

Letters

Practice It

Start by reading “Rosa Refuses”.

ROSA REFUSES

by Ruth Spencer Johnson • 2008

4th Grade

Lexile: 710

FONT SIZE



In December 1955, after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white man, black people in Montgomery, Alabama refused to use the bus until the laws were changed and they were treated fairly. In this passage, a young black girl writes to her cousin about the protest. **As you read, take notes on how black people avoided using the bus.**

- [1] In December 1955, Shirley, a fictional 9-year-old black girl in Montgomery, Alabama, might have written these letters to her cousin Elizabeth in Detroit, Michigan...

December 5, 1955

Dear Elizabeth,

Guess what's happening in Montgomery? We are having a bus boycott! Do you know what that is? It's when a lot of people refuse to use a service like the city bus as a way of protesting something. Starting today, black people won't ride the buses anymore because of the unfair way the bus company treats us.

Remember how it is here? The black people have to sit in the back of the bus, and the white folks get to sit up front. If the bus gets full, the black people have to give up their seats to the whites. It's the law. You're lucky that in Detroit, you can sit anywhere you like on the bus. That must be nice. Here's why we're having the boycott: Last week, a black woman here named Rosa Parks was riding the bus. She was on her way home from work. When the bus got full, the driver told her to get up and give a white person her seat. She refused! So the police came and arrested her. They took her to jail! Can you believe it? Mrs. Parks said she was tired of giving in to white people. So now, all 50,000 black people in Montgomery aren't going to ride the bus at all until things change. The bus company sure is going to lose a lot of money!

- [5] We're all trying to help each other. Most black folks here don't have cars. The ones that do are driving others to work. Black taxi drivers are charging only a dime (the same as the bus fare) instead of 45 cents for a ride. Thousands of people are walking miles to work, school, and church. The buses are practically **1** empty!

The new minister in town, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., is the leader of the boycott. He says that if we protest peacefully with “courage and dignity,” **2** we can make great changes for black people. Until then, I'll keep walking!

Love, Shirley



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December 21, 1956

Dear Elizabeth,

[10] You won't believe what I did today — I rode in the front of the bus!

The boycott is finally over, after 381 days. I never thought it could last this long, because the bus company was losing so much money. But the city officials did everything they could to stop the boycott without changing the seating rules. They arrested black drivers for the slightest **3** reason. They made black taxi drivers charge full fare. **4** They arrested people who were waiting for rides. Hundreds of people lost jobs and went to jail. A lot of white people were really angry, and Reverend King's house was bombed!

Our black leaders went to court to end segregation **5** on the buses. The city fought the case all the way to the Supreme Court. **6** Now the Supreme Court has said that we can sit wherever we want on the buses.

It wasn't easy for people to walk so far in all kinds of weather. My friends and I wore out our shoes walking to school. But we've kept up our spirits. **7** We believe this boycott is just the start of equal rights for our people! Tell Aunt Louise you want to come down and visit me here. We'll ride the bus up front together!

Love, Shirley

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Notes All Definitions Footnotes

1. almost
2. **Dignity** (*adjective*): a sense of pride in yourself
3. very small
4. the money a passenger has to pay for a ride
5. the separation of people based on their race
6. the most powerful court in the country
7. to stay positive about something

Next, label the different parts of each letter.
You can write them in or out and paste the labels below.

Greeting	Body	Closing	Heading	Signature
Greeting	Body	Closing	Heading	Signature

Finally, answer a few questions about this letter.

1. Which sentence describes the main theme about the bus boycott in Montgomery
 - A. Black children were even more responsible for the success of the bus boycott than adults, as they used the bus more than anyone.
 - B. Refusing to use the bus wasn't difficult for black people. As they walked together and often shared their cars with each other.
 - C. Black people in Montgomery succeeded in ending segregation on buses by working hard and not giving up on their protest.
 - D. The bus boycott didn't last very long, as the buses quickly gave into black people's demands for desegregation.

2. Which detail from the text best supports the answer to question 1?
 - A. "We are having a bus boycott! Do you know what that is? It's when a lot of people refuse to use a service like the city bus as a way of protesting something."
 - B. "The black people have to sit in the back of the bus, and the white folks get to sit up front. If the bus gets full, the black people have to give up their seats to the whites."
 - C. "But the city officials did everything they could to stop the boycott without changing the seating rules. They arrested black drivers for the slightest reason."
 - D. It wasn't easy for people to walk so far in all kinds of weather. My friends and I wore out our shoes walking to school. But we've kept up our spirits.

3. How does Shirley respond to the bus boycott?
- A. Shirley is angry that a bus boycott is necessary for black people to be treated fairly.
 - B. Shirley is hopeful about the bus boycott and willing to do her part to create change.
 - C. Shirley complains about having to walk everywhere, since she can't use the bus.
 - D. Shirley hesitates to join her friends and family in the bus boycott, as it's going to be a lot of work.
4. Shirley says the fight to end segregation on buses...
- A. Was easy for them to win.
 - B. Took a lot of hard work.
 - C. Was dangerous for her.
 - D. Felt hopeless for a long time.
5. Why do you think the greetings on these two letters were important?
- A. To show the reader how long the boycotting went on
 - B. To show how she said hello to her cousin
 - C. To show the letters were to Elizabeth
 - D. To show both letters were written in December

Answer Key

1. C
2. D
3. B
4. B
5. A