

# Comprehension

## Genre

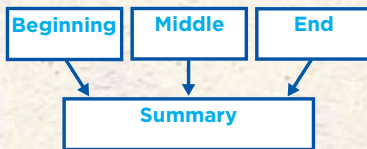
A **Biography** is the story of a person's life written by another person.



## Monitor Comprehension

### Summarize

As you read, use your Summary Chart.



## Read to Find Out

What was Rosa Parks's impact on the civil rights movement?



from

Let It

Shine

by *Andrea Davis Pinkney*

## Rosa Parks

Rosa McCauley was named after her maternal grandmother, Rose Edwards. The name fit her perfectly. She was a beautiful, delicate child, who was always blossoming with enthusiasm. Rosa's father, James McCauley, worked as a carpenter. He traveled through the South building homes. Rosa saw very little of her father while she was growing up. His work kept him away from his family for long periods of time.

Rosa's mother, Leona, was a schoolteacher who settled with her children in Pine Level, Alabama, the place where she was raised. Rosa and her baby brother, Sylvester, lived on an eighteen-acre farm with their mother and their grandparents, Grandma Rose and Grandpa Sylvester.



*Leona and James McCauley with their daughter Rosa Louise*



Because there were so few black schools in the immediate community, Leona often traveled to other towns to find teaching assignments. She also earned money by styling hair for the women in Pine Level and by mending clothes for neighbors and friends.

Although Rosa missed having her father nearby, she loved living with her grandparents. Grandpa Sylvester was an outspoken man, who was solid in his **convictions**. He believed that no human being had just cause to mistreat another, and that if somebody did you wrong, you should not stand for it.

From a very young age, Rosa learned about racial hatred. Both her grandparents had been slaves. They told her many stories about the wicked treatment black people had endured at the hands of white slave masters. But even though slavery had ended by the time Rosa was born, she still experienced the **oppression** of racism firsthand. This bigotry was **evident** mostly in laws that demanded separate schools, drinking fountains, restaurants, and public bathrooms for black people and white people.

When Rosa was six, she began to attend Pine Level's only black school, a shabby one-room schoolhouse where students from first through sixth grades crammed together on benches. There were no desks, no windows, a handful of tattered books, and one teacher for fifty kids. During the winter, the sixth-grade boys had to build a fire in a woodstove to keep the classroom warm.

The school for white students was a place black children could only dream about. It was made of bricks. It had a playground. There were books galore. There were plenty of teachers. And there was lots of heat. It wasn't fair that the amenities that made the white schools so fine were purchased with public tax money that came from the pockets of both Pine Level's white *and* black residents.

Leona saved every penny she could, and when Rosa was eleven years old, her mother sent her to the Montgomery



*Early twentieth century African American classroom*

Industrial School for Black Girls, a private school in Montgomery, Alabama. During the school year, Rosa lived with her aunt Fannie. At her new school Rosa learned everything, from how to read world maps to how to mix **remedies** for sick and ailing souls. She even took cooking lessons.

But a private education couldn't shield Rosa from the public humiliation of racism that was common in the South in the 1920s. Rosa often rode streetcar trolleys to school—segregated streetcars in which she, along with every other black rider, was forced to sit in the back.

When Rosa was sixteen, her grandma Rose died. Soon after that Rosa's mother got sick. Rosa quit school and returned to Pine Level so that she could work to help support her family. She spent the final years of her childhood running the Edwards's farm and earning money cooking and sewing, two skills she had perfected at the Montgomery Industrial School.



### Summarize

Summarize Rosa Parks's early life.

In 1931 a neighbor introduced Rosa to Raymond Parks. Raymond was as dandy as they come. He was smart, smooth talking, forthright, and **persistent**. And he drove a red car that had a rumble seat in the back. Raymond was a barber who worked in downtown Montgomery. He took a quick liking to Rosa. But she was not immediately impressed with him. He came to Rosa's house several times to ask Rosa's mother if he could take Rosa for a drive in his car. It was clear to Leona that Raymond Parks was intelligent and sincere. She agreed to let him spend time with her daughter, but it was Rosa who kept turning down Raymond's offers.

Finally, when Rosa said yes to a short ride with Raymond, she saw that he was more than just a pretty boy with a flashy car. Like Rosa's grandfather, Raymond was a man of conviction. He was well-spoken and cared deeply about the plight of black people in the South. And he was an active member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

*NAACP branch office, Detroit, Michigan, 1940's*



The more Raymond told Rosa about his commitment to helping black people, the more Rosa's awareness grew. Her love for Raymond grew, too. In December 1932 Rosa McCauley and Raymond Parks were married, in Pine Level at the home of Rosa's mother. Rosa was nineteen years old.

