“Resurrecting Claudette”

by

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In this lesson students will discover through document analysis that a 15 year old girl named Claudette Colvin was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus 9 months before Rosa Parks did. Students investigate why Claudette did not emerge as the iconic female figure of the Civil Rights Movement and, in the process, encounter different accounts of the same events.

Audiences: Grades 4-5.

Benchmark Addressed: (focus on 1-2 based on grade level).

Grades 4-5
• History 1, 4-5: Students will Study historical events and persons within a given time frame in order to create a chronology and identify related cause-effect factors.
• History 3, 4-5: Explain why historical accounts of the same event sometimes differ and relate this explanation to the evidence presented or the point-of-view of the author.

Grades 9-12
• Students will analyze historical materials to trace the development of an idea or trend across space or over a prolonged period of time in order to explain patterns of historical continuity and change.
• History 2, 9-12: Students will examine and analyze primary and secondary sources in order to differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations.
• Students will compare competing historical narratives, by contrasting different authors' choice of questions, use and choice of sources, perspectives, beliefs, and points of view, in order to demonstrate how these factors contribute to different interpretations.

Essential Questions:
• Why might there be different accounts of the past?

Vocabulary: corroborate, text, subtext, intertextual,

Materials Needed
• Resource 1: Photograph of Rosa Parks.
• Resource 2: Photograph of Claudette Colvin.
• Resource 5 - Reading Detective - Uncovering the Hidden Subtext
• Resource 6 – Analyzing Points of View/Perspectives.
• Resource 7 – Why Not Claudette?
• Resource 8 – Dual Character Maps.

**Time to Complete:** 1-2 class periods.

**Procedures**

1. Display a photo of Rosa Parks (Resource 1). Ask the following:
   a. who is she?
   b. is she famous? Why?

2. Then, display a photo of Claudette Colvin (Resource 2). Repeat the questions:
   a. who is she?
   b. is she famous? Why?

3. **Document Analysis:** Distribute a copy of Resource 3: Police Report for Rosa Parks while continuing to project the photograph of Rosa Parks. If the students have already constructed a solid understanding of the difference between a primary and secondary source, proceed to Procedure 4. If not, present the lesson at [http://www.udel.edu/dssep/lessons_and_resources/Primary_V_Secondary.htm](http://www.udel.edu/dssep/lessons_and_resources/Primary_V_Secondary.htm) before doing Procedure 3.

4. **Think-Pair-Share:** Ask the following questions
   a. What is the purpose of this document?
   b. Who wrote it and why might this matter?
   c. Is this document a primary or secondary source? How do you know?

   Have students think about responses quietly to themselves, discuss their conclusions with an elbow partner, then share their conclusions with the entire class.

   **Note to Teacher:** in this lesson it certainly would be a primary source as it is a firsthand account written by one of the officers who arrested Rosa Parks.

5. **Intertextual Corroboration:** Intertextual corroboration is a term used to describe the process of checking to see if what you read in one document (text) supports or strengthens what you read in another document (text). This is a step taken by historians who are trying to craft credible accounts of the past. In the previous lesson – Rethinking Rosa Parks - students encountered conflicting information across different accounts (or texts) relating to the historic bus incident involving Rosa Parks on 12/1/55. **Resource 3: Police Report for Rosa Parks** offers yet another piece of textual evidence that students can use to verify (or refute) what other texts claim happened.

   Ask students to examine the report to see if there is any information that helps to resolve the questions from the previous lesson: where did Rosa Parks sit, for
whom was she asked to give up her seat, was she tired, and was this the first time Ms. Parks had been put off a bus? [Note that the report suggests that Ms. Parks was sitting in the white section of the bus…which could be interpreted as suggesting that she sat in the “damnable” or “sacred 10” area. Revisit the question, who wrote it and why might this matter?]

Ask students if there are any other questions raised by the report e.g. what did Chapter 6, Section 11 of the Montgomery City code state (visit http://library.kentlaw.edu/Exhibit/Montgomery/boycott2.htm), and encourage them to do independent investigating (with extra credit offered?) in pursuit of the answers.


