Rethinking Rosa Parks

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In this lesson students will analyze primary and secondary source treatments of the same event i.e. the refusal by Rosa Parks to give up her bus seat to a white man on December 1, 1955 as a way of illustrating that there can be different accounts of the same event, that accounts of the past must be approached critically, and to show how historical texts may mislead.

Audiences: Grades 9-10.

Standards/Benchmark & Essential Questions Addressed:

Delaware History Standards

History 3, grades 9-12 [Interpretation]: Why might there be competing accounts of the past? How and why might history change?

ELA Common Core

• Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

• Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas developed over the course of the text.

Assessment:

• Formative – appear throughout the lesson.
• Summative – see last page of module.

Content: see Procedure 4.

Vocabulary: compare, contrast, primary source, secondary source, accurate, segregation, Jim Crow, boycott, “damnable 10.”

Materials Needed

• Resource 1: Anticipation Guide.
• Resource 2: Montgomery Bus Diagram.
• Resource 3: Text Feature Analysis.
• Resource 4: Passe Account of 12/1/55.
• Resource 5: Story Map.
• Resource 6: Kay Account of 12/1/55.
• Resource 7: Jaboubek Account of 12/1/55.

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• Resource 8: Greenfield Account of 12/1/55.
• Resource 9: Rosa Parks Account of 12/1/55.
• Resource 10: T-Chart Plus.

Time to Complete: 1-2 class periods.

Procedures
1. Gather Preconceptions (Part I) before the day of class: The day before teaching this lesson, ask students to write a few sentences or paragraphs in which they explain the story of Rosa Parks i.e. about the day she refused to give up her seat on the bus. Be careful not to give away any details when describing the assignment and make sure that each student crafts their account independently so that we can identify patterns of thought rather than risk generating a less telling group account such as that which comes from a KWL and that may or may not represent the thinking of most students in the class.

2. Gather Preconceptions just before teaching the lesson (Part II). Distribute copies of Resource 1: Anticipation Guide. Ask students to read the directions at the top of the page then complete the left hand column (the far right hand column will be completed at the end of the lesson.).

3. Gather Preconceptions (Part III). Distribute copies of Resource 2 - Montgomery Bus Diagram. Ask students to write Rosa Parks initials i.e. “RP” inside the square that represents the actual seat in which Rosa Parks sat on December 1, 1955.

4. Mini-Lecture: Use the following bullet points to provide students with some context for the lesson.
   • Civil War & 13th Amendment ended legalized slavery in the United States but not the anger (over losing, having outsiders tell them how to organize their society) and racism, particularly in southern states.
   • When northern troops pulled out of the south, southern states passed laws that denied freedmen equal treatment.
   • Racist attitudes led to the passage of segregation laws that separated whites and African Americans between the Civil War and the 1950s.
   • These laws were called Jim Crow laws and included provisions that made it illegal or difficult for African Americans to vote, attend white schools, eat in the same areas as white people, swim in swimming pools reserved for whites, marry white people, or sit in seats reserved for white people.
   • One Jim Crow law in Montgomery Alabama during the 1950s set aside the first 10 seats on public buses for white people only. Under no circumstances was an African American permitted to sit in those seats. African Americans grew to hate the #10 and referred to it as the “damnable 10.”
   • Understandably, African Americans hated these segregation laws. Gradually, African-Americans began to take steps to bring about an end to
segregation and unequal treatment. The first major victory occurred in 1954 when the United State Supreme court ruled in the Brown v Board of Education case that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Other forms of legal segregation, including laws that created white only sections on public buses, continued.

Demonstration: take a look at the diagram of the bus (Resource 2) on which Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on December 1, 1955. Arrange seats in your classroom or a larger room to simulate the seating arrangement on the bus. Be sure to set aside a seat where the bus driver would have sat as well as spaces where the doors would have been (e.g. front and middle right side). Hang a sign that read “White Only” at the back of the 10th seat from where the bus driver would have sat. Only white people were permitted by law to sit in the first 10 seats behind the bus driver. NOTE: you may have a small class for which you use fewer seats to demonstrate how the law was intended to be executed.

