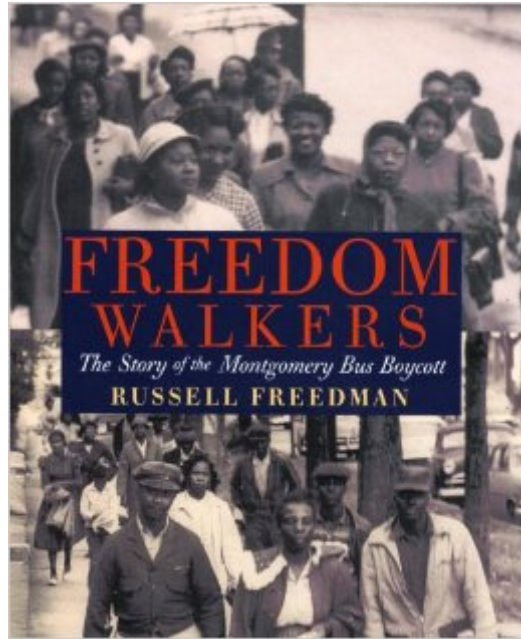


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Freedom Walkers: The Story Of The Montgomery Bus Boycott Grades 6-8



Synopsis

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus and give up her seat to a white man. This refusal to give up her dignity sparked the Montgomery bus boycott, a yearlong struggle, and a major victory in the civil rights movement. Source notes, map, bibliography, index.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 13 years

Grade Level: 5 - 08

Customer Reviews

Sometimes I wonder about the process that your average author of non-fiction titles for children goes through. What, for example, makes an author, such as well-respected and brilliant Russell Freedman, decide to write about the Montgomery Bus Boycott? The man could really write about anything he wanted. He could do a book about The Black Panthers (since not a single non-fiction children's title exists on the subject) or the life of Boss Tweed or how Kalamazoo, Michigan became the Celery City, if he so desired. Instead he concentrates on the honestly inspiring boycott that sparked the Civil Rights Movement. When I heard this I felt at first that this particular subject had been "done". There are oodles of books on the topic. Why would Freedman feel he needed to add his two cents as well? Then I thought it through. Sure, there are lots of books on the boycott, but who do they praise? Nine times out of ten the real focus of the story is Rosa Parks. Once in a while it'll mention the other Civil Rights leaders here and there. The true heroes of the movement who've

never really had their due, however, were the average joes. The black maids, elderly, children, and working folk who gave up their comfort, jobs, and who knows what all to support a cause that had never been won before. With "Freedom Walk", Freeman is giving credit where credit is due, to both the leaders and the people who made it happen. It's a story of heroism on a local level. An understandable tale that doesn't lose any of its power over time. This is the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott as it occurred from start to finish. But rather than concentrate on a single person or persons, Freeman gives credit and voice to some people you may not have heard from before. There was Jo Ann Robinson who lent her support. And there was Claudette Colvin, a young woman who refused to give up her seat on a bus before Rosa Parks did. And finally there were the people who participated in the boycott and their single-minded heroism. Freeman recounts all of this with an even hand and a great deal of intelligent editing. Part of what I loved so much about this book was the sheer number of photographs and background information I found I'd never encountered elsewhere. I don't know where Freedman was able to find so many remarkable pictures (the Acknowledgements may offer some clues) but they are, quite frankly, part of the book's real lure. There's an image of a Coca-Cola machine where the "only" part of the words, "White Customers Only!" is written in the same font as the Coke logo above. Did Coke itself write these words on their machines? There were also mug shots of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. that I've never seen in a book before. The title also debunked "facts" that I'd heard and believed incorrectly in the past. When I read Rosa Parks's autobiography, "I Am Rosa Parks", she mentions in the story that she was not the first black woman to refuse to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus. One Ms. Claudette Colvin was a potential case for challenging the segregation laws, but in the end was passed over because her out-of-wedlock pregnancy might have caused problems. As it turns out, Ms. Colvin wasn't used because she was "too young", had fought with the police. Her bun in the oven? "...it was later rumored that she was pregnant". Rumored! Russell Freedman: Rumor Debunker. Freedman knows how to bring out details that kids might miss in other books about the boycott. He concentrates a bit more on Martin Luther King Jr. than I expected him to, but that just makes good sense. He mentions how risky it was for drivers to allow people to volunteer their cars, especially when it might be "driven by strangers". He talks about the mass meetings that would booster morale during the boycott (I always wondered how people kept their spirits up). And once bus integration was legalized, there were twice-weekly mass meetings training sessions on dealing non-violently with potential bus situations. It's funny that he never mentions that moment when the Montgomery city leaders met with some church leaders not associated with the leaders of the boycott who then declared that it was "over". But then, I'm sure a lot of details like this one had to be

judiciously pruned. Which brings me to Freedman's talent with brevity. I've been having a real problem lately with non-fiction books for kids that are so thick and packed to the gills with excess information that few children but the truly dedicated will ever be able to slog through them front to finish. This is part of the reason I love Freedman's books. Somehow or other, he knows exactly the length to make his titles. "Freedom March", covers all the pertinent information, is interesting and informative, and never comes across as a tome. It's so engaging that kids who might otherwise not be the least bit interested in this period of history may find themselves truly engaged. To sum up, a moment in history with a happy ending is a rare and wonderful thing. And though I was incredulous that anyone, even Russell Freedman, could present the Montgomery Bus Boycott in such a way that it would be both interesting and new to young readers, somehow the author has managed beautifully. A fine piece of non-fiction and a bit of necessary reading.

I'm reading this book aloud to my twelve year old daughter as we study the history of America. I wasn't sure if a book like this, full of facts and information and not much dialog, would hold her interest let alone mine. However at the end of Chapter Three "Rosa Parks", my daughter exclaimed, "Don't stop reading! I want to know what happened next!" It's hard to read only one chapter a day. We are finding the story of the boycott to be fascinating! It angers me that white people were so ignorant and imposed such ridiculous rules on blacks. I also had no idea the lengths black people in Montgomery went to in order to secure a freedom that should have been theirs to begin with. I'm impressed with their non-violent means, their dedication to the cause, their untiring willingness to walk everywhere, and to help each other out with car pools. The author uses language that both young and old can understand. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr are central to the fight, but Russell Freedman includes lesser known names such as Jo Ann Robinson, Claudette Colvin, and E.D. Nixon. He also recognizes that some white people, such as Robert Graetz also took up the cause against bus segregation. Remarkable photographs of key events and key people are a bonus in this book. This is an amazing story told in such an understandable way that one is not likely to forget it.

This is an excellent book. Well written, well researched, succinct, full of information and inspiring. It is a true story of how a group of determined people succeeded in achieving a goal when the people controlling the local government were against them. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. came out of a movement built by the hard work and courage of hundreds and thousands of people. King and Parks were trusted spokespeople for a much-larger grass-roots movement. The standard

narrative is that Rosa and Martin acted largely on their own, but Freedom Walkers shows the many ordinary people who were the heart, soul, backbone and brains of the movement. There is no reason this book should be classified as "grades 6 to 8", as adults reading it will find it fascinating. It holds many lessons we can still use today.

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