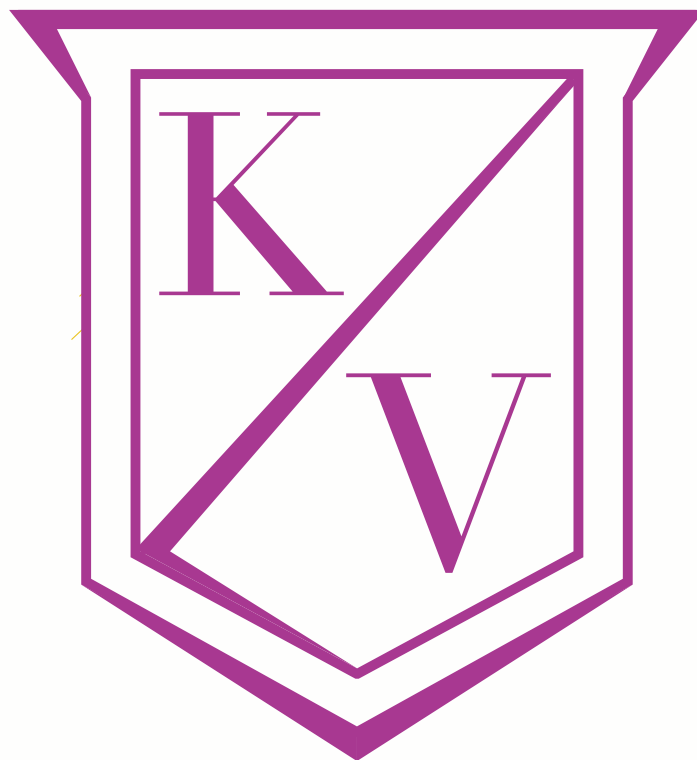


Heroes Who Inspire

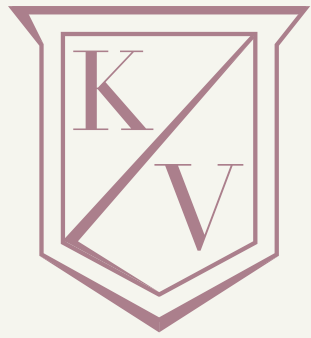
# Knightly Virtues



Rosa Parks

Learning About the Virtues  
of Justice & Courage

Heroes Who Inspire



# TEACHER'S NOTES

Rosa Parks

## Rosa Parks – Lesson Plan

The purpose of this pack is to reaffirm and develop pupils' knowledge and understandings of the character virtues, with particular reference to the virtues of **justice** and **courage**.

To accompany these Teacher's Notes, **Rosa Parks – The Story**, and **Rosa Parks – Resources for Pupils** are downloadable via the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues website ([www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources)).

The following supporting documents are also provided online:

- **Knightly Virtues Introduction Materials**
- **Virtues Toolkit** including activities on the following virtues: Self-Discipline, Honesty, Love, Gratitude, Justice, Courage, Service, Humility
- **Rosa Parks PowerPoint**
- **Other stories in the programme** including Gareth and Lynette, Don Quixote, Merchant of Venice, Robin Hood, El Cid, Beowulf, Joan of Arc and Anne Frank

### Background Information for Teachers

This information is to supplement the Rosa Parks PowerPoint which provides an introduction to the story, available online ([www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources)).

Rosa Parks was an African-American civil rights activist, known as 'the first lady of civil rights'. She was born in Alabama in 1913, and died in 2005, aged 92 years old. Parks' name became famous in the 1950s, when she refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama to a white passenger. Whilst not the first person to resist bus segregation, Parks' case became more popular, due to the support provided by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Parks was arrested for civil disobedience. Her name became synonymous with resistance to racial segregation around the world, and Parks collaborated with civil rights leaders including Martin Luther King Jr. Whilst Parks was widely honoured and supported in the years following the bus boycott, she initially suffered, and lost her job as a seamstress, and received death threats. Parks moved to Detroit and initially continued to work as a seamstress, before serving as secretary and receptionist to John Conyers, a US Representative from 1965-1988.

