

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus Teacher's Guide

A Learning Adventure for Middle School Students

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus

Route Progress

STOP 1

Bus Conditions

Stop 1

You barely have time to settle into your seat before the bus halts at the next stop. You watch an African-American rider step on the bus.

Driver: "Pay your fare and re-enter by the rear door."

Passenger: "Thank you."

The passenger pays, exits the bus, and re-enters by the rear door, taking the last available seat in the rear section of the bus.

A white passenger enters by the front door.

Driver: "Pay your fare."

Passengers: "Thank you."

The passenger pays and walks directly to a seat in the front of the bus. **Show me.**

How was the legal?

[Next](#)

Why we created this eLearning experience for middle school students

It has now been more than fifty years since the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

It is certain many of today's students have grandparents and great-grandparents who endured the daily burdens of segregation. It is equally certain most students do not know specifically what legalized segregation meant to pre-civil rights movement generations.

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus is intended to bring to life a small aspect of Jim Crow laws for students, specifically the bus conditions that caused Rosa Parks to make her heroic stand on December 1, 1955.

About the eLearning

The eLearning invites students to travel back in time and play the role of a school newspaper opinion reporter assigned to ride the Montgomery, Alabama bus system in 1955. Armed with a trusty notebook and guided by teacher/editor Ms. Wells, students observe incidents between the bus driver and African-American patrons and record impressions of events over seven stops. Each simulated incident is a common and recorded historic event. Life magazine at the time observed: "the pattern of segregation is a crazy quilt of complexity and inconsistency." The purpose of the eLearning is to help students to understand the complex and inconsistent rules of riding the bus in 1955.

After completing all seven stops, the student's notes are assembled into a featured opinion story for the school newspaper. Ms. Wells may or may not make suggestions for improving the story before it is sent to the printer. The eLearning concludes with a printable version of the story in a custom school newspaper format.

Recommendations for using the eLearning in your classroom

The eLearning can be accessed at any time from this [location](#). Students who have home computers can certainly complete it as homework, but the eLearning can also be used in the classroom. An eLearning can make a great group activity; students can vote on choices to make for each interaction. A group setting allows students to discuss the eLearning events at the time they occur.

Suggested classroom discussion questions

- What does it mean to be the person who, by law, must sit in the back of the bus? What does he or she see and feel when sitting in the back? Ask the same questions about the person at the front of the bus.
- Rosa Parks was arrested for not following the bus rules. Could you see yourself making the same decision she did under similar circumstances?
- What about the bus drivers? Are they responsible for their actions or were they “just enforcing the rules”?
- Is it different to ride the bus today than in 1955?
- Does segregation exist today?
If so,
 - Is it mandated by law?
 - Does it happen by choice?
 - Does it happen by circumstance?
 - What can be done to improve the situation?
- Participating in the bus boycott was a big inconvenience for Montgomery citizens who had no other transportation available. Would you be willing to make such a sacrifice?

Using the eLearning

The following pages feature screenshots of the course and some capabilities of the screens.


Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus



Welcome to Montgomery, Alabama, 1955.

What's your first name?

[Next](#)

A black and white historical photograph of a street scene in Montgomery, Alabama, 1955. The image shows a group of people, including men in suits and hats, walking on a sidewalk. A car is visible in the background, and a tree trunk is in the foreground on the right.

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To personalize the course, the eLearning asks for a first name. This information does not go outside of the course.

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus



Who knew?

Jane, it turns out you're the star opinion reporter for your school's newspaper.

The English teacher/newspaper editor, Ms. Wells, has called you to her office to deliver your assignment.

What's the name of your newspaper? Start then Stop the newspaper generator to find out.



[Start](#) | [Stop](#)

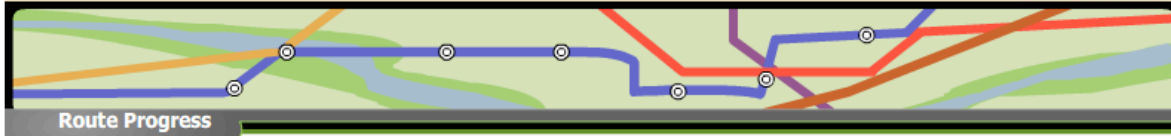
[Back](#) | [Next](#)



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The student can customize the school paper name using the “newspaper generator”.

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus



You head out into the daylight and walk toward your first stop. There's something not quite...modern...about your surroundings. Have you really been transported back in time? Click the links below to learn more about Montgomery, Alabama in 1955.

[Schools](#) | [Buses](#) | [Restaurants](#) | [City Hall](#)
[Cars](#) | [People](#) | [Churches](#) | [Housing](#)

Restaurants

African-American diners may only sit in certain areas of a restaurant and many restaurants refuse to serve African-American customers. This discriminatory practice was legal in 1955.

