

The Girl Who Got Arrested

How 15-year-old Claudette Colvin helped change history



LOOK FOR WORD
NERD'S 7 WORDS
IN BOLD

CHARACTERS

*Historians 1, 2, & 3

*Narrators 1, 2 & 3

Students 1, 2 & 3

Mrs. Nesbitt:
Claudette's teacher

*Claudette Colvin: a
15-year-old girl

Bus Driver

Officers 1 & 2

Neighbors 1, 2 & 3

Attorney Gray: Claudette's lawyer

Attorney Knabe: the city's lawyer

*Indicates large speaking role



Left: Claudette Colvin as a student. Above: Dr. Martin Luther King leads a march calling for equality for African Americans.

Scene 1

Historian 1: Have you heard of Rosa Parks?

Historian 2: In December of 1955, she refused to give up her seat on a bus in Alabama. There were laws that required African Americans to give up their seats to white people.

Historian 3: What Mrs. Parks did was shocking. It happened in the beginning of a time in history we call the Civil Rights Movement, when people fought for **equality**, working to

get unfair laws changed.

Narrator 1: But before Mrs. Parks there were others.

Narrator 2: Let's journey back to March 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. Students in Mrs. Nesbitt's class at Booker T. Washington High are finishing their reports on famous African Americans.

Student 1: During the Civil War, Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery. She made it to the North where she could be free. But she went back to the South to help free other slaves. She was brave.

Student 2: Mrs. Nesbitt, why does history remember Harriet Tubman and not others?

Student 3: Didn't other people risk their lives doing the same thing?

Mrs. Nesbitt: History can be rather careless about who and what it remembers.

Narrator 3: The discussion moves to Jim Crow laws. Such laws were created to keep black citizens apart from whites.

Historian 1: In states that had these laws, black Americans weren't allowed to go to the same schools, or even use the same public bathrooms as white people.





Separate soda machines, bus waiting rooms, and movie theaters were just a few of the injustices suffered by African Americans throughout the South until the 1960s.

Mrs. Nesbitt: Sometimes, justice is slow. Here in Alabama, it seems as slow as molasses. But the Constitution says all men have equal rights.

Student 1: I'm not sure that's true in Montgomery, Mrs. Nesbitt.

Mrs. Nesbitt: How do you mean?

Student 2: When the rodeo was coming to town, my dad bought me cowboy boots. But it turned out the rodeo was only for white folks, so we never got to go. That doesn't sound equal.

Student 3: And when my mom took me to buy a hat for Easter, the saleslady wouldn't let me try any hats on. She said my hair was dirty, and, if I tried them on, none of the white customers would want them.

Student 1: That's the way it is for black folk, and we all know there's been worse.

Mrs. Nesbitt: Sooner or later the Constitution will come to Montgomery. You just watch.

Scene 2

Narrator 1: Later that day, some black students from Mrs. Nesbitt's class board a city bus.

Historian 2: Rosa Parks's famous arrest for refusing to give up her bus seat was still nine months away.

Narrator 2: The students sit towards the back, away from the "whites only" section.

Student 2: That was a good report you gave, Claudette. You sure can talk.

Claudette: Thanks. My momma always says I can talk more than 10 lawyers put together.

Narrator 3: Soon the bus gets crowded.

Student 3: Claudette, we have to move. This white lady wants our seats.

Narrator 1: Claudette sees a white woman standing nearby. The bus driver notices too.

Bus Driver: I need those seats!

Narrator 2: Claudette's schoolmates stand up. But Claudette's mind is still swirling with thoughts of the Constitution. She thinks of the courage of Harriet Tubman.

Bus Driver: Why are you still sittin' there?! Gimme that seat!

Narrator 3: The driver summons the police. He points out Claudette.

Officer 1: That's nothin' new. I had trouble out of that thing before.

Officer 2: You gonna get up?

Claudette: No, sir.

Officer 1: Get up!

Claudette: It's my constitutional right to sit here as much as that lady. I paid my fare.

Narrator 1: The bus is full of people, but no one speaks up to help Claudette.

Narrator 2: The officers yank Claudette from her seat. Her books fall to the floor. One of the officers kicks her.

Claudette (crying): It's my constitutional right!

Narrator 3: They drag her out, handcuff her, and push her into a police car. Claudette worries they'll try to hurt her.

Narrator 1: But at the city jail, it's the sound of her prison cell's iron doors' clanking shut that

pains her the worst. All alone, Claudette falls to her knees and cries.

Scene 3

Historian 3: That night, Claudette was freed from jail.

Narrator 2: Her neighbors rally around her.

Neighbor 1: They could have hurt you!

Neighbor 2: You're brave, Claudette! Talking back to a white person!

Neighbor 3: I'm proud of you, Claudette. You've brought the **revolution** to Montgomery.

Historian 1: Claudette had done something most adults hadn't: She'd stood up for her rights. Claudette was a local celebrity.

Student 1: There's the girl who got arrested!

Student 2: Jim Crow didn't push her around.

Student 3: I wish I had the courage to do that.

Historian 2: But in court, Claudette was declared guilty. By not giving up her seat to



African Americans could sit down on buses—unless a white person needed their seat. Nine months after Claudette's arrest, Rosa Parks (left) was jailed for refusing to give up her seat to a white person.

Montgomery’s bus laws **violated** the Constitution—just as Claudette had claimed 11 months earlier.

Historian 1: It was dangerous for an African American to stand up in public to fight for equality.

Historian 2: But Claudette was willing to **testify** in court, to tell her story. Like Harriet Tubman, she took a risk to help others.

Attorney Gray: I call Claudette Colvin to the stand.

Narrator 3: Claudette tells the court how she was mistreated.

Claudette: One policeman asked if I was going to get up. I said, “No, sir.” I didn’t move. The other policeman kicked me, and they dragged me out.

Narrator 1: The judges listen closely.

Claudette: I was crying then. I didn’t know white people would act like that. It really hurt me, and I was sick of having to give a person a seat when all those colored people were standing and there were no more empty seats.

Attorney Gray: What happened at the jail?

Claudette: The policeman said, “She didn’t want to sit back there with the Negroes!” So they put me in a cell and locked the door.

Narrator 2: The lawyer for the city questions Claudette.

Attorney Knabe: Miss Colvin, why did you stop riding the buses?

Claudette: Because we were treated wrong—dirty and nasty.

Narrator 3: The lawyer tries to trick her into saying it was Dr. Martin Luther King who made her stop riding the buses.

Attorney Knabe: Did you have a leader?

Claudette: Our leaders are just us—ourselves.

Attorney Knabe: Be honest, Miss Colvin.

Claudette: We were getting treated like that all the time. Some of us just didn’t have the guts to stand up.

Narrator 1: The court rules that Montgomery’s



bus **segregation** laws are unconstitutional.

Historian 3: The trial’s star witness had to have been Claudette Colvin.

Historian 1: Through all her suffering, Claudette had brought the Constitution to Montgomery.

Historian 2: But for many years, history did forget Claudette Colvin.

Historian 1, 2, & 3 (together): We sure know who she is now. ■

WRITE TO WIN!

Write a letter to Claudette sharing your feelings about what she did in 1955. Send it to “Colvin Contest” by Feb.

FIND THIS CONTEST ONLINE

15, 2011.

We’ll send 10 winners Phillip Hoose’s *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. See page 2 for more details.

