

SHE SAT ON BUS AND WAS ARRESTED... 9 MONTHS BEFORE ROSA PARKS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2; 7.4 and 7.5



HERE'S CLAUDETTE'S STORY!

Anyone who hears her story may be amazed, but to hear Claudette Colvin tell it, she really did not have much of a choice. In 1955, Colvin was a 15-year old girl living in Montgomery, Alabama, when she was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white woman. This event took place nine months before Rosa Parks did the same. According to Claudette Colvin, "I could feel Harriet Tubman on one shoulder and Sojourner Truth on the other." (1)

Almost everyone is familiar with the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a defining moment in the early Civil Rights Movement. Far less is known about the story of Colvin, a high school girl who simply refused to stand up or back down.

During February, Negro History Month, the **segregated** high school in which Claudette attended taught its students about black **activists** like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth.(2) Claudette was taking the bus home from school when the bus driver told her to give up her seat for a white woman. Giving up her seat was never an option for Colvin, who could feel the ghosts of Tubman and Truth commanding her to take a stand. She refused and was promptly arrested and thrown in jail for the night.

After posting **bail**, the NAACP considered defending her in court but decided not to when she became pregnant later that year. Unlike Parks, an NAACP secretary, Colvin was not the one the Civil Rights organizations wanted as the face of the Civil Rights Movement. She did not have the fair skin of Rosa Parks, nor the **charisma** or experience. Claudette Colvin was only a teenager, after all.(3)

Claudette Colvin rejected the idea that she was too young and too small to fight. She became one of the first to truly challenge Montgomery's bus laws, declaring herself not guilty in court. Claudette was sentenced to **probation**. As a result, she struggled to find work with a criminal record. She was **shunned** by a community **reluctant** to be associated with someone who had challenged the white

VOCABULARY

Segregated: to separate or isolate from others

Activists: someone engaged in activism

Bail: a sum of money used for the release of an arrested person

Charisma: a personal quality attributed to leaders; charm

Probation: a person who is released from jail or confinement but is still under court supervision*

Shunned: to avoid deliberately

Reluctant: unwilling

Associated: to join as a partner, ally, or friend

References

(1) http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/books/26colvin.html?_r=2&hp&

(2) <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2000/dec/16/weekend7.weekend12>

(3) *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* By Phillip Hoose Published by Melanie Kroupa Books

CLAUDETTE'S STORY (CONT.)

establishment. Despite these obstacles, Claudette was determined to fight **segregation**. She became one of only four citizens willing to sue the bus company. A lawsuit was filed in 1956, known as Browder v. Gayle. The case went to the U.S. Supreme court. On December 17, 1956, the court ruled that Montgomery's bus laws were **unconstitutional**. In fact, it was that decision that brought the famous Montgomery bus boycott to a victorious conclusion.

History usually remembers the elder statesmen, Martin Luther King and others, who served as the face of the Civil Rights Movement. Their gigantic **reputations** are more than justified. Yet, there is another tale to tell, the tale of Claudette Colvin and so many like her. She is **emblematic** of countless young people who simply refused to **tolerate discrimination** and hatred. She took a stand and took on the giant.

VOCABULARY

Segregation: separation or isolation from others

Unconstitutional: not in accord with the principles set forth in the Constitution

Reputation: a characteristic attributed to a person or thing

Emblematic: symbolic

Tolerate: to allow without opposing

Discrimination: treatment or consideration based on class or category rather than merit

Quiz

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2 Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

QUESTION 1. Which of the following sentences is one of the central themes of the article?

- She was only a teenager, after all
- Most everyone has heard of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a defining moment in the early Civil Rights Movement.
- But Colvin rejected the idea that she was too young, too small to fight.
- That 1956 suit, known as Browder v. Gayle, went to the U.S. Supreme court.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

QUESTION 2. What is the best meaning of the word "face" as used in the following sentence? History usually remembers the elder statesmen—Martin Luther King and others who served as the face of the Civil Rights Movement.

- Surface
- Photo
- Visage
- Representative

QUIZ (CONT.)

CCSS.ELA.-LITERACY.RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision. (i.e. Determine the reason behind words or sentences used by the author within the text.)

QUESTION 3. What is the reason behind the placement of the following sentence by the author? “But there is another tale to tell, the tale of Claudette Colvin and so many like her.”

- a. The author liked Colvin
- b. The author showed that Colvin’s story was important
- c. The author revealed the Colvin’s story was like a fairy tale
- d. The author was saying that Colvin’s story was just like many others

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.5 Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.

QUESTION 4. Why did the author use this sentence when he did? “But standing up was never an option for Colvin, who could feel the ghosts of Tubman and Truth commanding her to take a stand. She refused, and was promptly arrested and thrown in jail for the night.”

- a. The author wanted to surprise the reader
- b. The author gave the rationale for Colvin’s action
- c. The author wanted to provide his opinion of Colvin’s action
- d. The author wanted to show that Colvin was brave