Before the Boycott

Test a familiar account against historical evidence.

SS24.HS.8a "Compare historical evidence to previous interpretations and corroborate salient facts and theories."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the familiar interpretation of the boycott. Number three pieces of evidence that support or challenge it, then circle a phrase that limits what one piece of evidence can prove.

Was the Montgomery Bus Boycott Spontaneous?

1. On December 1, 1955, police arrested Rosa Parks after she refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama. Four days later, Black residents began a bus boycott. A familiar interpretation says Parks's refusal alone sparked a protest that organizers planned overnight. Her arrest was a turning point, but the word "alone" deserves testing. Did people already discuss a boycott? Were others resisting bus segregation? To answer, historians compare this account with records made before and after the arrest. They also ask whether separate sources support the same conclusion.

2. In May 1954, the Women's Political Council, a group of Black women in Montgomery, wrote to Mayor W. A. Gayle about unfair treatment on buses. Its letter warned that local groups had discussed a citywide boycott. In March 1955, police arrested Claudette Colvin, a Black teenager who refused to surrender her bus seat. Parks was also active in the local NAACP before her arrest. The dated letter and the record of Colvin's arrest offer different evidence that opposition existed earlier. Neither proves that a boycott in December 1955 was inevitable or that everyone agreed on how to protest.

3. After Parks's arrest, the Women's Political Council distributed a leaflet calling for a one-day boycott on December 5. Contemporary newspaper reports described buses with few Black passengers that day. The leaflet shows what organizers asked people to do; the reports offer separate evidence that many people acted. Organizers formed the Montgomery Improvement Association, and residents continued the boycott for more than a year. A federal court ruling against bus segregation eventually took effect in Montgomery. The evidence supports a more careful interpretation: Parks's arrest triggered the boycott, while earlier organizing and sustained participation helped turn one day's action into a long campaign.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the 1954 letter challenge the familiar interpretation in paragraph 1?

2. Which two different records support the conclusion that opposition to bus segregation existed before Parks's arrest? Explain what each shows.

3. How do the leaflet and newspaper reports work together as evidence about December 5? What can the leaflet alone not prove?

4. Does the evidence support replacing "Parks's refusal alone sparked the protest" with "Parks's arrest did not matter"? Compare the two claims using the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Assess this new claim: "The Montgomery bus boycott was only a one-day protest." Write 4 to 5 sentences that compare the claim with two different pieces of evidence in the passage. Explain what the evidence establishes and one detail it cannot establish.

ANSWER KEY

Before the Boycott

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HS.8a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the familiar interpretation of the boycott. Number three pieces of evidence that support or challenge it, then circle a phrase that limits what one piece of evidence can prove. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the 1954 letter challenge the familiar interpretation in paragraph 1?	**The letter shows that local groups discussed a citywide boycott well before Parks's arrest, challenging the idea that organizers planned the protest only overnight.**
2	Which two different records support the conclusion that opposition to bus segregation existed before Parks's arrest? Explain what each shows.	**The 1954 Women's Political Council letter records discussion of a boycott. The record of Colvin's March 1955 arrest documents an earlier act of resistance.**
3	How do the leaflet and newspaper reports work together as evidence about December 5? What can the leaflet alone not prove?	**The leaflet shows that organizers called for a boycott, and the newspaper reports provide separate evidence that many people stayed off buses. The leaflet alone cannot prove that anyone followed the call.**
4	Does the evidence support replacing "Parks's refusal alone sparked the protest" with "Parks's arrest did not matter"? Compare the two claims using the passage.	**No. Earlier resistance and boycott discussions challenge the word "alone," but the leaflet appeared after Parks's arrest and called for a boycott in response to it. Her arrest remained a trigger.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The one-day claim fits the leaflet's call for a boycott on December 5, but it does not describe what followed. Newspaper reports of buses with few Black passengers support the conclusion that many people took part that day. The passage also says residents continued the boycott for more than a year, which directly challenges the claim. These sources establish that the protest began as a one-day action and continued longer, but they do not establish how many residents participated throughout the campaign.

Accept answers that distinguish a source's stated plan from evidence that people acted. For the open task, students should use two distinct pieces of evidence, reject the one-day claim, and state a reasonable limit on what those pieces establish.