You can give students index cards on which they can write “Colored” or “White.” Have “colored” students get on the bus, pay their fare, then go back out the front door and enter the back door to enter. They may sit in seats reserved for “colored” persons only. Be sure to do the math so that, even thought there are empty seats up front, there are “colored” students standing. Have “white” people get on the bus and fill up the white section. Then, let another white person get on.

Ask the students to predict—what happens now?

5. Pre-reading prediction. Write the following words on the board and ask students to predict in 2-3 sentences what the first reading will be about. They must use some or all of the words from the reading that appear below:

- Rosa Parks
- tired
- sat
- bus driver
- move
- jail
- stop
- changed.

Have students share their predictions.

6. Guided Practice: Distribute copies of Resource 3: Text Feature Analysis. Tell the students that they are going to read several text accounts of “the” bus seat event involving Rosa Parks on December 1, 1955. Working with a reading partner, they are to complete the appropriate Text Feature Analysis for each reading. Provide guided practice with the first text by Jeff Passe (i.e. Resource 4)

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– Passe Account of 12/1/55). Give the students a few minutes to complete the analysis of the Passe Text then ask for volunteers to share their answers to each of the four analytic questions.

7. Story Mapping - Distributed Summary: Distribute copies of Resource 5 - Story Map. Ask students to draw key scenes from the reading in Resource 3 in the four blocks on Resource 4 then write an sentence that informs a reader what happened.

8. Independent Practice: Distribute copies of Resource 6 – Kay Account of 12/1/55. Ask students to work with their partners to complete the section of the Text Feature Analysis that focuses on the details within the Kay text. Go over responses after the students complete the Text Feature Analysis. Repeat the process with Resources 7- 8 (Jabourek and Greenfield Accounts of 12/1/55).

DO NOT HAVE THEM READ/ANALYZE THE ROSA PARKS READING (RESOURCE 9) UNTIL THEY HAVE COMPLETED PROCEDURE 12.

9. Construct/Analyze a Chronology: Ask the students, “Does chronology matter i.e. does it help us to know when something was written? Explain.

Distribute scissors to each pair of students. Have the pairs cut one of their completed Resource 3: Text Feature Analysis (TFA) worksheets so that the responses for each text are cut into individual strips according to the rows on the TFA. Have them refer back to their readings to “source” the document by noting and recording the year in which each text was published under the author’s name on the cut-out strip of paper. Ask the students to arrange the cut-out strips in chronological order on their desks and analyze for any trends that might surface. Have students report out on any conclusions. Ask the following to guide thinking:

Using their completed Resource 3: Text Feature Analysis (TFA) worksheets, have the students places their responses on the board as a class.

a. What trends [continuities or changes over time], if any, appear?
b. What might explain any of these trends?
c. Does this chronology help to reduce the confusion about what happened on December 1, 1955? If so, explain how?

10. Whole Group Discussion:
   a. What have we learned from our readings about Rosa Parks?
      • [some of the details relating to the event are unclear,
      • texts offer competing accounts,
      • what we read in history textbooks are not always facts,
      • there is still uncertainty about what happened on December 1, 1955].

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b. What are some additional steps we might take to try to resolve the confusion [e.g. weigh the evidence, intertextual corroboration, check other sources]

c. Are the documents you read primary or secondary sources? Why? [secondary]

d. What might be a good source to consult to see if we might learn what actually happened and why? [primary source]

e. What might be a good primary source to consult? [arrest report, newspaper accounts, testimony from others who were there, something Rosa Parks wrote about the event etc. ]

11. Corroborating Evidence:

Provide students with a copy of the Montgomery Police Department report of Rosa Parks arrest. Ask students if the primary source would be accurate? [yes: physical attributes of Rosa Parks, date, location; ?: the report of the bus driver’s and police officers. Would they have a reason to lie or have a bias in what they testified to?]