7. Think-Pair-Share: Ask the following questions
   a. What is the purpose of this document?
   b. Who wrote it and why might this matter?
   c. Is this document a primary or secondary source? How do you know? Note to Teacher: in this lesson Resource 4 would certainly be a primary source as it is a firsthand account written by the officers who took Claudette Colvin into custody.
   d. Can we assume that it is reliable i.e. that it describes what actually happened on March 2, 1955?

8. Think Chronologically: ask students to lay the two arrest reports i.e. Resources 3 & 4 side by side in chronological order so that the one placed to the left is the earlier document.

9. Whole Group Discussion:
   a. How much time separated the writing of the two reports?
   b. Why is the second document i.e. Resource 4, so notable? [provides evidence that Rosa Parks was not the first African-American to refuse to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus to a white person]

10. Venn Diagram: ask students to work again with their collaborative partner to create a Venn Diagram on which they compare and contrast the similarities and differences in the details found on the arrest records of Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks.

11. Discussion: highlight the fact that Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat to a white person 9 months before Rosa Parks did yet Claudette did not receive the recognition in history that Rosa did. Why might Claudette Colvin have been denied the place that Rosa Parks has been given in history? Why is Claudette Colvin a “ghost in our curriculum?”
12. **Document Analysis:** Ask students to re-read what the report states about how Claudette Colvin behaved after she was asked to give up her seat on the bus. Is there anything in the report that suggest reasons why Civil Rights leaders decided not to use Claudette as a test case or leading symbol of the Movement. Explain. [she “struggled…kicked and scratched…kicked” the arresting officers.]

13. **Engage Competing Accounts – Text v Subtext:** In a very brief passage from Phillip Hoose’s Claudette Colvin (Resource 5), which they will read in a few minutes, Claudette offers her own version of the encounter with police in March of 1955. Resource 5 aims to raise students’ consciousness of subtext. Although Ms. Colvin does not deny physically resisting the police during her encounter with them, it is part of the subtext in this passage.

Discuss the concept of subtext with students. Give an oral example such as “Just after dinner the host asked her guests, what they thought of the new recipe she prepared. Though he did not eat much, one guest replied, “it was remarkably unusual.” Ask students what the subtext might be (e.g. subtext = I did not like it or I thought it was so awful that I could not get it past my lips! or Were you trying to poison us!?). Then ask them to work with an elbow partner to think of examples on their own, share the text with their partner, and have the partner describe the subtext.

Distribute (or project) copies of Resource 5 – History Detective: Uncovering the Hidden Subtext. Have students read Claudette’s account and be attentive to both text and subtext. Ask them to write responses in the boxed prompts that appear below the passage (i.e. identify important text and subtext). Ask…

a. Is the description on the arrest report the same as the description given by Claudette Colvin?
b. Does Claudette’s address the accusation that she was physically abusive toward the arresting officers in the text or subtext? Is her response in the text or subtext (or both)?
c. Does she agree that she violently resisted the arresting officers?
d. Why might there be different accounts of the same event?
e. Has your thinking about why Claudette did not become the Rosa Parks of the Civil Rights Movement changed or remained the same? Explain.

14. **Comparing/Contrasting Points of View:** Distribute copies of Resource 6. Have students analyze what authors have suggested as reasons why Claudette not chosen. There are 4 different points of view offered on Resource 6. Consider doing this as a jigsaw activity.

15. **Dual Character Mapping:** distribute copies of Resource 7 – Dual Character Map. Have students use what they have learned about Rosa Parks and Claudette Colvin compare/contrast their characters as a way of reaching a conclusion about
why Claudette Colvin has been overlooked in history while Rosa Parks remains an icon in history.

**Debrief:** Pose the following questions to the students…

**Extensions:**
- There were actually 3 individuals who refused to give up their Montgomery bus seats in the months prior to December 1, 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give up hers (Claudette Colvin was the first). Have students research information about the other two individuals who were denied “the” place in history and infer why they were denied that place.
Resource 2
Complainant: J.F. Blake (wm)
Address: 27 No. Lewis St.
Offense: Misc.
Date and Time Offense Committed: 12-1-55 6:06 pm
Place of Occurrence: In Front of Empire Theatre (On Montgomery Street)

We received a call upon arrival the bus operator said he had a colored female sitting in the white section of the bus, and would not move back.

