

EXCERPTS TO WRITE ABOUT

Rosa Parks

Name: _____ Date: _____

- **Part 1 Directions:** Read these three excerpts written by different authors on Rosa Parks. They all focus on the same event. Highlight words and phrases in each piece that help you determine the author's purpose and point of view. Annotate your observations in the margins.

Rosa

by Nikki Giovanni

"I said give me those seats!" the bus driver bellowed. Mrs. Parks looked up in surprise. The two men on the opposite side of the aisle were rising to move into the crowded black section. Jimmy's father muttered, more to himself than anyone else, "I don't feel like trouble today. I'm gonna move."

Mrs. Parks stood to let him out, looked at James Blake, the bus driver, and then sat back down.

"You better make it easy on yourself!" Blake yelled.

"Why do you pick on us?" Mrs. Parks asked with that quiet strength of hers.

"I'm going to call the police!" Blake threatened.

"Do what you must," Mrs. Parks quietly replied. She was not frightened. She was not going to give in to that which was wrong.

Some of the white people were saying aloud, "She ought to be arrested," and "Take her off this bus." Some of the black people, recognizing the potential for ugliness, got off the bus. Others stayed on, saying among themselves, "That is the neutral section. She has a right to be there."

Mrs. Parks sat.

Rosa Parks: Civil Rights Pioneer

by Karen Kelleher

After work, Rosa boarded a city bus to go home. As always, she walked past the first five rows. These rows were empty, but they were marked "Whites Only." It was against the law for blacks to sit there. At that time Alabama and other southern states had laws that were unfair to black citizens. These segregation laws said that blacks had to drink from separate water fountains, go to separate schools, and ride in a separate part of the bus.

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Rosa found a seat in the first row of the “Colored” section. Black passengers were allowed to sit there—unless white riders needed the seats.

As the bus continued, all the seats filled up. The driver noticed that a white man was standing. The driver looked at Rosa and the other black passengers.

“I want those seats,” the driver said.

At first, no one moved. Then the man sitting beside Rosa moved to the back. The city’s laws said that a black person could not sit in the same row as a white person. Rosa would have to move so that the white man could sit. But Rosa did not budge.

She was tired of giving in to unfair laws. And she was tired of being mistreated. Rosa had to stick up for herself.

“Are you going to stand up?” asked the driver.

“No,” Rosa answered quietly.

“Well, I’m going to have you arrested,” he warned.

Rosa looked the driver in the eye. “You may do that.”

Soon two white police officers arrived. One of them asked Rosa why she hadn’t given up her seat.

She asked him a question in return. “Why do you all push us around?”

“The law’s the law, and you’re under arrest,” he answered.

Rosa hated segregation, and she hoped that the laws would change one day. But she did not know that her own act of courage would lead the way.

Rosa Parks: My Story

by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins

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 say 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.”

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. . . .

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.

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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.

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.

► **Part 2 Directions:**

- **Choose two of the above excerpts and use your annotations to fill out the Analyze Different Perspectives template.**
- **Write about the similarities and differences in point of view of the two different authors. Use information from the text to support your analysis.**

Note: With these three excerpts that describe Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger, we have three distinct narrative points of view.

The one written by Rosa Parks herself, with Jim Haskins, inarguably has the greatest force of truth and factual accounting. After all—Rosa was there.

And yet, and yet—whenever you have a byline "with _____," it introduces another factor, another agenda, another point of view. The strong writing and vivid details make you believe everything happened just as it's described, right down to the bus driver's diction, "Y'all better make it light on yourselves."

But did Rosa really say or write, "I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in"? That may, indeed, be a direct quote we can confirm from a TV clip, a radio interview, a letter Rosa wrote, or some other primary source document. But as is true of any "nonfiction," the job of a reader and a historian is to look at several accounts and consider the veracity of these details. In *Rosa*, by Nikki Giovanni, we are given the account through the lens of an African American poet and writer who was probably a young girl at the time of the famous incident. It's clear from the dialogue and the sentence structure that Giovanni is telling the story in a way younger readers can grasp. In *Rosa Parks: Civil Rights Pioneer*, the authors weave in more background than the other two accounts do, with details about the separate water fountains, schools, and buses for blacks and whites. Notice that in Rosa's account, she claims she only told the bus driver "You may do that." She says, "These were the only words we said to each other." Yet in the account by Kelleher, there is dialogue between the bus driver and Rosa, with Rosa retorting, "Why do you all push us around?" What, as readers, do we make of this discrepancy? Did Rosa forget she said that? Did Kelleher get the quote from some other source? Taken together, these three pieces remind us that it takes long, hard research and critical reading to describe events in history supported by the real facts.