

Amazing Woman of the Month Series

Rosa Parks

The Mother of the Civil Rights Movement

Girl Scouts of the Jersey Shore



Levels: Daisies, Brownies, Juniors, Cadettes, Seniors, Ambassadors

Rosa Parks was born on February 4th in Tuskegee Alabama to a sharecropper family. Her grandparents had been enslaved but were one of the few families who were able to own a piece of land once they were freed. Rosa grew up watching the injustice Black people suffered living in the deep south. Even though she was a small, sickly child- she would not back down when it came to protecting herself. Rosa was a mild, soft-spoken, petite woman but when it came to the fight for racial justice- she was 10 feet tall!

Rosa inspired thousands of people to stand up to racism by sitting down! After slavery was ended in 1863, laws were passed in some states to keep people of different races apart. This was called **segregation** and meant that Black people were not allowed to sit in the same areas as others, eat in the same restaurants, attend the same schools or churches, play in the same parks, vote, or hold public office, or earn the same wages as White people. When Rosa was arrested for not giving up her seat on a bus, she inspired a bus boycott which started the civil rights movement that would eventually end segregation.

Watch this video to get a background of her life:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8A9gvb5Fh0>

girl scouts 
of the jersey shore

STEP ONE: DON'T BACK DOWN

Rosa's grandfather Sylvester was the son of a enslaved woman and her owner. When the owner died, Sylvester was treated very poorly by the family who owned the plantation and the other enslaved people since he was of mixed race. When Rosa was a child, her mother moved with her children into her parents' home in Pine Level Alabama after her marriage broke up. Rosa and her brother grew up hearing stories of how Sylvester was beaten by the overseer of the plantation and her grandmother would illustrate how enslaved people had to pretend they liked their owners and were happy if they wanted to avoid being mistreated.

During WWII, many Black men enlisted in the military to fight for freedom overseas. They served honorably and many had earned awards for outstanding service. When they returned to the United States, they were not treated like heroes. Instead, they were targeted with further violence for expecting the same levels of freedom they had fought for in Europe. Rosa recalls that her grandfather would sleep in a rocking chair by their front door with a shotgun in his lap to defend his home and family.

ACTIVITY: ADVICE TO LIVE BY

When Rosa was little, she was threatened by a much bigger boy named Franklin. As he balled up his fist to hit her, Rosa picked up a brick and dared him to do it! Thankfully, the boy backed down and ran away from Rosa so no one was hurt. During this incident, Rosa listened to the advice her grandfather had given her. As he was defending his home, he told her: "Rosa, don't ever let anyone treat you poorly." Throughout her life, she proved that she would rather be arrested or killed than allow anyone to abuse her.

Materials:

- 1 8X10 canvas (available at Dollar Tree)
- Paints and brushes
- Pencil
- Permanent Markers or print out of advice

Instructions:

1. Ask a few older friends or relatives (grandparents or great-grandparents work well) for the best piece of advice they can give you.
2. Make sure to write down what they say. You will need it later.
3. Use your paints to create a background on your canvas. Be creative!
4. After the paint dries, use your markers to write, or glue the printout of your favorite piece of advice that you received.



STEP TWO: UNFAIR LAWS

Even though Rosa was born 50 years after slavery was ended, she was still very aware of how people were treated differently based on the color of their skin. Rosa said she was glad that she did not live in slavery times, but she knew that conditions for her family were not that much better under segregation. She recalled that she had to walk 3 miles to her one room school with no windows, and that before they could take their seats on hard wooden benches, they had to chop and collect firewood for the stove that was the only source of heat in building. While they were walking a school bus would pass, full of white children on their way to a much nicer school that had desks and central heat. The children on the bus would often throw trash at the kids who were walking, so Rosa and her friends walked in the fields to avoid the road.

