

## Social Studies

### Genre

**Letters** are written messages that people send to each other.



### Text Features

A **Salutation** is the line in the letter in which the writer greets the person to whom she or he is writing.

The **Body** of a letter is the main part of the letter, containing the message.

### Content Vocabulary

**activist**   **nonviolence**  
**unconstitutional**

# Dear Mrs. Parks

*by Rosa Parks with Gregory J. Reed*

## Introduction

In 1955, civil rights **activist** Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white person. Her action helped bring about a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. For over a year, thousands of African Americans refused to ride buses in that city. The boycott ended when the U.S. Supreme Court said that separate seating for whites and blacks on the city's buses was **unconstitutional**.

The following letters are from a collection of letters between children and Rosa Parks.



This is the **salutation**.

Dear Mrs. Parks,

This is the **body** of the letter.

I live in the New England area, and I always wondered about the South. When you were growing up in Alabama, did you think that things would ever get better for African Americans?

Kelli  
Hartford, Connecticut



**W**e knew that they had to get better! The South had suffered under the unjust laws of segregation far too long. It was time for something to happen to turn things around.

During my childhood years, I had been bothered by the fact that white children had privileges that I did not. I was deeply hurt by the hate that some white people, even children, felt toward me and my people because of our skin. But my mother and grandmother taught me to continue to respect myself and stay focused on making myself ready for opportunity. They felt that a better day had to come, and they wanted me to be a part of it. But it was up to us to make it better.

As an adult, I would go home thirsty on a hot summer day rather than take a drink from the “colored only” fountain. I would not be a part of an unjust system that was designed to make me feel inferior.

I knew that this type of system was wrong and could not last. I did not know when, but I felt that the people would rise up and demand justice. I did not plan for that point of change to begin with my actions on the bus that evening in 1955. But I was ready to take a stand.

Dear Mrs. Parks,

What is hope? I have read that you hope for this world to be a better place to live in, and you haven't given up. I'm still figuring out what is "hope," and then maybe I can help "hope" out to make this a better world and be like you.

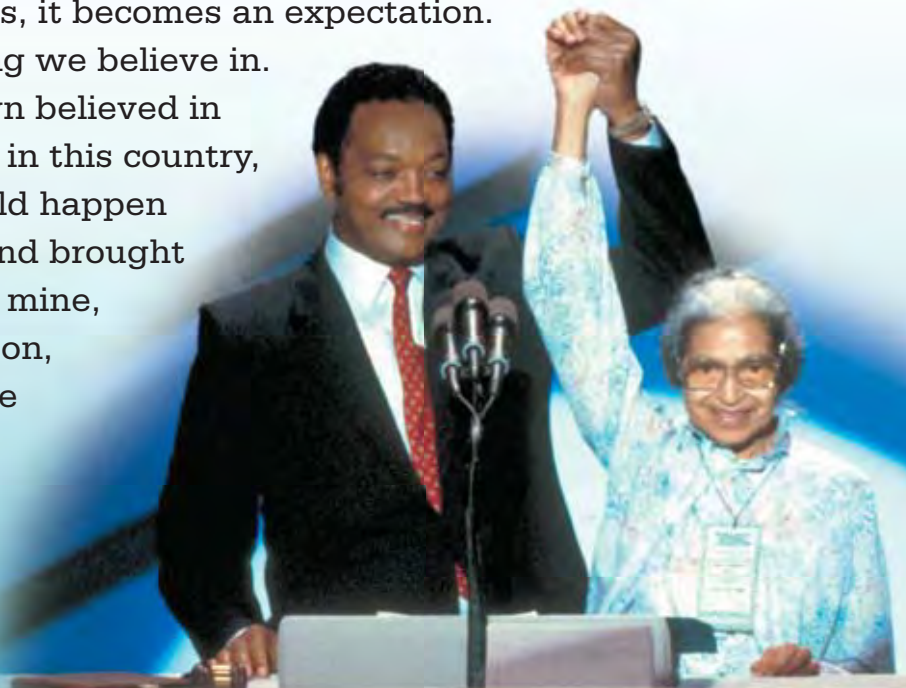
Elizabeth  
Grosse Point, Michigan



**E**lizabeth, many times we as adults seek to teach students like you without giving you examples of what the true meanings of words are so that you can learn from them.

Hope is wanting something that means a lot to you. It is like wanting something that you do not have. Hope is something we feel with our hearts. When we hope for something with our hearts, it becomes an expectation.

Hope is also something we believe in. Many people I have known believed in ending racial segregation in this country, and their hope that it could happen influenced their actions and brought about change. A friend of mine, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, says, "We must keep hope alive." I agree. You can help keep hope alive by believing in yourself. Your hope for yourself and for the future can make this world a better place to live.



Dear Mrs. Parks,

I always like hearing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches. He was a great man. I wish he was still living. I believe he can straighten out this mess this country is in. Were you ever afraid of him dying and leaving you here?

Wilbar  
Kerhonkson, New York

I, too, wish Dr. King was still with us. It has always been very difficult and very painful to think about Dr. King's death. He was a very dear friend of mine. He spoke with authority and conviction. His faith, his words, and his commitment to **nonviolence** inspired us all in the Civil Rights movement.

You are right in saying that our country has many problems. We have a long way to go. But we can work together, young and old, to achieve Dr. King's dream of equality and justice. I hope that you will keep that dream in your heart and make it your own.

## Connect and Compare



1. Look at the form of the letters to Mrs. Parks. What parts do all the letters have in common? **Reading Letters**
2. What would you do if there were an empty seat on the bus and someone told you that you couldn't sit in it? **Evaluate**
3. Think about this week's main selection, *My Brother Martin*. What might Martin's sister say in a letter to Rosa Parks?  
**Reading/Writing Across Texts**



## Social Studies Activity

Write a letter to a famous person about something they did which you would like to know more about.



Find more about writing letters at [www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)

## Writer's Craft

### Formal and Informal Language

Good writers often use both **formal and informal language** to show their feelings. In a poem, make every word count.

# Write a Poem

## My Hero

by Joseph M.

Rosa Parks worked hard.  
Her feet ached.  
She wanted that seat.  
The driver said he'd call the police.  
"You may go on and do so,"  
Said Rosa Parks,  
My hero, Rosa Parks.  
She took a stand  
By sitting down.  
"You may go on and do so,"  
Said Rosa Parks.

I wrote about my hero using both formal and informal language.

To show how I feel, I included this thought about my subject.



## Your Turn

Write a poem about a person who inspires you. It can be a family member, a friend, or someone famous. Explain why this person has made a difference. Choose language that clearly shows your enthusiasm. Use the Writer's Checklist to check your writing.



## Writer's Checklist

- Ideas and Content:** Have I made clear why this person is important to me?
- Organization:** Did I express my ideas in order?
- Voice:** Have I clearly shown my feelings through my use of **formal and informal language**?
- Word Choice:** Have I chosen colorful words?
- Sentence Fluency:** Do the sentences read smoothly when I read my poem aloud?
- Conventions:** Did I use the right tense for each verb? Did I check my spelling?