



Module 1, Unit 2, Lesson Plan 1

Montgomery Bus Boycott

(Grades 6-12)

Learning Targets/Objectives:

- Use the free newspaper database curated by the Library of Congress titled “Chronicling America” to research the Montgomery Bus Boycott
- Analyze and assess the strategies of the Montgomery Bus Boycott
- Synthesize ideas about the bus boycott

Success Criteria:

- Utilize the Chronicling America newspaper database
- Identify themes among student work in order to craft an original perspective about the Montgomery Bus Boycott

Anchor Text:

- Library of Congress. “Chronicling America.” Newspaper Archive. Retrieved at <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

Supplemental Resources:

- *Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL). “Lone Negro Waits At Bus Stop.” December 6, 1955. 1.
- King, Rev. M.L. and W.J. Powell. Integrated Bus Suggestions. November 19, 1956. [bussuggestions_809ade83cc.png \(701x963\) \(cuny.edu\)](https://www.cuny.edu/libraries/chroniclingamerica/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/bussuggestions_809ade83cc.png)
- Library of Congress. “Chronicling America Database Tutorial.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWWHF7rQsiA>
- Newspaper Analysis Sheet

Lesson Content Overview:

On Thursday, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a seamstress at a Montgomery department store, was arrested for violating Montgomery’s segregation laws when she refused to give up her seat to a male passenger on a Montgomery City Lines bus driven by James F. Blake. Parks was jailed for violating Chapter 5, Section II of the City Code of Montgomery, a section giving bus drivers “police powers” in assigning seats according to “race.” She was later released under a \$100 bond.¹ On Saturday, December

¹ *Alabama Journal*. “City Charge Faced by Negro Bus Rider.” December 2, 1955. 6C; Joe Azbell. “Negro Groups Ready Boycott of City Lines.” *The Montgomery Advertiser*. December 4, 1955. 1.

3, leaflets were dispersed announcing a boycott of Montgomery's public transit line set to begin on Monday, December 5. Jo Ann Robinson, President of the Women's Political Council (WPC), and two other women produced the leaflets that spread word of the boycott among the Black citizens of Montgomery. The mimeographed leaflets read as follows:

Don't ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or any place Monday, December 5. Another Negro woman has been arrested and put in jail because she refused to give up her bus seat. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. If you work, take a cab, or share a ride, or walk, come to a mass meeting, Monday at 7:00 pm, at the Holt Street Baptist Church for further instruction.

The boycott of Montgomery buses began on the day of Parks' hearing, December 5. Montgomery Recorder's Court Judge John B. Scott fined Parks \$10 and the \$4 cost of the police court. The bus driver, James Blake, served as one of three witnesses for the state. While Parks remained silent throughout the trial, her attorney, Fred D. Gray, informed Judge Scott they would appeal the case. That same day, Montgomery City Lines Manager J. H. Bagley reported that 90 percent of Montgomery's Black population refused to ride its buses. At the start of the boycott, Fred Daniel, 19, was arrested and jailed on a disorderly conduct charge for using force to prevent a Black woman from boarding a bus. Black cab drivers in the city only charged 10 cents a passenger from 4 a.m. to 9 a.m. and from 3 p.m. until 11 p.m.²

Before the evening meeting on December 5, King was elected to head the MIA. With only 20 minutes to prepare for the 7:00 p.m. meeting that evening, King gave a landmark speech detailing why Black people in Montgomery should boycott the bus line. King appealed to the edicts of God, a sense of dignity and self-respect, and love to inspire and motivate those in attendance at the meeting. He said:

And we are not wrong, we are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to earth. If we are wrong, justice is a lie. Love has no meaning. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.³

The speech received rousing applause and propelled Dr. King to the forefront of the Black freedom struggle in the United States. It was during this historic time that King refined the nonviolent conflict resolution strategies and tactics of Mahatma Gandhi and encouraged everyone to embrace nonviolence and love as a means of overcoming evil. Utilizing conflict resolution tactics during the bus boycott was essential in that many of the leaders, including King and his young family, were the victims of unscrupulous criticism, death threats, and bombings. Many church officers and even King's father, Rev. Martin Luther "Daddy" King, Sr., encouraged him to consider hiring an armed guard to protect him. Reflection on that situation, King commented:

How could I serve as one of the leaders of a nonviolent movement and at the same time use weapons of violence for my personal protection? Coretta and I talked the matter over for several days and finally agreed that arms were no solution ... When I decided that I couldn't keep a gun, I

² Bunny Honicker. "Negress Draws Fine in Segregation Case Involving Bus Ride." *Alabama Journal*. December 5, 1955 1-2.