For adults, things were even worse. They were paid less than white people doing the same work, could be fired for any reason, had to endure the disrespect of being called names or pushed around, and if someone stole from them or assaulted them, not much was done. Black people were limited in the jobs they could do, places they could live, or education they could receive. Sometimes, their homes or businesses would be vandalized or burnt to the ground, and no one would be held accountable. When a 14-year-old boy named Emmett Till was murdered and his killers were found innocent, Rosa knew that the laws had to change.



ACTIVITY: RESEARCH LAWS THAT MAKE NO SENSE

Rosa knew she was breaking the law by not giving up her seat on the bus. When you break a law on purpose because you think it's unfair, it's called civil disobedience. Talk to a trusted adult about whether it is OK to break a law on purpose, no matter how unfair it is. Civil Rights leader John Lewis called this practice "good trouble", but many people believe that a law should be followed no matter what. For instance, in school hitting someone is always against the rules so anyone who engages in fighting is punished. But many people believe you should have a right to defend yourself if someone hits you first.

Use the internet to research laws in your state that make no sense. For example, in my state of NJ, it is illegal for a man to knit during fishing season! You can google "Outdated Laws in <Your State>". Grab a sheet of paper and write down at least three laws in your state that you think are unfair or should be removed.



Iranian women burning their hijab in protest.

STEP THREE: THE WHEELS ON THE BUS

On December 1st, 1955 Rosa entered a bus driven by James Blake. Blake was the daily driver of this route and he had mistreated Rosa before. Black people were required to enter the bus using the front door to pay their fare, then exit and re-enter through the back door to take a seat in the “colored section.” One day, Blake drove off leaving Rosa stranded after she had paid her fare so Rosa already disliked James Blake.

As Rosa was on her way home on that December day, the “Whites Only” section of the bus filled, so Blake told the 4 people sitting in Rosa’s row to give up their seats. The three other passengers complied, but Rosa remained sitting. Blake threatened to call the police, and she asked him to please do so. When the police arrived, they told Rosa to move, or they would arrest her she replied “You may do that.” She peacefully went with the officers and was processed as a criminal. Watch this video to see how it all happened: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-MLurRcUxg>

Later, when reporters asked Rosa if she didn’t move because she was tired from a long day of work she replied “The only tired I was, was tired of giving in.” All her life, Rosa was taught to accept the way things were and just try to avoid the people who taunted her. Like most Black people, she was expected to stay in her place, and not make waves.

Her grandmother had warned her that if she stood up to white people as she had done to the boy with the brick, she would be lynched by the time she was 20! But Rosa worked to help people who had been victimized without receiving justice and she was tired of letting the bullies win.

By staying in her seat, Rosa was making a point that unfair treatment based on skin color was wrong and needed to stop. She wanted to live in a country where everyone was treated equally, which is an ideal we still strive for today.



ACTIVITY: STAND UP TO A BULLY

The sad fact is that at one point in our lives most of us will be bullied. This can happen at school, in the workplace, during clubs or activities, or even online. Bullying is not always a physical act like shoving someone in a locker, or verbal like calling someone names. Bullying also includes spreading rumors about a person or intentionally not including them in group activities.

Bullying negatively affects how a person feels about themselves, how well they can form relationships with others and even their physical health. You don't even have to be the victim of bullying, just witnessing it is enough to have lasting consequences! As Girl Scouts, we know it is important to be kind and considerate so we will never take part in bullying another person. We also know to be courageous and strong when we can help someone who is being bullied.



Watch the videos below to see what to do if you or someone you know is being bullied. Then, write and perform a skit with your friends or family to practice how to defeat a bully. We would love to see your skits- please email videos to spetti@gsfun.org!