# Rosa Parks — Lesson Plan

**Title: Rosa Parks – Justice and Courage**

**Year Group 5/6**

Curriculum links: Literacy, History, Civil Rights

## Learning Objectives

1. To understand what the virtues of justice and courage mean in the story of Rosa Parks;
2. To accurately identify vocabulary which illustrate the virtues of justice and courage from the story of Rosa Parks;
3. To demonstrate sustained attention to an extended narrative and answer relevant questions accurately;
4. To be able to accurately retrieve information from the narrative which illustrates an answer or point of view.

## Learning Outcomes

1. To be able to identify and describe the virtues of justice and courage;
2. To begin to be able to relate the virtues of justice and courage to our own lives today.

## Resources

Related Knightly Virtues resources, including the Virtues Toolkit, are available via [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources)

**Provided:** Rosa Parks narrative, Rosa Parks Teacher's Notes, Rosa Parks Resources for Pupils

**Not Provided:** Interactive White Board, Flipchart, Pens

## Introduction (15mins)

Introduce/reaffirm the meaning of character and virtue (Knightly Virtues Introduction PowerPoint). Introduce the Knightly Virtues definitions of humility and honesty (Virtues Toolkit). Establish open space for pupil engagement principles.

## The Story (30-35mins)

Read the story to pupils. Provide pupils with the opportunity to clarify understanding. Provide pupils with access to the Glossary for reference to character names and new vocabulary.

## Activity (15-20mins) Virtue in Focus: Justice

Ask the pupils to read 'Schooling in Montgomery' and 'Arrest' sections of the story through for themselves. Then divide them into small groups and ask them to work together to identify examples where justice is present, or absent, from the situations described. There is space provided for them to write their answers. Pupils then think of examples where they have displayed justice in their own lives, or seen others display justice.

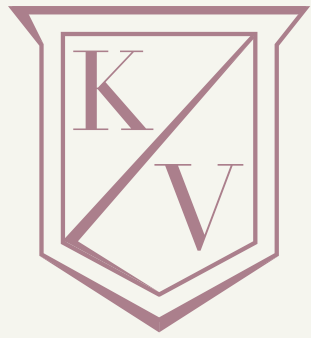
## Plenary (15mins)

Bring the group together to discuss the acts of justice or injustice found within the story and invite them to share their experiences of displaying or witnessing justice in their own lives. Show and read the courage virtue card (available in the Virtues Toolkit) and introduce the homework task.

## Progression/Homework Virtue in Focus: Courage

Courage task from the Virtues Toolkit found online at [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources)

Heroes Who Inspire



# THE STORY



Rosa Parks

Story retold by Jon Davison

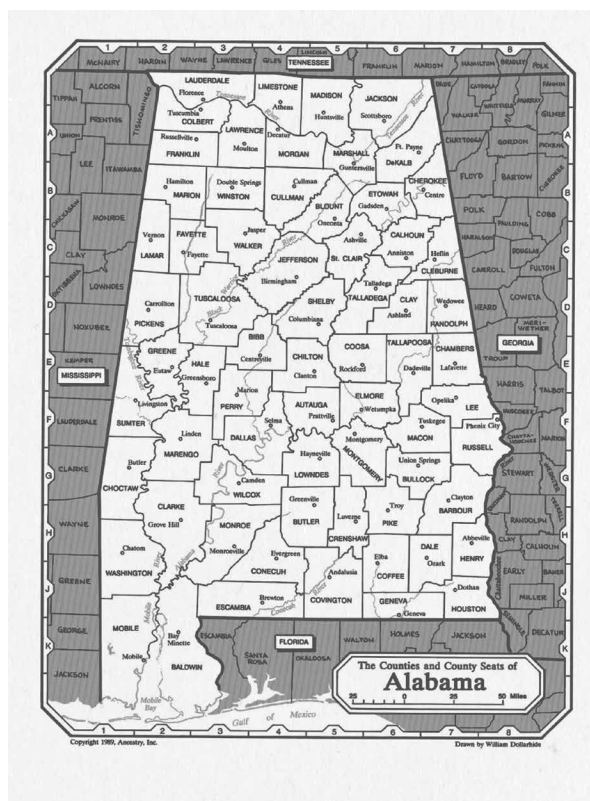
“Sometimes when Rosa and her friends walked to school, the bus carrying the white pupils would drive past and the white pupils would throw rubbish from the windows at them.”