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, December 5, 1955. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/mia-mass-meeting-holt-street-baptist-church>

came face to face with the question of death and dealt with it. From that point on, I no longer needed a gun nor have I been afraid. Had we become distracted by the question of my safety we would have lost the moral offensive and sunk to the level of our oppressors.⁴

The initial demands of the boycott leaders did not include changing the segregation law itself, but sought to accomplish the following things:

- (1) Blacks would be treated politely by the bus drivers.
- (2) A first-come, first-seated policy with whites filling the buses from the front and Blacks from the rear; Black people would not have to give up their seats to white people.
- (3) Blacks would be hired as bus drivers.

King and others were even indicted for violating the state of Alabama's boycott laws. In early June 1956, the U.S. District Court ruled that racial segregation of Alabama City bus lines was unconstitutional. After more than a year of organized protest, on December 20, 1956, the MIA voted to end the boycott and to return to the buses on December 21 (382 days) on a non-segregated basis. Although Blacks in Montgomery could now ride the buses freely, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling did not protect Blacks from the wave of terror via home and church bombings, launched by the Ku Klux Klan and other hate groups.

Instructional Sequence:

- **Opener:**
Show students the picture titled "Lone Negro Waits At Bus Stop" from the *Montgomery Advertiser* on December 6, 1955. Ask students the following series of questions. The teacher may choose to have students write their responses, or the teacher can lead the class in a discussion.

- "What do you know about the Montgomery Bus Boycott?"
- "What is the purpose of a boycott?"
- "After looking at the photograph from the *Montgomery Advertiser*, what pressure might the woman in the picture feel after not participating in the bus boycott?"
- "Would you defend this woman for not participating in the boycott? Explain."

SEL Connection: Do you think you could risk your safety for others the way leaders of the bus boycott did? Explain your answer.

- **Class Discussion:**
Using the Lesson Content Overview and supplemental resources, the teacher will facilitate a discussion on the history of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Discussion should center on the death of Emmett Till being an inspiring factor in Rosa Parks' actions on December 1, 1955, the Montgomery Improvement Association, and details about the boycott. The teacher should use the 1956 "Integrated Bus Suggestions" to guide the discussion. [bussuggestions_809ade83cc.png \(701x963\) \(cuny.edu\)](#)
 - Teacher should emphasize the cause and effect of the boycott

⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr. quotes in Clayborne Carson, ed. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* retrieved at The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/publications/autobiography-martin-luther-king-jr-contents/chapter-8-violence-desperate>

- Teachers should focus on the dates December 1, 1955 (Rosa Parks’s arrest), December 5, 1955 (first day of the boycott), and December 21, 1956 (boycott’s conclusion, integration of buses in Montgomery upheld by Supreme Court decision.)
- Teacher should define the following terms:
 - Fourteenth Amendment
 - Fifteenth Amendment
 - Jim Crow Laws
 - de jure segregation
 - de facto segregation
 - desegregation
- **Individual Research:**
Teacher will introduce students to the Library of Congress’s newspaper archive “[Chronicling America](#).” After training the students to use the database, have students search “Bus Boycott in Montgomery” from December 1955 to December 1956. Ask students to sort by “Date” (oldest to newest).
 - Students should find three articles about the bus boycott and complete the newspaper analysis sheet.
- **Small Group Discussion:**
Putting students in groups of three to four, students will share findings. Students can use the three questions below as guiding questions:
 - “What is the name of the newspaper and headline?”
 - “What was the content of the article?”
 - “What was Dr. King’s role in the bus boycott? Did you discover the name of the organization that orchestrated the boycott?”

Formative Assessment:

- After sharing, students will identify and discuss two or three common themes in their articles. Themes might include but are not limited to, any of the following: communication, sacrifice, hardship, and strategy. Students will retell, either orally or in writing, the history of the Montgomery Bus Boycott by emphasizing at least two themes. Students must cite evidence from newspaper research.

Adaptations for Student Needs

IEP:

- Sizes of student groups range
- Students team up with a peer partner, while others would prefer to work individually.
- There is a variety of small-group work
- Chunking information
- Visual cues and wait time
- Visual supports (maps, images, PowerPoint slides, handouts)
- Assessments will be modified, and students given extra time

ELD

- Modified/simplified reading material
- Content-related lists/handouts of key terms

- Text is supported by visuals and connected to real-life experiences