We (Day & Mixon) also saw her.
The bus operator signed a warrant for her. Rosa Parks, (cf) 634 Cleveland & Court. Rosa Parks (cf) was charged with chapter 6 section 11 of the Montgomery City Code.

Warrant #114254

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Resource 4

Resource 5: Reading Detective - Uncovering the Hidden Subtext.
“Not everyone knew the bus rule that said they couldn’t make you get up and stand if there was no seat available for you to go to – but I did. When the driver told me to go back, there was no other seat. I hadn’t broken the law. And assaulting a police officer? I probably wouldn’t have lived for very long if I had assaulted those officers?”

Claudette Colvin
Interviewed by Phillip Hoose
January 1-September 13, 2007.
In Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice

The Text is what is actually written or stated. It is in the actual words that you see.

If our key question in this lesson is, did Claudette resist the policy physically, what is the most important piece of text in this passage?

Subtext refers not to what is actually written, but what the writer is suggesting without actually stating it. It is implied under the text.

What is the most important piece of subtext in this passage?
Resource 6: Why not Claudette

I did meet with Claudette, and talked about taking her case to the federal courts. Claudette was willing and we started making plans. Everything was going fine until Mr. Nixon discovered that Claudette was pregnant. She wasn’t married, and so that was the end of that case. If the white press got hold of that information, they would have a field day. They’d call her a bad girl. So the decision was made to wait until we had a plaintiff who was more upstanding before we went ahead and invested any more time and effort and money.

Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins Rosa Parks: My Story. (1992) p. 112

She [Claudette] was crying and madder than ever when the police told her she was under arrest. “You have no right to do this,” she protested. She struggled as they knocked her books aside, grabbed her wrists, and dragged her off the bus, and she screamed when they put on the handcuffs. (p. 16)

They needed the strongest possible case –the arrest of a black rider who was above reproach, a person of unassailable character and reputation who could withstand the closest scrutiny. Claudette Colvin, Nixon felt, was too young and immature, too prone to emotional outbursts, to serve as standard-bearer for a long and expensive constitutional test case. As Nixon pointed out, she had fought with police, she came from the poorer side of black Montgomery, and it was later rumored that she was pregnant.

She had expected to be cleared, and when the judge announced his verdict, she broke into agonized sobs that shook everyone in the crowded courtroom.


“On May 6, 1955…Judge Eugene Carter dropped two of the charges against Claudette – disturbing the peace and breaking the segregation law. But he kept the third, her conviction for “assaulting” an officer…

It was dispiriting outcome on two scores. First, Montgomery’s black leaders had hoped to keep using Claudette’s case in higher courts to challenge the constitutionality of segregated us seating. But now that Judge Carter had shrewdly dropped that charge, there was nothing left to appeal that was specifically about segregation.

Second, Claudette still had a criminal record…”


“…There was a time when I thought I would be the centerpiece of the bus case. I was eager to keep going in court. I had wanted them to keep appealing my case. I had enough confidence to keep going. Maybe adults thought a teenager’s testimony wouldn’t hold up in the legal system. But what I did know is they all turned their backs on me, especially after I got pregnant.

Claudette Colvin in Phillip Hoose Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice (2009) p. ___
Resource
Analyzing Perspectives:

Why Claudette Colvin did not become a Civil Rights Icon?

Analyzing Points of View or Perspectives

Directions: read the excerpts from the four authors and answer the central question in the appropriate box.

Why might Claudette Colvin have not been selected as the symbol for the Civil Rights Movement?
Comparing and Contrasting
Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks

Directions: List the characteristics of Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks that might account for one not becoming, and the other becoming, the test case for desegregation in the United States.

Claudette Colvin Character Map

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Rosa Parks Character Map

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Conclusion

Rosa Parks has become the leading female symbol of the Civil Rights Movement because ____________________________________________