# Introduction

Rosa Louise McCauley was born on 4 February 1913, in a place called Tuskegee, Alabama in the southern states of America. She grew up with her family, went to school like other children and when she was nineteen, she met Raymond Parks. They fell in love and married. This sounds like a very ordinary story, but we remember Rosa Parks as a very courageous woman, because she sat on a bus. That might sound strange to us, because many of us, our friends and family sit on buses every day. So why was this a courageous thing for Rosa to do?

The United States of America in which Rosa was born was very different from the USA we know today. Less than fifty years before Rosa was born, the US totally abolished slavery in 1865. Before that time, African American people living in the southern states of America could be owned by white Americans. They could be bought, sold and forced to work on farms and plantations. If they ran away, slaves could be returned to their owners by law.

During the whole of Rosa's childhood and her early adult life, the southern states of America operated a system of segregation - in their everyday public lives African American and White people were separated in their schools, in shops, restaurants and in many other situations that we would find very strange today. The laws of the southern states upheld this separation and people could be put in jail for breaking them. Many African American people were attacked, persecuted and even murdered by racist white people. Often law enforcement officers in the southern states did nothing to solve crimes committed against African American people.



## Going to School

Rosa began school at the age of six years. Her brother Sylvester began the following year, at the age of five. They went to a school for African American children near where they lived in Pine Level - it had just one teacher. At school Rosa enjoyed fairy tales and Mother Goose rhymes. She also enjoyed reading very much.

During the colder months, older boys had to go to cut and fetch wood to provide heating in the school. Boys at the white school did not have to do this as the school authorities looked after the heating. When Rosa was very young a new school was built for white pupils. The school was not very far from where she lived. But even though the school had been built with public money, including taxes paid by all adults in the community, Rosa could not attend it but had to go to the poorer school for African American children.

Some white pupils rode to school in a bus, but there were no school buses for African American pupils. Sometimes when Rosa and her friends walked to school, the bus carrying the white pupils would drive past and the white pupils would throw rubbish from the windows at them. Complaining would do no good as nobody would listen.

## Schooling in Montgomery

The nearest big town to Pine Level was called Montgomery. From the age of eleven years Rosa attended Montgomery Industrial School, which everybody called Miss White's school, after the head teacher and co-founder, Miss Alice L. White. The school had an excellent reputation. All the teachers at the school were white women from the north states of America. Therefore, when they travelled south to educate African American girls at the school, white people in Montgomery refused to have anything to do with them. Life was not easy for them. In the early days of the school it was burned down twice by angry white people.

The best lesson that Rosa learned at Miss White's school was that she was a person with dignity and self-respect. She decided that she would not set her sights lower than anybody else just because she was not white. The girls at the school were taught to be ambitious and to believe that they could achieve what they wanted in life. Rosa's mother and grandparents also encouraged her to think this way about herself.

Many aspects of life in those days were very different from today. On the public bus service between Pine Level and Montgomery, African American people could not travel inside, but had to ride on the roof of the bus with the luggage. There were other examples of segregation in Montgomery, too. For example, the public water fountains in Montgomery had signs on them: 'White' and 'Coloured'. Like many other African American children, Rosa and her friends wondered if 'White' water tasted different from 'Coloured' water. They wanted to know if 'White' water was white and if 'Coloured' water came out of the fountain in different colours. Of course, Rosa and her friends began to understand that there was no difference in



“Today, every American citizen over the age of 18 years has the right to vote. But the right to vote for all citizens in the USA did not become law until 1965. In those days, the vast majority African Americans living in the southern states could not vote.”

the colour or taste of the water. The only difference was who was allowed to drink it from which public fountains.

By the time Rosa was sixteen years old, her grandmother had become very ill. Although Rosa had begun eleventh grade in September, she dropped out of high school after a month to look after her grandmother. Sadly, she died. Rosa started work and did a number of jobs from cleaning to working in a shirt factory. Although she went back to school briefly, she had to drop out again when her mother became ill.