Raymond knew that Rosa had been forced to quit high school to take care of her family. It troubled him that his wife had to give up something she enjoyed so much. Soon after Rosa and Raymond married, Raymond encouraged Rosa to complete her education. Rosa was happy to return to school. She graduated from Alabama State Teachers College in 1933, with a high school diploma.

Rosa found work as a helper at Saint Margaret's Hospital in Montgomery. At night she worked as a seamstress at home, mending and tailoring clothes. Rosa was grateful for her job, but going to work drove home the sad reality of segregation. When Rosa took the city bus to work, she had to go through the same degrading ritual day after day. She would step on the bus at the front and buy a ticket from the driver. Then she'd have to leave the bus, walk around to the back, and enter the bus again through the rear door. All black passengers had to sit in the back. Only white people were allowed to ride at the front of the bus. This was the law. If you were black and the back of the bus was too crowded, tough. You had to wait for the next bus, go through the same drill, and pray you would get to work on time.

Rosa was growing tired of this daily disgrace. Sometimes she would get onto the bus at the front and pay her fare, like always. Then before the driver had a chance to take full notice of her, Rosa would breeze through the front section of the bus to find her seat in the back.



*Alabama State Teachers College*



Several drivers came to associate Rosa with her **defiance**. Once, in 1943, a driver kicked Rosa off his bus because she refused to enter the bus through the back door. He told Rosa that if she thought she was too high-and-mighty to follow the rules, she should find another bus to ride. But there was no other bus for her to ride. And there were no drivers bold enough to turn their backs on the ugly ways of discrimination.

As the wife of a civil rights activist (and the granddaughter of a civil rights believer), Rosa had learned three important things about changing the unjust treatment black people had suffered: Change takes time. Change takes strength. Change takes the help of others. Rosa Parks had all three.

She knew that one of the best ways to put these advantages to work would be to join the NAACP. But becoming an NAACP member wasn't as simple as it seemed. Rosa's husband didn't think it was a good idea. The NAACP existed under the constant threat of white vigilantes who looked for violent ways to sabotage group meetings. Sometimes NAACP meetings had to be held during late-night hours, in dark, secret places where Klansmen and the police couldn't find the group.

Raymond supported his wife's wish to stop segregation, but at the same time, he feared for her safety. And there were very few women enrolled as NAACP members. If Rosa were to join, she would be shrouded by the influence of men. Rosa respected her husband's concerns. But in 1943 when she spotted a picture in the *Alabama Tribune* of Johnnie Carr, a friend of hers from the Montgomery Industrial School, who was acting as a temporary secretary for the local NAACP Montgomery branch, Rosa knew she had to join. Soon after Rosa saw the newspaper article, she attended the annual NAACP Montgomery meeting. This was the meeting to elect new officers. There were sixteen people at the meeting—fifteen men and Rosa Parks.



*African American citizens sitting in the rear of the bus during the time of segregation laws*

When it came time to elect a permanent volunteer secretary, everybody looked to Rosa. They all figured secretarial work was women's work and she was the natural choice. Rosa accepted the job gladly. What better way to serve the cause than to document its progress?

Rosa wasted no time. She put her pen to paper right then and there, and recorded the remaining minutes of the meeting. From that day on for the next twelve years, Rosa took her position as the NAACP Montgomery chapter secretary very seriously. And when he saw the commitment that Rosa brought to her volunteer work, so did her husband.

Rosa organized branch meetings, kept the books, wrote and mailed letters and press releases, and at every turn, drummed up new members. When the office phone rang, Rosa answered it. When someone had a question about the workings of the branch, Rosa answered that, too.





*Montgomery NAACP meeting, 1950s. Rosa is at the right and Mr. E. D. Nixon is the first in the middle row.*

As branch secretary, Rosa worked closely with E. D. Nixon, the chapter president. Under E. D.'s direction, she recorded all of the cases of discrimination and violence against black people in the state of Alabama. The cases seemed never ending. There were hundreds of them.

Documenting these cases showed Rosa that racism in Alabama was big. It was powerful. It gathered **momentum** with each mile it covered. It would take the force of one woman's iron will to stop it in its tracks.

Turns out, Rosa Parks was that woman.

