When Riders United

Tracing how organized action can change society

S.8.3 "Describe how collective behavior can influence and change society."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions people took together, then circle the effects those actions had on the community or the wider civil rights movement.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

1 On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus and was arrested. Black residents had long faced unfair rules and treatment on city buses. Local activists, including members of the Women's Political Council, called for a one-day bus boycott. Thousands of Black riders stayed off the buses on December 5. Their shared refusal turned a daily injustice into a public issue the city could not easily ignore. After the first day, residents voted to continue the boycott and chose Martin Luther King Jr. to lead a new organization.

2 The protest lasted 381 days. Many people walked long distances, while volunteers arranged carpools so workers could still reach their jobs. Churches hosted meetings and collected money to support the effort. Because many Black residents had been regular bus customers, their absence reduced fare revenue. Staying organized also made the demand for fair treatment visible day after day. Not everyone faced the same risks: some participants lost jobs or were threatened. Yet the group kept acting together, showing that a boycott can turn private frustration into sustained public pressure.

3 Meanwhile, several Black women challenged bus segregation in federal court in a case called Browder v. Gayle. In 1956, federal courts ruled that segregation on Montgomery's buses violated the Constitution, and the U.S. Supreme Court let the decision stand. The boycott ended after the ruling took effect in December 1956, and Black riders began using the buses without the old seating rules. The court case, not the boycott alone, changed the law. The boycott helped bring national attention to the struggle and showed civil rights organizers elsewhere how coordinated action could sustain a movement.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did thousands of riders staying off the buses change the way the city faced unfair bus rules?

2. How did carpools and church meetings help the boycott continue long enough to create pressure?

3. How did riders' collective refusal affect the bus system financially?

4. What changed Montgomery's bus seating rules, and how did the boycott influence people beyond Montgomery?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine students at several schools want safer streets near their campuses. In one paragraph, describe an action they could take together, how they could sustain it, and two possible effects, including a change in a public decision.

ANSWER KEY

When Riders United

HIGH SCHOOL · S.8.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions people took together, then circle the effects those actions had on the community or the wider civil rights movement. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did thousands of riders staying off the buses change the way the city faced unfair bus rules?	**Their shared refusal made unfair treatment a public issue that the city could not easily ignore.**
2	How did carpools and church meetings help the boycott continue long enough to create pressure?	**Carpools helped people reach work without riding buses, while church meetings helped people organize and raise support. These efforts kept the boycott visible day after day.**
3	How did riders' collective refusal affect the bus system financially?	**The buses lost fare revenue because many regular customers stopped riding.**
4	What changed Montgomery's bus seating rules, and how did the boycott influence people beyond Montgomery?	**A federal court ruling changed the rules. The boycott drew national attention and showed organizers elsewhere how coordinated action could sustain a movement.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Students at several schools could collect signatures asking the city to add marked crossings near their campuses. They could share reports of near misses, attend city meetings each month, and invite families to speak. Acting together could make the safety problem harder for officials to overlook. If city leaders approved new crossings, drivers might have clearer places to stop, and more students might feel safe walking. A petition would not guarantee that decision, but continued public participation could help keep the request on the city's agenda.

Accept other passage-based explanations that connect organized actions to their effects. For the open task, look for a plausible sustained group action and two possible effects, including a public decision.