## Marriage

In December 1932, Rosa married Raymond Parks. It was a small wedding attended by family members and close friends. They went to live on the East Side of Montgomery in a lodging house on South Jackson Street.

Parks was very supportive of Rosa's wish to finish school so she went back to school after they were married. She was awarded her High School diploma in 1933 when she was 20 years old. At that time only a small percentage of African American people in Montgomery were High School graduates. In 1940, seven years after Rosa gained diploma only 7 out of every 100 (7%) had a High School education.

After a while Rosa and her husband went to live on South Union Street, where they stayed with Mr. King Kelly, who was a deacon of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. One day Rosa went to the railway station with Mr. Kelly and his daughter to see them off on the train. She was walking a short distance behind them. As they were on their way to the train a police officer approached Rosa and asked if she had a ticket. She told him she didn't. He pushed her back against some railings and told her that if she did not have a ticket, she could not go any further. It was clear that officer had a club and a gun, which he would use if he felt provoked. Rosa could do nothing but move out of the way. She was very upset by the incident.

## The right to vote

Today, every American citizen over the age of 18 years has the right to vote. But the right to vote for all citizens in the USA did not become law until 1965. In those days, the vast majority African Americans living in the southern states could not vote. At the time in order to register to vote African Americans had to have white people to approve of them. Most white people in the South made it very difficult for African American people to register to vote.

Rosa tried to register to vote in 1943, when she was thirty. She had to take a test. She was told she had failed. No reason had to be given for why she had failed, or what she could do to pass the test. The second time she tried, the same thing happened, but she was sure that she had answered the questions correctly. She took the test a third time in 1945. She kept a hand-written copy of all her answers to the test. If she was failed a third time, she was going to take legal action. But her certificate arrived in the post. She was now a registered voter and

could now vote.

Rosa became more and more interested in the rights of African American citizens. In the mid 1940s she became a member of the local branch of what was known as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This national organisation had been founded by a small group of African American and White Americans to protest against racial discrimination, lynching, brutality, and unequal education. Rosa became secretary of the local branch and one of her duties was to keep a record of incidents of discrimination, unfair treatment or acts of violence against African American citizens.

There were many violent incidents against African American people in the late 1940s, after World War II ended. African American soldiers who had fought for their country were returning home, and they believed they should have equal rights. Many World War II veterans came back and tried to get registered to vote but could not. They were treated with even more disrespect, especially if they were in uniform. White Americans felt that things should remain as they had always been.

## Public Transport

African American people had special rules to follow on public transport. Montgomery buses contained thirty-six seats. The first ten were always reserved for white people, even if there were no white passengers on the bus. African American people were required to sit in the last ten seats at the back of the bus. Even if there were empty seats in the front of the bus, they could not use them.

It was up to the bus drivers how they organised who sat in the middle sixteen seats. They had total control and passengers could not argue. Bus drivers carried guns and had what was known as 'police power' to rearrange seating and enforce rules of segregation. Some bus drivers were stricter than others. But usually once the ten seats in the back of the bus were filled, all the other African American passengers had to stand. If the front ten seats and the middle sixteen seats filled, drivers would insist that the African American passengers give up

their seats in the back section. People who refused to give their seats would be dragged from the bus by police and arrested even if they were children or elderly women.



“Some people have said that she didn’t give up her seat because she was tired, but that was not true. She was not tired physically, but she was tired of giving in. The bus driver saw her still sitting there, and asked her again to stand up. Rosa refused.”

# Arrest

In the winter of 1955 Rosa Parks was 42 years old. She was working as an assistant tailor at 'Montgomery Fair' department store. It was the kind of store where assistants had to smile and to be polite no matter how rudely or badly they were treated.

On the evening of 1 December 1955 Rosa boarded a bus after work to take her home. She took a seat in the middle section of the bus. At the next stop some white people got on. They filled up the front ten seats, and one man was left standing. The driver noticed the man standing. Then he looked back at Rosa and the people sitting near her and demanded their seats. But Rosa and three other people did not move.

The driver spoke a second time and a man in the window seat next to her stood up. Rosa moved to let him pass. She looked across the aisle and saw that the two women were also standing.