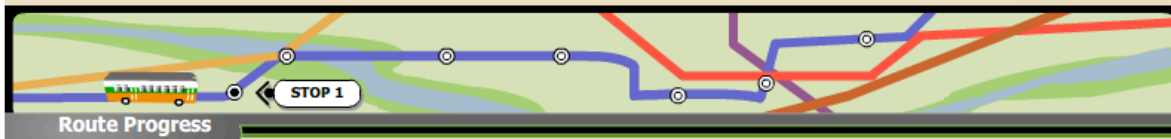
[Back](#) | [Next to board the bus!](#)



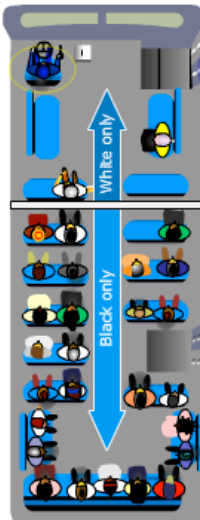
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Screens 4-6 set the scene for Montgomery, Alabama in 1955.

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus



Passenger Age 38, World War II veteran, machinist, father of two young children



Bus Conditions

Stop 1

You barely have time to settle into your seat before the bus halts at the next stop. You watch an African-American rider step on the bus.

Driver: "Pay your fare and re-enter by the rear door."

Passenger: "Thank you."

The passenger pays, exits the bus, and re-enters by the rear door, taking the last available seat in the rear section of the bus.

A white passenger enters by the front door.

Driver: "Pay your fare."

Passenger: "Thank you."

The passenger pays and walks directly to a seat in the front of the bus. [Show me.](#)

[How was this legal?](#)

[Next](#)

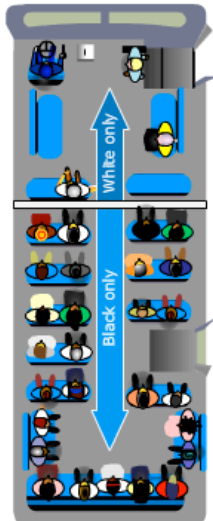
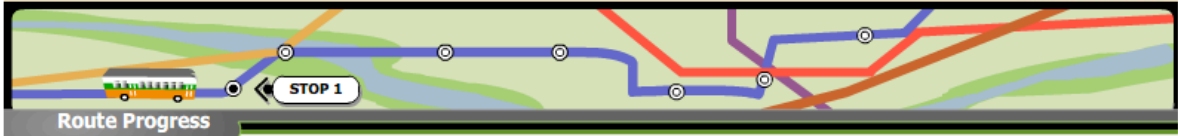


7

Each bus stop features the following controls:

- Route Progress—the top panel indicates how far you are along the bus journey.
- Halos around the passengers--hover the mouse pointer above the halos to learn more about the key people in each scenario.
- Bus Conditions—hover the mouse pointer above the Bus Conditions text to learn about all the bus passengers.
- Show me—click this link to set in motion the scenario described in text.
- Learn more links—in this case, the “How was this legal?” link provides more information about history and the bus rules.

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus



Bus Conditions

What do you make of this? **Choose the best statement for your article.**

[African-American riders are forced to go out of their way just to get on the bus.](#)

[African-American riders can't walk through the white section of the bus.](#)

[Riding the bus in 1955 seems different from riding the bus now.](#)

After viewing an incident at a bus stop, the student selects the descriptive statement that will later appear in the custom news story.

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus



Bus Conditions

How does this make you feel?

[Embarrassed, sad, or humiliated.](#)

[Angry or irritated.](#)

[Neutral or not bothered.](#)

[Confused or surprised.](#)

[Next](#)

Stop 1: African-American passengers pay in the front, exit, and re-enter at the rear door.

My note: African-American riders are forced to go out of their way just to get on the bus.

This makes me feel: Angry or irritated.




< 1/7 >

After each descriptive statement is selected, the student's custom notebook appears. The student is asked to assign an emotional response to the statement.


NOTE: The arrows at the bottom of the notebook allow students to review notes for each stop.

Each stop follows this pattern:

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus

Stop 1
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Driver: "Pay your fare."
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 How was this legal?
[Next](#)



Bus Conditions

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1. Witness the incident.

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus





What do you make of this? Choose the best statement for your article.



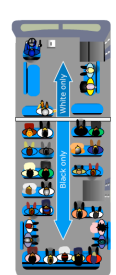
[African-American riders are forced to go out of their way just to get on the bus.](#)
[African-American riders can't walk through the white section of the bus.](#)
[Riding the bus in 1955 seems different from riding the bus now.](#)

Bus Conditions

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2. Assign a descriptive statement for the new story.

Before the Boycott: Riding the Bus

How does this make you feel?

[Embarrassed, sad, or humiliated.](#)
[Angry or irritated.](#)
[Neutral or not bothered.](#)
[Confused or surprised.](#)

Stop 1: African-American passengers pay in the front, exit, and re-enter at the rear door.
 My note: African-American riders are forced to go out of their way just to get on the bus.

Bus Conditions

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3. Assign an emotional response to what was witnessed.

You get off the bus, exhausted from your day-long excursion.

If you had to choose one word to describe your experience riding the city bus in 1955, what would it be?

[Angry](#)
[Surprised](#)
[Sad](#)
[Troubled](#)
[Neutral](#)

Once all seven stops are completed, the student is asked to assign an overall emotion to the experience. This emotion will be added to the news story.

