When Evidence Disagrees

Use historical sources to test explanations of change.

USH.P.1.2 "Develop practices which demonstrate an understanding that social studies involves the evaluation of evidence. Develop, investigate, and evaluate plausible answers to essential questions that reflect enduring understandings across time..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the two interpretations in paragraph 2 and circle two kinds of documents named in the passage. Number the boycott and the lawsuit in the order they began so you can test a claim about cause.

How Did a Bus Boycott Grow?

1. How does one arrest become a movement? On March 2, 1955, police arrested fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin after she refused to surrender her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus. On December 1, police arrested Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her seat. The Women's Political Council, a local Black women's organization, then distributed leaflets calling for a one-day bus boycott on December 5. Arrest records and surviving leaflets help establish this sequence. They do not, by themselves, explain why the later arrest led to a citywide campaign while the earlier arrest did not.

2. One interpretation credits Parks's arrest as the single spark that caused the boycott. Another emphasizes years of work by Black organizers who challenged unfair treatment on buses. Both interpretations recognize that Parks's arrest came before the boycott. The leaflets support the claim that people quickly organized a protest, but they cannot prove exactly when organizers first discussed one. After the first day, the Montgomery Improvement Association coordinated a longer boycott. To assess either interpretation, ask what its evidence can show. An arrest record confirms an arrest, not the motives of every person who joined a movement.

3. The boycott continued for more than a year, while a separate federal lawsuit, *Browder v. Gayle*, challenged bus segregation. Colvin was one of its plaintiffs. In 1956, the Supreme Court affirmed a ruling that Alabama's bus segregation laws were unconstitutional. Saying the leaflets alone prove that the lawsuit caused the boycott reverses the order of events: the lawsuit was filed after the boycott began. Saying one person made change inevitable also goes beyond the records. A stronger answer connects individual action, community organization, and legal pressure, while admitting that surviving documents cannot reveal every private decision.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What can the arrest records and leaflets establish, and what question about the movement can they not settle?

2. Where do the two interpretations in paragraph 2 agree, and how do their explanations differ?

3. A classmate says the leaflets prove organizers first discussed a boycott after Parks's arrest. Why does that conclusion go beyond the evidence?

4. What is inconsistent about the claim that the lawsuit caused the boycott?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a protest movement outside Montgomery. Write your own question about how it produced change, name two different kinds of records you would investigate, and explain how agreement or disagreement between them would affect your tentative answer.

ANSWER KEY

When Evidence Disagrees

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.P.1.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the two interpretations in paragraph 2 and circle two kinds of documents named in the passage. Number the boycott and the lawsuit in the order they began so you can test a claim about cause. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What can the arrest records and leaflets establish, and what question about the movement can they not settle?	**They establish the order of the arrests and the call for a December 5 boycott. They cannot settle why Parks's arrest led to a citywide campaign while Colvin's did not.**
2	Where do the two interpretations in paragraph 2 agree, and how do their explanations differ?	**Both recognize that Parks's arrest preceded the boycott. One treats it as the single spark; the other emphasizes years of organizing.**
3	A classmate says the leaflets prove organizers first discussed a boycott after Parks's arrest. Why does that conclusion go beyond the evidence?	**The leaflets show that organizers called for a boycott after her arrest, but they do not reveal when discussion first began.**
4	What is inconsistent about the claim that the lawsuit caused the boycott?	**The boycott began before the lawsuit was filed, so the lawsuit could not have caused its start.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

How did the 1968 Memphis sanitation strike help workers gain a labor agreement? I would compare union flyers with city records of negotiations. If both identify the same demands and concessions, I would tentatively connect the workers' organizing to the agreement. If the records conflict, I would seek newspaper reports and reconsider that explanation.

Accept other well-supported comparisons that distinguish what a source shows from what it cannot prove. For Part 3, look for a specific inquiry, two relevant record types, and a plan for evaluating conflicting evidence.