

- **braveness – for standing up for her rights**
- **calmness – to not get violent in such an unfair situation**
- **stubbornness – to not move on the bus**
- **proudness – for being proud of who she was**
- **determined – to stand her ground**