Evidence on the Bus

Trace how local action and legal change shaped the Montgomery bus boycott.

USG.P.2.2 "Develop skills which demonstrate an understanding of historical events and the people who shaped our history. Gather and evaluate the usefulness of various formats of evidence for specific inquiry, analyzing the broader historical context..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline dated local actions, circle dated court actions, and number two source types whose usefulness or limits the passage explains.

Montgomery, 1955 to 1956

1 On December 1, 1955, police arrested Rosa Parks after she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus. City rules required Black riders to yield seats under certain conditions, part of a larger system of segregation. On December 5, Black residents began a bus boycott, the same day Parks appeared in court. The Montgomery Improvement Association, led by Martin Luther King Jr., helped coordinate carpools and meetings. Many riders walked to work for months. Parks's arrest record can establish when she was arrested, but it cannot explain why thousands chose to protest.

2 Different evidence answers different questions. Organizers' leaflets urged residents to stay off buses, revealing goals and tactics, but their purpose was to persuade, not to record every disagreement. A bus company's financial records could show lost fares, yet they would miss the risks walkers faced, including threats and arrests. A newspaper report written during the boycott might record a public meeting quickly, but its account could reflect which speakers an editor chose to quote. Compare each source's purpose and audience before deciding what it can prove about support for the boycott.

3 Montgomery's boycott lasted until December 1956, when a federal court order ending segregation on city buses took effect. On November 13, the Supreme Court had upheld a lower court ruling against bus segregation. On December 21, Black and white passengers rode Montgomery buses without the old seating rules. These events unfolded in one city, but national courts helped change local practice. A court ruling establishes the legal decision, not whether every rider felt safe afterward. A participant's later interview may reveal that experience, although memory and the passage of time can shape its details.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did segregation rules and organizers' carpools each affect the boycott?

2. Why might an organizers' leaflet and a newspaper report give different impressions of support for the boycott?

3. If you wanted to study the boycott's effect on bus fares, which source would be most useful? What important effect would it miss?

4. Why would you need both a court ruling and a participant's later interview to study the change on Montgomery buses?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write two parallel timelines, one for local action and one for court action, with at least two dated events in each. Then write two sentences naming a question the timelines cannot answer and evaluating a source that could help, including one limitation.

ANSWER KEY

Evidence on the Bus

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.P.2.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline dated local actions, circle dated court actions, and number two source types whose usefulness or limits the passage explains. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did segregation rules and organizers' carpools each affect the boycott?	**Segregation rules gave residents a reason to protest. Carpools helped them stay off the buses for months.**
2	Why might an organizers' leaflet and a newspaper report give different impressions of support for the boycott?	**Organizers wrote leaflets to persuade residents, not to record disagreement. A newspaper account could reflect the editor's choice of speakers to quote.**
3	If you wanted to study the boycott's effect on bus fares, which source would be most useful? What important effect would it miss?	**The bus company's financial records could show lost fares. They would miss risks faced by people who walked.**
4	Why would you need both a court ruling and a participant's later interview to study the change on Montgomery buses?	**The ruling establishes the legal change, while an interview could reveal whether a rider felt safe afterward. The interview's details may be affected by memory.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Local action: Dec. 1, 1955, Parks was arrested; Dec. 5, the boycott began; Dec. 21, 1956, passengers rode without the old seating rules.
Court action: Dec. 5, 1955, Parks appeared in court; Nov. 13, 1956, the Supreme Court upheld the lower ruling; Dec. 1956, the federal court order took effect.
The timelines cannot show whether riders felt safe after the rules changed. A later participant interview could describe that experience, but memory may alter its details.

Accept timelines with at least two correctly dated events in each track. The two sentences should identify a question the events leave open and explain both the value and a limitation of a relevant source.