Daisies & Brownies: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8A9gvb5Fh0>

Juniors & Cadettes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBWL8iI6KbI>

Seniors, Ambassadors, and Adults: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oKjW1OIjuw>

STEP FOUR: THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

On the day that Rosa Parks was found guilty of breaking segregation laws, a young pastor named Martin Luther King Jr. organized a boycott of the buses that ran through Montgomery. It is a little-known fact



that Rosa was not the first person to be arrested for not giving up her seat, that honor belongs to Claudette Colvin who was a 16year old member of the youth division of the NAACP that Rosa had founded. Her arrest was not the focus of the boycott because NAACP leaders thought she was too young and unreliable to be the face of their movement. They asked Rosa to be the face of the protest since she had an impeccable reputation and was mature enough to handle the controversy that started with the boycott.

Since most of the riders were African Americans, most of the buses were now empty which caused a funding problem for the city. To help the boycott, people of all races who owned vehicles formed carpools to drive Black people to work and school so they could avoid the bus. Whoopi Goldberg and Sissy Spacek starred in a movie about this called The Long Walk Home which is worth watching, although you should be warned about harsh language and some violence.

After 381 days of either walking or catching a ride with someone trying to help, the boycott worked and segregation on buses was declared unconstitutional under the 14th amendment which guarantees ALL people equal rights and protections under the law. Although this was a major victory, it was only the start of the civil rights movement. The decision to integrate public transportation was met with violence in some areas, and the push to integrate all public areas had just begun.

The NAACP, with Rosa Parks as a guiding member and Martin Luther King Jr. as a strong leader, began to organize other peaceful protests to gain even more rights for African Americans.

ACTIVITY: LEARN HOW TO PROTEST PEACEFULLY

Gandhi: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nAUxQ8X3GQ>

Peaceful protest for 10+ :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kn6I1JUHklU>

To integrate our country, the Civil Rights Movement looked to Mohandas Gandhi for inspiration. He believed in peaceful protest which he called **satyagraha**, which means “truth force.” Gandhi taught that the goal of protesting is not to defeat the wrong-doer but to win his friendship and understanding. By not arguing with the driver and the police, Rosa was able to get more people on her side because she was being nice. There are many forms of peaceful protest, and they are still used all over the world today. Use the chart on the next page to list places where each type of protest has been used to make positive change.



ACTIVITY: LEARN HOW TO PROTEST PEACEFULLY CONTINUED

Peaceful Protest Method	Issue being protested	Where/date
Boycotts	Segregation	Alabama, United States/1951
Sit-Ins		
Walk-outs		
Marches		
Burning of your own clothing/ cutting of your own hair		
Demonstrations		

STEP FIVE: HONORING ROSA'S LEGACY



After the Supreme Court ruled that segregation was unlawful, Rosa's battle was won – but she did not stop fighting. She continued her work with the NAACP and Martin Luther King Jr. Due to her arrest, she lost her job as a seamstress in a department store and her husband became unemployed as well. They eventually moved to Detroit to pursue better opportunities. Rosa was able to get a job sewing in what would be called a 'sweatshop' and her husband got a job as a barber. Both continued to work for equal rights for Black people.

Due to her dedication to the cause, when John Conyers was elected as the first African American to serve on the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, he asked Rosa to work as his secretary. She finally stopped working as a seamstress and joined his staff. Before her passing in 2005, Rosa left a rich legacy of fighting injustice. For her efforts, she won the 1979

NAACP Springarn medal, over two dozen honorary doctorate degrees, the Congressional Gold Medal, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, was the first woman to lie in state in the Capital rotunda, and is the only full length statue of an African American in the Statuary Hall in the Capital. She deserves every honor she received for her dedication to the idea that all human beings are the same no matter their racial, religious, or cultural background.

ACTIVITY: CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH

Honor Rosa's legacy by making an Equality Quilt with your family and friends.

Materials:

- Card stock paper
- Hole Puncher
- Markers or crayons
- Pipe cleaners
- Scissors

Instructions:

1. Take 10 sheets of card stock paper and cut them in half on the short edge (Hamburger style)
2. Ask your friends and family to draw what equality means to them on one of the cut sheets
3. Punch holes in the cards and attach them using pipecleaner
4. Don't forget to snap a photo of your work and send it to us at spetti@gsfun.org

