

# A Lesson in Courage

Fifty Years Ago, Rosa Parks Changed the Country Forever

## Cast of Characters

**Narrators 1, 2, 3**

**Bus driver**

**Rosa Parks**

**Bus riders 1, 2**

**Police officers 1, 2**

**E. D. Nixon, civil rights leader**

**Raymond Parks, Rosa Parks's husband**

**Protesters 1, 2, 3**

**Fred Gray, Rosa Parks's lawyer**

**Judge**



AP/Wide World Photos

*Rosa Parks is arrested and fingerprinted in February 1956 for breaking segregation laws.*

*Growing up, Rosa Parks knew what to do when she saw a school bus—hide. The bus wasn't coming to take her to school. It was only for white children, and when the kids saw Rosa walking, they would pelt her with trash.*

*In the 1920s, the South was **segregated**<sup>1</sup>. African Americans didn't have the same rights as white people. They were forced to sit in the back of public buses and could not go to the same schools as white people.*

*Rosa Parks hated segregation. She refused to drink from water fountains designated for "colored" people. (At that time, some people referred to black people as "colored.") She joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to fight for equal rights.*

<sup>1</sup> **segregated:** restricted to one group or race

## Reading Passage

*On Dec. 1, 1955, Parks took a stand that helped eliminate racial inequality in the United States. She died on Oct. 24, 2005, leaving behind a legacy of strength, courage, and hope.*

## Downtown Montgomery, Alabama

**Narrator 1:** Rosa Parks boards a bus on her way home from work.

**Narrator 2:** She sits in the front row of the "colored" section.

**Bus driver:** Next stop, Empire Theater!

**Narrator 3:** After the bus grinds to a stop, a few white people get on. One white man is left without a seat.

**Bus driver:** *(to Parks and the people in her row)* Let me have those seats.

**Narrator 1:** Parks and the people in her aisle don't move.

**Bus driver:** *(threatening)* You know white folks and colored people can't sit in the same row. Let me have those seats.

**Narrator 2:** The others get up and move to the back, but Parks stays put.

**Rosa Parks:** *(to herself)* The more we give in to segregation, the worse it gets.

**Bus driver:** *(to Parks)* If you don't stand up, I'm going to have you arrested.

**Parks:** *(quietly)* You may do that.

**Bus rider 1:** *(in a hushed tone)* I wonder what's going to happen.

**Bus rider 2:** *(worriedly)* I don't know, but she's in trouble now.

**Narrator 3:** A few minutes later, two police officers arrive.

**Police officer 1:** Why didn't you stand up when the driver spoke to you?

**Parks:** *(defiantly)* Why do you all push us around?

**Police officer 2:** I don't know, but the law is the law, and you're under arrest.

## Parks's house

**Narrator 1:** After Parks is released from jail on bail, she talks with the local NAACP president, E. D. Nixon; her husband, Raymond Parks; and a few others.

**Parks:** I know one thing: I will never, ever ride a segregated bus again.

**E. D. Nixon:** Rosa, how would you feel about making your arrest a test case against segregation?

**Raymond Parks:** We could take this all the way to the Supreme Court.

**Parks:** (*after a moment*) I'll do it.

**Nixon:** Good. Now let's show white people how much they need us. Black people ride city buses more than anyone else. If we don't ride, the bus company could go bankrupt. Tell everyone—we're going to boycott the buses.

## A bus stop on Monday morning

**Narrator 2:** Dark clouds loom overhead. African Americans huddle at bus stops, but they're waiting for taxis owned by African Americans—not for buses.

**Protester 1:** I'm glad we're finally teaching the bus company a lesson.

**Protester 2:** Me too. I'm tired of standing on buses when there are empty seats in the white section.

**Protester 3:** I'd rather walk to work every day than put up with segregation any longer.

## The courthouse

**Narrator 3:** The courtroom is packed. Parks's lawyer speaks on her behalf.

**Fred Gray:** The defendant pleads not guilty.

**Narrator 1:** The bus driver takes the stand.

**Bus driver:** I asked her to move. She refused.

**Judge:** I find Rosa Parks guilty. She must pay a \$10 fine, plus \$4 in court costs.

**Narrator 2:** Parks's supporters react angrily, booing the decision.

**Parks:** You haven't heard the last from us.

The crowd might have booed, but the guilty verdict was exactly what Parks wanted. She immediately **appealed**<sup>2</sup> the decision. When the state court ruled in her favor, the city took the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

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<sup>2</sup> **appeal:** a legal proceeding by which a case is brought to a higher court for review

**Reading Passage**

In the meantime, the bus boycott continued. On Nov. 13, 1956, the African American community's efforts paid off. The Supreme Court ruled that Alabama's segregated buses violated the Constitution.

A month later, Rosa Parks boarded a bus for the first time in more than a year. This time, she sat in the front seat.