Ms. Wells: Good morning! Did you happen to notice that the buses were unusually empty this morning?

Your response:

[Yes...is it a holiday or something?](#)

[Yes...this had something to do with my bus ride... didn't it?](#)

[I guess everyone figured out what a drag it is to ride the bus.](#)



You could say that. Today marks the start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

[Next](#)

Ms. Wells reappears to debrief the student about the experience. She provides insight into the history and the outcomes of the bus boycott.

Let's plug your notes into our (patent pending) Story-O-Matic and see what we get...

[Next](#)

The student's descriptive statements (notes) are then added to the "Story-O-Matic".

[Injustice on the City Bus in 1955](#)

By Jane

On Thursday I actually spent the day in 1955, riding the city bus. I feel sad about what I'm about to report.

Before I get to the ride itself, let me provide some background information. In 1955, most schools were racially segregated and black schools received less money. Public transportation was also segregated, allowing African-American riders to sit only in the back of the bus. Many restaurants refused to serve African-American customers and many landlords refused to rent to black tenants. The police regularly overlooked violations of laws that were supposed to alleviate some of the discrimination. This was the USA in 1955—not that long ago.

On the bus, there's a dividing line between the white and black sections of the bus. As the bus fills, an entire row of four riders must be vacated if one white person needs a seat. I witnessed the bus driver cruelly make an elderly woman move to the back of the bus to accommodate a white man at the fourth stop.

[Next](#)

The student's story appears in a reviewable version.

Jane, your story is a human interest marvel. You really pulled me in, helped me understand what happened and how you feel about the situation.

[Next](#)

Ms. Wells provides some last minute encouragement or advice before the story goes to print.

Ms. Wells: Take a look through this box of photos and select the one you think best reflects the story you've written. Feel free to try more than one—you never know if the next photo might look even better.

[Next](#)

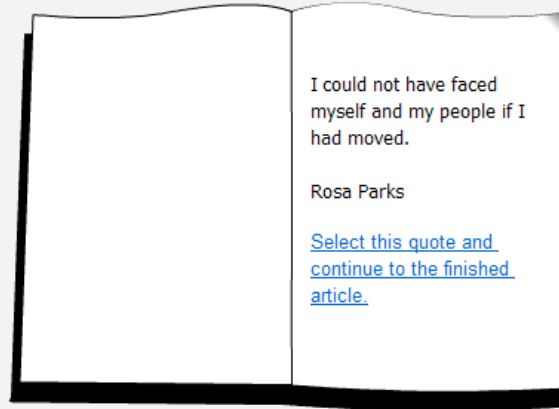


An elderly woman is removed from her seat because a white man wanted to sit in her row.



The student selects a photo to go along with the story.

Ms. Wells: Now, page through our Civil Rights book of quotations to find the perfect quote to highlight your story. The quote should summarize or restate a message in your story. Click the right corner of the page to view the quotes.



The student selects a famous civil rights quote to accompany the story.



"News with your views"

Roosevelt Bugle

Price 25 cents

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On the bus, there's a dividing line between the white and black sections of the bus. As the bus fills, an entire row of four riders must be vacated if one white person needs a seat. I witnessed the bus driver cruelly make an elderly woman move to the back of the bus to accommodate a white man at the fourth stop.

Did you know...African-American passengers pay at the front of the bus then exit and re-enter through the back door? I witnessed this at every stop. African-American riders are forced to go out of their way just to get on the bus.

One overloaded woman with a small child paid her fare and the bus left before she could enter at the rear door. This shows that African-American riders are treated unfairly.

When one African-American man was threatened and thrown off the bus, I knew that riding the bus can be unpleasant for African-American riders.



I could not have faced myself and my people if I had moved. -Rosa Parks

Did you know...Bus drivers routinely didn't stop to pick up African-American riders, leaving them stranded? When I observed a single African-American man stepping up to the curb to see that the bus didn't even slow down, I thought the driver bypassed the man deliberately because of his race.

Did you know...As long as people are willing to take a stand, things can change. Many riders wouldn't put up with being treated so unfairly. They refused to move and were even arrested. One famous rider was Rosa Parks. When she was arrested for not giving up her seat for a white man, it was the last straw. Her actions sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott where African-Americans refused to ride the bus for more than a year. Finally the bus company had to give in to the demands and start treating people better.

The finished, printable story appears. Click the Print button to print a copy of the story. For best results, print the story in a landscape orientation.

This concludes the eLearning!

Bibliography and Internet resources

Rosa Parks by Douglas Brinkley

The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.

[The National Civil Rights Museum](#)

[Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development](#)

[The Rosa Parks Bus at the Henry Ford Museum](#)

[Alabama Department of Archives and History Civil Rights Unit](#)

[The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott](#)

[@15](#) Best Buy's philanthropic initiative to support teens

Acknowledgments/Credits

Thanks to:

- Rosa Parks and all those who help to improve the world.
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Development team:

- Nancy Lacroix-Shutter and Bob Stryker, Best Buy Learning Solutions
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- Melissa Johnson, HR Program Manager, Diversity & Inclusion and Latinos Initiatives, Best Buy