Have them examine the report and compare it to previous sources.

Tell students to notice how there is blank space/row at the bottom of the chart on Resource 3. Distribute copies of Resource 9 - Rosa Parks Account of 12/1/55. Ask student to read Ms. Parks account of what happened on 12/1/55, write “Rosa Parks Text” in the open cell, and write the responses to the questions at the top of Resource 3 chart in the other spaces provided. Remind them to “source” Resource 9 for the date in which the account was published.

Once they’ve completed Resource 3 with the information from Rosa Parks, include the Rosa Parks strip on the chronologies constructed in Procedure 9. How might the completion of the chronology inform what they conclude happened on December 1, 1955?

12. Discussion:

a. What should one learn from this examination of the story of Rosa Parks?

b. What rules should one follow when trying to determine what happened in the past, especially when there are competing accounts? [e.g. weigh the evidence, corroborate, consult a range of sources]

c. Which types of sources might be especially important to consult? [primary sources]

d. What story about Rosa Parks should we believe now and why?

e. Can one source trump all others or should the rule always be, whichever story has the most pieces of evidence should be accepted?


14. Students complete the Anticipation Guide (far right-hand column labeled “After the Lesson).
Debrief: Pose the following questions to students…

Extensions
Ask students how many years passed between the year in which Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat (1951) and when she published Rosa Parks – My Story (1992).
- Is “My Story” a primary or secondary source? Explain why.
- Can we trust what Rosa Parks is reporting of it is 41 years later? Explain.
- Discuss whether her story would be accurate after 41 years. Would her memory have faded or would the events be indelible in her mind from telling the story repeatedly over that time?
- Should the details found in Rosa Parks Story trump all others? Explain.

Bibliography


Anticipation Guide

**Directions:** Read each of the statements in the middle column of the chart below then write the letter “A” in the left hand column if you AGREE with the statement or the letter “D” if you disagree with the statement. DO NOT write anything in the 3rd column until we’ve completed our next lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before the Lesson</th>
<th>After the Lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on December 1, 1955.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat mainly because she was tired.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Parks planned to give up her seat that day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the front of a bus to a white man.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Parks had never refused to give up her seat to a white person before.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The arrest of Rosa Parks inspired the idea to start a bus boycott in Montgomery Alabama.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Parks was the first person in Montgomery, Alabama to refuse to give up her seat to a white person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I want to know what really happened in the past, I can find the answer in a history book.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resource 2: Montgomery City Lines Bus Diagram c. 1955

Directions: Shade in the seat where you think Rosa Parks was sitting on December 1, 1955 when she refused to give up her seat to a white person.
Text Feature Analysis

Directions: Write your answers to each question after reading each of the texts relating to the story of Rosa Park. Write the year of each text’s publication in the “Text Analyzed” or first column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Analyzed</th>
<th>Did Rosa remain seated because she was tired?</th>
<th>Where did Rosa sit?</th>
<th>To who did she refuse to give up her seat?</th>
<th>Was this the first time Rosa had been put off a bus?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passe Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakoubek Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Text Feature Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Analyzed</th>
<th>Did Rosa remain seated because she was tired?</th>
<th>Where did Rosa sit?</th>
<th>To whom did she refuse to give up her seat?</th>
<th>Was this the first time Rosa had been put off a bus?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passe Text 1991</td>
<td>Yes, tired.</td>
<td>Front of bus</td>
<td>White person (gender not known)</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay Text 1969</td>
<td>Yes, tired.</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>White woman.</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakoubeek Text 1989</td>
<td>“Feet hurt.”</td>
<td>Row just behind White Only section</td>
<td>2 white men</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield Text 1973</td>
<td>Yes, tired.</td>
<td>1st seat for blacks just behind white section.</td>
<td>White man</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When Rosa Parks rode on a bus, she had to sit all the way in the back. Her city had a law. It said black people could not sit in the front of a bus.