Rosa moved over to the window seat. She had begun to realise that the more African American people gave in and did what they were told, the worse they were treated.

Some people have said that she didn't give up her seat because she was tired, but that was not true. She was not tired physically, but she was tired of giving in.

The bus driver saw her still sitting there, and asked her again to stand up. Rosa refused. He said that he would have her arrested. Rosa replied, 'You may do that.'

The driver got out of the bus and stayed outside for a few minutes, waiting for the police.

As she sat there, she tried not to think about what might happen to her. She knew that anything was possible. She could be manhandled or beaten. She could be arrested.

But she tried not to think too deeply about what might happen to her, or she might have got off the bus. So she chose to remain and wait for the consequences.

## Rosa Parks — Glossary

### Characters

Rosa Parks	an African-American civil rights activist
Raymond Parks	Rosa's husband

### The Story

abolish	to formally put an end to
dignity	being worthy of respect, or a composed manner
High School diploma	academic qualification for US school leavers

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)	an African-American civil rights organization in the United States
--	--

persecute	to subject someone to ill-treatment, particularly because of their skin colour
-----------	--

'police power'	United States constitutional law, to enforce order
----------------	--

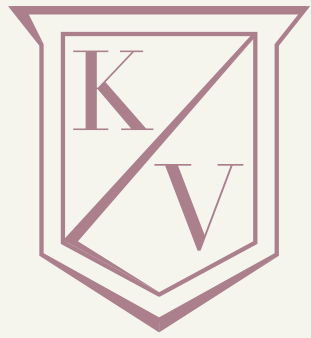
provoke	to deliberately make someone react, possibly making them angry or annoyed
---------	---

segregation	the separation of racial groups in daily life
-------------	---

slavery	when people are treated as the property of someone else
---------	---

vote	a method for making a group decision
------	--------------------------------------

Heroes Who Inspire



# RESOURCES

— FOR PUPILS —

Rosa Parks

## Activity 1

With the virtue of justice in mind, read the sections *Schooling in Montgomery* and *Arrest* again.

- A** In small groups discuss how the situation in Alabama in the 1950s is different from your experience today. Describe how you believe the virtue of justice is present or absent from the situations described. Is anyone displaying injustice? If so, how? Write your answers in the space below.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- B** Put yourself in Rosa's position when she was asked to give up her seat on the bus in Montgomery. What do you think you would do if you were asked to give up your seat? Describe a situation where you have displayed the virtue of justice in your life, or seen someone else show justice. What happened?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Virtue in Focus

Justice





# The Knightly Virtues

## The Knightly Virtues Programme 8 virtues

**Humility** — To put the needs of others before your own, and be willing to take care of others as you take care of yourself.

**Honesty** — To be true to yourself and other people.

**Love** — To feel and to show great affection for another person or group of people.

**Service** — Working hard for a person, organisation or country. Helping other people.

**Courage** — Having the strength and will to know what you should do even though you may be afraid.

**Justice** — To have an understanding of what it is to uphold what is right.

**Self-discipline** — The ability to control yourself and be very organised.

**Gratitude** — To feel or to show appreciation for something that has been done for you.

## Other Virtues

**Mercy** — To show forgiveness to someone who has done wrong.

**Generosity** — To be kind and generous to those around you.

**Faith** — To stand strong in your ideals and beliefs.

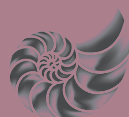
**Nobility** — To be of impeccably strong moral mind or character.

**Hope** — To always keep a positive outlook on how your actions will improve your life and the lives of those around you.

**Strength** — To have the inner resolve to stand firm and not back down.

For more information about other Knightly Virtues resources please go to:  
[www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources)

For more information about the Knightly Virtues Research Report please go to:  
[www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtues](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtues)



## Additional Teacher Narrative

### Rosa Parks in her own words

The following extracts come from Rosa Parks' own autobiography called 'Rosa Parks: My Story' written with Jim Haskins (Puffin; Reprint edition: 31 Jan 1999, isbn 0141301201) - a copy of which is provided with this pack.

