



Classroom Guide for **THE BUS RIDE**

by **William Miller**
illustrated by **John Ward**
introduction by **Rosa Parks**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grade 2

Interest Level: Grades 1–5

Accelerated Reader® Level: 3.0/.5

Lexile™ Measure: 480

*Reading levels based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes:

Personal Strength, Overcoming Injustice, Civil Rights, Sacrifice, Family, Love, African American Interest

Synopsis

This book is a fictionalized version of Rosa Parks's historic stand on December 1, 1955, when she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. William Miller, author of *The Bus Ride*, has retold the story from the point of view of a young girl named Sara. In Miller's story, it is Sara who goes to the front of the bus out of curiosity and an emerging sense of injustice. She is taken off the bus and ends up at the police station. However, the media gets in on this unusual event. The next day, Sara's act of defiance is headline news and soon sparks a rider boycott and an eventual overturning of the offending law that treats African American and white riders differently on public buses. Her actions are also a triumph for a child discovering the courage of her convictions.

Background

In 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a bus and give up her seat to a white man, racial segregation was the norm in southern states. The so-called Jim Crow laws kept African Americans and whites apart in almost all aspects of life. Separate entrances for public buildings, restrooms, drinking fountains, hospitals,

restaurants, libraries, and places of worship were almost universal in the South. Only the year before (1954) had the U.S. Supreme Court struck down segregation in public schools with the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The Supreme Court had also ruled in November 1955 that segregation on interstate buses was illegal. However, the buses that most African Americans in Montgomery rode were owned by the city, and Rosa Parks's action violated Montgomery law. After her arrest, the black community of Montgomery staged a boycott of city buses. The leader of this boycott was a young minister, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. The boycott lasted more than a year, until on December 20, 1956, the Supreme Court declared bus segregation in Montgomery unconstitutional. For many people, Rosa Parks's action was the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in this country.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Discussion and Questions

Before reading *The Bus Ride* with the class, you may wish to share the background material to help students understand the times and setting of the story. Then explore questions such as these with students.

- How do you get to school each day? Have you ever faced problems getting to school? What were they?
- How do you feel when something is forbidden to you? Are you ever curious? What happens?
- What does it mean to be brave? What is the bravest thing you have ever done? Why did you do it?
- What is an injustice? What examples do you know about? How might people overcome an injustice?
- What are some laws that you know about? How do they affect your life? Why is it important for people to follow laws? What happens when people break laws? Are there any laws that you would like to have changed? Why?

Teacher Tip

This story is also relevant as part of your celebration of Women's History Month in March. Sara is a strong female character whose personal strength has far-reaching effects. You may wish to introduce students to the beginnings of the Women's Rights Movement and explore its similarities to and interconnections with the Civil Rights Movement.

Exploring the Book

Display the book cover. Read aloud the title and discuss the illustration. Ask students to talk about what the girl's posture and expression convey to them. What might have happened on a bus ride that she took?

Point out the author's name and ask students if they have read any other books by William Miller. (William Miller has published numerous children's books with African

American themes. Search our Web site by the author's name for a complete list of Miller's titles.)

Point out that Rosa Parks wrote an introduction to the story. If students are not familiar with Rosa Parks, give a brief introduction about her. (See also the BACKGROUND INFORMATION above.) Ask student why they think she might have written an introduction to this story.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Read aloud Rosa Parks's introduction in the book, or let a student volunteer read it to the class. Ask students to read THE BUS RIDE to find out how this book relates to what Rosa Parks says in the introduction.

Vocabulary

Make word clusters that relate to a subject or theme in the story and write the words on the chalkboard. For example, the following words relate to the legal system:

| | | | |
|--------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| law | rules | policeman | police station |
| jail | sergeant | criminals | trouble |
| rights | | | |

Encourage students to volunteer other words they know that relate to the theme. Then ask students to make connections with the words and theme by creating sentences. For example, "A policeman helps to enforce the law."

READING AND RESPONDING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion and develop students' understanding of the book and the historic events it represents. Encourage students to refer to passages or pages in the book to support or illustrate their responses.

1. Why does Sara feel sad for her mother?
2. Why is Sara curious about the front of the bus?
3. Why does the bus driver want Sara to return to the back of the bus? Is he worried about what might happen to him? To Sara? To the other people on the bus?
4. What makes Sara stand up to the bus driver?
5. What does the policeman mean when he speaks of "your people" to Sara? Why does he use this term?
6. Do you think the policeman wants to take Sara to the station? What makes you think so?
7. Why do people come by to look at Sara in the police station?
8. What does Sara's mother mean when she says, "I think it's time to let the police go back to chasing real criminals"?

9. How does Sara's mother feel about what Sara has done? Why does she feel this way?
10. How does Sara become a hero?
11. What happens as a result of Sara's actions?

Literature Circles*

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in developing the roles of the circle members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide to help group members explore the book.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for passages that relate to the feelings of Sara's mother and how they change from the beginning of the story to the end.
- The **Illustrator** might draw other scenes from Sara's life such as her home, school, or what she does with her friends.
- The **Connector** might find out about why buses were so important as a means of transportation in southern communities in the 1950s.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find out about other people besides Rosa Parks who were important during the Civil Rights movement.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, oral discussion, or drawings.

1. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story of Rosa Parks in this way? How does knowing that the story of Sara is based on a true story affect your feelings?
2. Why is it important for people to know about Rosa Parks's story?
3. Would you have dared to act as Sara did? In what ways was she foolish? How was she brave? Why was it dangerous to do what she did?
4. What did you learn about laws in this story? Why is it important to be able to change laws?
5. What does this story say about dignity and respect? How did Sara earn these things? Why are they important to everyone?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for them to share and discuss their work.