One day Rosa was tired. She sat in the front. The bus driver told her to move. She did not. He called the police. Rosa was put in jail.

Some citizens tried to help. One of them was Martin Luther King Jr. The citizens decided to stop riding buses until the law was changed.

Their plan worked. The law was changed. Soon, many other unfair laws were changed. Rosa Parks led the way!

On Dec. 1, 1955, a woman named Rosa Parks did something about the Jim Crow buses.

Mrs. Parks was black. She worked in a department store. That evening she climbed the bus and sat down.

Each time the bus stopped, more people got on. Soon no seats were left in the white part of the bus.

At the next stop, some white people got on. The driver got up and walked over to Mrs. Parks. He told her to give her seat to a white woman.

But Rosa Parks was tired. She did something she had never done before. She just stayed in her seat…

Black people all over the city heard about Rosa Parks. They were very angry. They were mad at the Jim Crow laws. They were mad at the police. They were mad at the bus company. But what could they do?

Then one man said, “Why don’t we boycott the buses?” This meant that all the black people would stop riding the buses. Soon the bus company would lose money. Maybe then the owners would be fair to blacks.

On Tuesday evening, December 1, 1955, a small neatly dressed black woman in Montgomery left work at quitting time, walked across the street to do some shopping at a pharmacy, and then boarded a bus for the ride home.

She took a seat toward the rear, in the row just behind the section marked Whites Only. Holding her packages, she was glad to sit down. After a long day, her feet hurt.

As the bus wound its way through Montgomery, it steadily filled with passengers, and soon every seat was taken. When two white men boarded and paid their fines, the bus driver called over his shoulder for the first row of blacks to move back.

After some delay, three blacks rose and stood in the aisle. But Mrs. Rosa Parks, her feet aching, her lap covered with packages, did not budge. The driver shouted, “Look woman, I told you I wanted the seat. Are you going to stand up?”

Gently but firmly, Rosa Parks said “No,” and for that she was arrested and thrown in jail.

By now Mrs. Parks had a job sewing in a department store. When people bought dresses or suits that did not fit, Mrs. Parks made them a little longer or shorter or tighter or looser.

On Thursday evening, December 1, 1955, Mrs. Parks left work and started home. She was tired. Her shoulders ached from bending over the sewing machine all day. “Today, I’ll ride the bus,” she thought.

She got on and sat in the first seat for blacks, right behind the white section. After a few stops the seats were filled. A white man got on. He looked for an empty seat.

Then he looked at the driver. The driver came over to Mrs. Parks.

“You have to get up,” he said.

All of a sudden Mrs. Parks knew she was not going to give up her seat. It was not fair. She had paid her money just as the man had. This time she was not going to move.

“No,” she said softly.

“You’d better get up, or I’ll call the police,” the driver said.

It was very quiet on the bus now. Everyone stopped talking and watched. Still, Mrs. Parks did not move.

“Are you going to get up?”

“No,” she repeated.

The driver left the bus and returned with two policemen.

“You’re under arrest,” they told her.

Mrs. Parks walked off the bus.

But that is not why I refused to give up my bus seat to a white man on Thursday, December 1, 1955. I did not intend to get arrested.

When I got off from work that evening of December 1, I went to Court Square as usual to catch the Cleveland Avenue bus home. I didn’t look to see who was driving when I got on, and by the time I recognized him, I had already paid my fare. It was the same driver who had put me off the bus back in 1943, twelve years earlier.

I saw a vacant seat in the middle section of the bus and took it. There was a man sitting next to the window and two women across the aisle.

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 sat 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.

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.

Rethinking Rosa Parks

What the “myths” suggest | What the evidence suggests

What should be written in our textbooks about December 1, 1955?