#### How it all started

One evening in early December 1955 I was sitting in the front seat of the coloured section of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. The white people were sitting in the white section. More white people got on, and they filled up all the seats in the white section. When that happened, we black people were supposed to give up our seats to the whites. But I didn't move. The white driver said, "let me have those front seats." I didn't get up. I was tired of giving in to white people.

"I'm going to have you arrested," the driver said.

"You may do that," I answered.

Two white policemen came. I asked one of them, "Why do you all push us around?"

He answered, "I don't know, but the law is the law and you're under arrest."

(p.1)

For half of my life there were laws and customs in the south that kept African Americans segregated from Caucasians and allowed white people to treat black people without any respect.

I never thought this was fair, and from the time I was a child, I tried to protest against disrespectful treatment. But it was very hard to do anything about segregation and racism when white people had the power of the law behind them.

Somehow we had to change the laws. And we had to get enough white people on our side to be able to succeed. I had no idea when I refused to give up my seat on that Montgomery bus that my small action would help put an end to the segregation laws in the South. I only knew that

I was tired of being pushed around. I was a regular person, just as good as anybody else.

There had been a few times in my life when I had been treated by white people like a regular person, so I knew what that felt like. It was time that other white people started treating me that way.

(p2)

I was born on February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, in the USA and named Rosa after my maternal grandmother, Rose. My mother took me to live with her parents in Pine Level, Alabama, when I was a toddler. Later my father joined us, and we lived as a family until I was two and a half years old. He left Pine Level to find work, and I did not see him again until I was five years old and my brother was three. He stayed several days and left again. I did not see my father anymore until I was an adult and married.

(p6)

I don't remember this myself, but my grandmother told me that one time when my mother was away, she was going to give my brother a whipping. He was just a little fellow, and she was scolding him, and then she took up a little switch. I said, Grandma, don't whip brother. He's just a little baby and he doesn't have no mama and no papa either." And so, she said, she put the switch down and looked at me and decided she would not whip him that day. I can remember what a mischievous little boy he was and how I got more whippings for not telling on things he did than I did for things I did myself. I never did get out of that attitude of trying to be protective of him.

(p20)

## ..... **Not just another little girl** .....

I was about six when I started school. Sylvester started a year later, when he was around five. We went to the one-teacher black school in Pine Level, in a little frame schoolhouse that was just a short distance from where we lived.

At school I liked fairy tales and Mother Goose rhymes. I remember trying to find Little Red Riding Hood because someone had said it was a nice book to read. No matter what Miss Hill gave me to read, I would sit down and read the whole book, not just a page or two.

(p25)

Some of the older boys at school were very good at running sports and playing ball. They were also the ones who were responsible for wood at the school. The larger boys would go out and cut the wood and bring it in.

They didn't have to do this at the white school. The town or county took care of heating at the white school. I remember that when I was very young they built a new school for the white children not very far from where we lived, and of course we had to pass by it. It was a nice brick building, and it still stands there today. I found out later that it was built with public money, including taxes paid by both whites and blacks.

(p26)

Another difference between our school and the white school was that we went for only five months while they went for nine months. Many of the black children were needed by their families to plough and plant in the spring and harvest in the fall. Their families were sharecroppers like my grandparents' neighbours. Sharecroppers worked land owned by

plantation owners, and they got to keep a portion of the crop they grew. The rest they had to give to the owner of the plantation. So they needed their children to help. I was aware of the big difference between blacks and whites by the time we started school.

(p27)

Some of the white children rode a bus to school. There were no school buses for black children. I remember when we walked to school, sometimes the bus carrying the white children would come by and the white children would throw trash out the windows at us. After a while when we would see the white school bus coming, we would just get off the road and walk in the fields a little bit distant from the road. We didn't have any of what they call "civil rights" back then, so there was no way to protest and nobody to protest to. It was just a matter of survival – like getting off the road – so we could exist from day to day.

(p29)

Not all the white people in Pine Level were hostile to us black people, and I did not grow up feeling that all white people were hateful. When I was very young, I remember, there was an old, old white lady who used to take me fishing. She was real nice and treated us just like anybody else. She used to visit my grandparents a lot and talk with them for a long time. So there were some good white people in Pine Level.