1. Have students pretend they are reporters who are covering the story of Sara. Ask them to write a news story about what happens. You might have some students write about Sara's visit to the police station and other students write about the boycott in the community afterwards.
2. Students might wish to write to Rosa Parks about what she did in 1955, her views of racial relations today, or any other questions they may have for her. (Students may also enjoy reading *Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue With Today's Youth*, in which Mrs. Parks answers children's questions while challenging them to embrace life's possibilities. Find out more about this book at: http://www.leeandlow.com/books/40/pb/dear_mrs_parks_a_dialogue_with_today_s_youth)
3. Challenge students to retell the story of Sara from the point of view of a white passenger on the bus or the bus driver.
4. Ask students to think of an award they might give Sara. Have them describe the award and explain how they would present it. Students might also create an "award" or plaque that signifies their award.

ELL (ESL) Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Have students write or dictate questions about the book. Set aside time to help students explore these queries.
2. Use real objects or photographs to help students identify concrete nouns from the book, such as **bus, money, shoes, dress, coat, window, door, steps, policeman, camera, candy bar, newspaper, autograph**.
3. Model how to use the illustrations to enhance understanding of the meaning of the text. Read aloud and comment on how an illustration provides clues to the words.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, introduce some of the following activities.

Social Studies

1. Interested students might research and report on the life and teachings of Rosa Parks. Reading through the book *Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue With Today's Youth* is a good way to get students started in their research and understanding of Rosa Parks.
2. Use *The Bus Ride* as a jumping off place for a study of the role of the press in the United States. Remind students that in this story it was the photographers and

journalists who made Sara's story public. Without this publicity people would not have known about what happened and would not have reacted as they did. Ask students to find examples in today's news in which the press has brought important issues to light.

3. Some students might research and make a time line of important events in the Civil Rights Movement beginning with the arrest of Rosa Parks in 1955.
4. Interested students might do additional research and compare the life of Rosa Parks to that of Dorothy Height, who primarily through her long career with the YWCA worked for women's rights and well as civil rights.

Art

Draw attention to the illustrations in the book. Ask students to trace Sara's feelings during the story by examining the pictures. If students need help getting started, pose guiding questions such as:

- How does Sara look when she walks down the aisle of the bus?
- What is Sara's expression when the bus driver tells her she can walk if she doesn't follow the rules?
- How does Sara look in the police station? What is she thinking? How does she feel?

Drama

Students can work together in groups to use body language to convey the attitudes of the characters at different moments in the story. Have students take turns showing (but not telling) what the attitude of the bus driver, Sara, Sara's mother, and the sergeant are at different times. Ask the rest of the class to try to identify the character's feelings and thinking. Then challenge students to act out the story in THE BUS RIDE without speaking any of the words.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Miller is the author of numerous award-winning books for young people. His first book, *Zora Hurston And The Chinaberry Tree*, a Reading Rainbow selection, was originally written as a poem. "I started out as a poet who wrote poems about famous African American writers," says Miller. "My high school English teacher, who is also a children's book author, encouraged me to write a picture book based on my poems. I expanded a poem on Hurston's life and simplified the language for children."

Miller was raised in Anniston, Alabama, and now lives in York, Pennsylvania, where he has taught African American literature for many years. His children's books all relate to the African American experience and themes of struggle, renewal, and celebration. *The Bus Ride*, a "Choices" selection by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, was praised by *Kirkus Reviews* for letting readers "feel the winds of history rustle." Miller's most recent book, *Joe Louis, My Champion*, tells the story of a young boy who learns to trust in his own natural abilities from the example of his hero, world champion prizefighter Joe Louis. Other award-winning books by Miller are listed below.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

John Ward has illustrated many acclaimed children's books, including *Kente Colors*, *The Freedom Riddle*, *We Keep A Store*, *I Call It Sky*, *Families: Poems Celebrating The African American Experience*, *Poppa's Itchy Christmas*, and *poppa's new pants*, winner

of the Parents' Choice Award. Ward studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. He lives with his wife in Freeport, New York.

Resources on the Web

Learn more about *The Bus Ride*

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/27/hc/the_bus_ride

Other Books by William Miller

Zora Hurston And The Chinaberry Tree:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/136/hc/zora_hurston_and_the_chinaberry_tree

ZORA HURSTON AND THE CHINABERRY TREE in Spanish:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/163/hc/zora_hurston_y_el_arbol_sonador

Frederick Douglass: The Last Day Of Slavery

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/51/hc/frederick_douglass_the_last_day_of_slavery

Richard Wright And The Library Card

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/99/hc/richard_wright_and_the_library_card

RICHARD WRIGHT AND THE LIBRARY CARD in Spanish:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/158/hc/richard_wright_y_el_carne_de_biblioteca

Night Golf

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/87/hc/night_golf

The Piano

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/90/hc/the_piano

Rent Party Jazz

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/98/hc/rent_party_jazz

Joe Louis, My Champion

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/70/hc/joe_louis_my_champion

View other **Active Reader Classroom Guides** at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/teachers-african_american.mhtml

BookTalk with William Miller about Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/miller.mhtml>

Book Information

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(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Themes: Inspiring Children To Make A Difference, Equality And Prejudice, Civil Rights, Overcoming Fear

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.0/.5

Lexile Measure®: 480

Scholastic Reading Counts!™: 4.8

Order Information

On the Web:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/27/hc/the_bus_ride (secure on-line ordering)

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

By Phone:

212-779-4400 ext. 25

212-683-3591 fax

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, NY NY 10016

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