

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 Rosa Louise McCauley on 4th February, 1913. After her parents separated, she grew up on a farm with her mother, brother and grandparents in Montgomery, Alabama, USA. She grew up in a time when America was segregated before the Civil Rights Act was enforced. 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 and white people were separated by law in many ways. 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. It was also clearly apparent that black facilities were of a poorer standard than white facilities. The laws at the time also made it difficult for black people to vote. So not only were black and white people segregated, but black people were treated very badly in society.

The Bus Ride That Changed History

On 1st December, 1955, Rosa Parks was travelling home from work on a bus and sitting – as rules required – in the black section to the rear of the bus. Bus companies prioritised seating for white people and moved black people further back, or made them stand if the white section was full and a white person needed a seat. This happened to Rosa and she was told to move further back to give her seat to a white person...but she refused to move. She was threatened with police action but she stayed sat still, adamant that she would not follow the 'rules'. Eventually, the police arrested, charged and fined her for breaking the law.

What Happened Next?

Amazingly, Rosa's defiance unleashed a wave of protest. Around 40 000 black citizens (and some white citizens) supported the 'Montgomery Bus Boycott'. The profits of the bus companies fell and the sheer size of the movement could not be ignored. The press reported it all over America and the boycott went on for 381 days. It gained the attention of the USA government and just over a year later, in December 1956, the unfair segregation on buses was lifted. Rosa's small actions made history as they acted as a catalyst for the Civil Rights movement, which eventually succeeded. Even though it wasn't the end of segregation and civil rights still had a long way to go, it was a victory for the rights of black people within society.

"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. In the introduction paragraph, what type of word is 'comparatively'?

2. If Rosa was born with the name Rosa Louise McCauley, what can we most likely guess happened in her private life?

3. Explain what you understand by the term 'segregation'.

4. In the 'Segregation in America' section, the author uses the words 'second-class citizens'. Explain what you think this means.

5. Why did the bus driver ask Rosa to move on the bus?

6. Find two compound adjectives in the text.

7. What was 'The Montgomery Bus Boycott'?

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8. Near the end of the text, the author writes: 'Rosa's small actions made history as it acted as a catalyst for the Civil Rights movement', what does the author mean by 'acted as a catalyst'?

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. In the introduction paragraph, what type of word is 'comparatively'?

The word 'comparatively' is an adverb.

2. If Rosa was born with the name Rosa Louise McCauley, what can we most likely guess happened in her private life?

Rosa's surname was probably changed because she got married. (She may also have changed her surname in conjunction with her mother and father splitting up).

3. Explain what you understand by the term 'segregation'.

The terms 'segregation' means the separation of people by law usually by race, gender or religion.

4. In the 'Segregation in America' section, the author uses the words 'second-class citizens'. Explain what you think this means.

'Second-class citizens' means people were treated as though they were not as valued in society as others.

5. Why did the bus driver ask Rosa to move on the bus?

Rosa was asked to move by the bus driver to give up her seat to a white person that had boarded the bus (as the 'rules' at the time stated).

6. Find two compound adjectives in the text.

Two compound adjectives in the text are: 'African-American' and 'second-class'.

7. What was 'The Montgomery Bus Boycott'?

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was when many black citizens (and some white citizens) refused to use the buses until it was fair for black and white people to sit where they liked and not be separated.

8. Near the end of the text, the author writes: 'Rosa's small actions made history as it acted as a catalyst for the Civil Rights movement', what does the author mean by 'acted as a catalyst'?

The phrase 'acted as a catalyst' means that something was given a boost, it speeded up the process or kick-started an event or change.

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**