(p36)

## Schooling in Montgomery

When I was eight years old...my mother had the idea of sending me to Miss White's school because it had a great reputation, better than the public junior high school. Miss White was from Melrose Massachusetts. All her faculty were white women from the north. That meant that when they came south to educate black girls they were ostracized by the white community in Montgomery. Any social life they had, had to be with blacks, and therefore they went to black churches and so on. Miss White had a very rough time. Her school was burned down at least twice in the early days.

(p43)

What I learned best at Miss White's school was that I was a person with dignity and self respect, and I should not set my sights lower than anybody else just because I was black. We were taught to be ambitious and to believe that we could do what we wanted in life. This was not something I learned just at Miss White's school. I had learned it from my grandparents and my mother too.

(p49)

There were other aspects of segregation in Montgomery that I had to get used to. Public water fountains were one. The public water fountains in Montgomery had signs that said "White" and "Coloured." Like millions of black children, before me and after me, I wondered if "White" water tasted different from "Coloured" water. I wanted to know if "White" water was white and if "Coloured" water came in different colours. It took me a while to

understand that there was no difference in the water. It had the same colour and taste. The difference was who got to drink it from which public fountains.

(p46)

## ..... Marriage and activism .....

I first met Raymond Parks when a mutual friend, a lady I knew very well, introduced us. Parks – everyone called him Parks – was a very nice person, and I enjoyed talking to him. He would drive along and tell me about his life experiences and problems that he'd had as a youngster. Parks looked after his ill mother and grandmother until they died when he was in his late teens.

He was the first man of our race, aside from my grandfather with whom I actually discussed anything about the racial conditions. And he was the first, aside from my grandfather and Mr Gus Vaughan, who was never actually afraid of white people.

(p55,57,59)

Parks was also the first real activist I ever met. He was a long time member of the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, when I met him. Later I came to understand that he was always interested in and willing to work for things that would improve life for his race, his family and himself.

(p59)

The second time Parks and I were ever in each other's company, he talked about getting married. I hadn't given marriage a thought at all. He spoke about it and I didn't pay it any attention. But one day he said "I really think we ought to get married," and I agreed with him. The next day, when I was at church, he asked my mother's permission to marry me, and when I came home from church she told me that she had agreed. He didn't actually propose to me at all, or anyway not formally. That was in August of 1932, we were married in December of 1932 in Pine Level, in my mother's home. It was not a big wedding, just family and close friends. We didn't even send out any invitations. After we got married we went to live on the East side of Montgomery not very far from Alabama State in a rooming house on South Jackson Street.

(p63)

My husband was very supportive of my desire to finish school and I went back to school after we were married. I received my High School diploma in 1933 when I was 20 years old. At that time only a small percentage of black people in Montgomery were High School graduates. In 1940, seven years after I got my diploma only 7 out of every 100 had as much as a High School education.

(p64)

After a while we left Huffman Street and moved to South Union Street, where we stayed with Mr. King Kelly, who was a deacon of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

(p68)

While we were living at Mr. Kelly's, an incident happened to me that I didn't even tell my husband about. I went downtown to the railroad station with the Kellys - Mr. Kelly and his daughter and her two children - to see them off on the train. I was walking a little behind them. We were on our way to the train when a policeman approached me and asked if I had a ticket. I told him, "No." He pushed me back against the railing and said, "If you don't have a ticket, you can't go." I knew that he had a club and a gun and that there wasn't anything for me to do but just get out of the way. It upset me quite a bit.

(p69-70)

What really upset me was that another young black woman was there - about my age, early twenties. I guess she must have been somebody who knew the policeman, because she was kind of playing with him, saying, "I'm going through." He said, "No, don't you go through," and he sort of swung his club in her direction. She laughed, and that upset me just as much, because she seemed rather familiar with him. To me, she showed a lack of respect for herself as a woman, and especially as a black woman. She had seen him treat me with disrespect. His treatment of her was just as disrespectful, but she had laughed about it.

(p70)

## ..... **We fight for the right to vote** .....

The right to vote is so important for Americans. We vote for people to represent us in government. If we do not like the way they represent us, we can vote for someone else. But in those days most black people in the South could not vote.

The segregationists made it very difficult for black people to register to vote. In order to get registered blacks had to have white people to vouch for them. A small number of blacks who were in good favour with the white folks did get registered in that way. But once they got registered, they did not want other blacks to do the same. I guess they felt that when the white people vouched for and approved of them being registered, that put them on a different level from the rest of us.

(p73)

The second time I tried to register to vote, I was put off a Montgomery city bus for the first time, I didn't follow the rules. The driver who put me off was a mean one. He was tall and thickset with an intimidating posture. His skin was rough-looking, and he had a mole near his mouth. I never wanted to be on that man's bus again. After that, I made a point of looking at who was driving the bus before I got on. I didn't want any more run-ins with that mean one.

(p77-78)

Black people had special rules to follow. There were thirty-six seats on a Montgomery bus. The first ten were reserved for whites, even if there were no white passengers on the bus. There was no law about the ten seats in the back of the bus, but it was sort of understood that they were for black people. Blacks were required to sit in the back of the bus, but it was sort

of understood that they were for black people. Blacks were required to sit in the back of the bus, and even if there were empty seats in the front, we couldn't sit in them. Once the seats in the back were filled, then all the other black passengers had to stand. If whites filled up the front section, some drivers would demand that blacks give up their seats in the back section. Some bus drivers were meaner than others. Not all of them were hateful, but segregation itself is vicious.

(p77)

By the time I was put off the bus, I was a member of the NAACP. It was a national organization with headquarters in New York, founded by a small group of African Americans and Caucasians who believed in democracy... They formed the group to protest against racial discrimination, lynching, brutality, and unequal education. As secretary of the NAACP, I recorded and sent membership payments to the national office, answered telephones, wrote letters, and sent out press releases to the newspapers. One of my main duties was to keep a record of cases of discrimination or unfair treatment or acts of violence against black people.

(p80,84)

There were more violent incidents against black people in the late 1940s, after World War II ended. Black soldiers who had served in the armed forces were coming home, and they felt as if they should have equal rights since they had served their country. A lot of black World War II veterans came back and tried to get registered to vote and could not. They found they were treated with even more disrespect, especially if they were in uniform. Whites felt that things should remain as they had always been.

There were cases of violence against blacks all over, not just in Alabama.

(92,93)

When I first met Septima Poinsette Clark... She was in her late fifties and teaching citizenship classes at Highlander School... Her job was to teach adults to read and write and learn about basic citizenship so they could become teachers of others, so they could register to vote. I spent ten days at Highlander for the NAACP and went to different workshops, mostly on how to desegregate schools. Everything was very organised. We all had duties, and they were listed on a bulletin board each day. We shared the work and the play. We forgot what colour anybody was. I was forty-two years old, and it was one of the few times in my life up to that point when I did not feel any hostility from white people. I experienced people of different races and backgrounds meeting together in workshops and living together in peace and harmony. I felt that I could express myself honestly without any repercussions or antagonistic attitudes from other people. It was hard to leave, knowing what I was going back to, but of course I knew I had to leave. So I went back to Montgomery and back to my job as an assistant tailor at Montgomery Fair department store, where you had to be smiling and polite no matter how rudely you were treated. And back to the city buses, with their segregation rules.

(p107)



## You're under arrest

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 recognised 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. He was still tall and heavy, with red, rough looking skin. And he was still mean-looking. I saw a vacant seat in the middle section of the bus and took it. The next stop was the Empire Theatre, 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.

I thought back to the time when I used to sit up all night and didn't sleep, and my grandfather would have his gun right by the fireplace, or if he had his one-horse wagon going anywhere, he always had his gun in the back of the wagon. 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.

The driver of the bus saw me still sitting there, and he asked was I going to stand up. I said "No". He said "Well, I'm going to have you arrested." Then I said, "you may do that" These were the only words we said to each other. He got out of the bus and stayed outside for a few minutes, waiting for the police.

As I sat there, I tried not to think about what might happen. I knew that anything was possible. I could be manhandled or beaten. I could be arrested. 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. In fact if I had let myself think too deeply about what might happen to me, I might have gotten off the bus. But I chose to remain.

(p113-116)