December 1, 1955, started out like any other Thursday for Rosa. She went to her job at the Montgomery Fair department store, where she then worked as a seamstress. When the workday ended, Rosa gathered her purse and coat and walked to the Court Square bus stop. She waited patiently for the Cleveland Avenue bus—the bus she'd taken to and from work many times. When she stepped onto the bus and paid her dime to ride, she immediately spotted an empty seat on the aisle, one row behind the whites-only section of the bus. It was rush hour. Any seat on any bus at this time of day was a blessing. Rosa sat back and gave a quiet sigh of relief.

When the bus stopped to pick up passengers at the Empire Theater stop, six white people got on. They each paid the ten-cent fare, just as Rosa had done. All but one of them easily found seats at the front of the bus. The sixth passenger, a man, didn't mind standing. He curled his fingers around a holding pole and waited for the bus to pull away.

But according to the bus segregation laws for the state of Alabama, black people were required to give up a bus seat if a white person was left standing. And each bus driver in the state was allowed to lay down the letter of the law on his bus.

As it turned out, Rosa was sitting on the bus that was driven by the same driver who, twelve years before, had kicked Rosa off his bus because she would not enter through the back door. The driver remembered Rosa. And Rosa sure remembered him. He glared at Rosa through his rearview mirror. He ordered her up and out of her seat. But she wouldn't move. Instead, she answered him with a question. Why, she asked, should she have to endure his bossing her around?

Well, the driver didn't take kindly to Rosa challenging him. Next thing Rosa knew, he was standing over her, insisting that she give up her seat to the white man who needed a seat. Rosa clenched her purse, which rested in her lap. When the driver asked Rosa to move a second time, Rosa put it to him plainly and firmly: No.

He told Rosa he would call the police if she didn't move. Rosa didn't flinch. Maybe she was thinking about her grandpa Sylvester's solid belief in not allowing mistreatment from others. Or maybe she was just fed up with giving in to segregation's iron fist.





Even the threat of police couldn't rouse Rosa. Once again her answer to the bus driver was simple: Do it. And he did—lickety-split. The police came right away. They arrested Rosa and took her to the city jail. Rosa called her husband and told him the whole story. News of Rosa's arrest had already begun to spread through Montgomery's black community. Several friends of Rosa's and Raymond's had seen Rosa get arrested. E. D. Nixon from the NAACP was one of the first to hear about Rosa. He immediately collected enough bail money to release Rosa from jail. He told Rosa and Raymond that though the incident was an unfortunate one, it had the power to pound out segregation. If Rosa was willing—and brave enough—to bring a case against Alabama's segregation laws, she could help end segregation in the state.

Rosa didn't have to think long about E. D. Nixon's proposal. Just a short time earlier, Rosa had been staring segregation in the face and saying *no*. Now she was looking the law in the eyes, and without blinking, she said *yes*. She agreed to attack the system that kept her and every black person in the United States of America from being treated equally. Years later, in reflecting on the events that led to her decision, Rosa said, "People always say that I [didn't give] up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically . . . The only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

On December 5, 1955, Rosa and her attorney, Fred Gray, appeared before Judge John B. Scott in the city court of Montgomery, Alabama. Rosa was found guilty of breaking the Alabama State segregated bus law. She was fined ten dollars. Although Rosa was convicted, her act had ignited the Montgomery bus boycott, a civil rights movement that would change the face of segregation forever.



### Summarize

Summarize how Rosa Parks decided to help end segregation in her state.



*Rosa being fingerprinted*



*Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. outlining boycott strategies to his organizers, including Rosa Parks.*

The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. helped the boycott get off to a strong start. On the evening of December 5, 1955, he addressed nearly one thousand people at the Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery. He said, “We’re going to work with grim and firm determination to gain justice on the buses in this city. And . . . we are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong . . . If we are wrong, justice is a lie. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream . . .”

Martin Luther King’s words **resonated** like thunder on a dark night. The kind of thunder that stirs you from the inside out. As a protest to the treatment they and Rosa had received, every black resident of Montgomery stopped riding the city’s buses. They walked to where they wanted to go. They walked miles and miles—to work, to church, to the bank, to the grocery store. They organized car pools. And by denying money to the city bus system, they showed white people that black men and women were valuable paying customers. No matter how tired of walking they may have been—some had to wake up long before dawn to get to work on time—they refused to give up.



*African Americans car pool, during bus boycott, deserted bus in background*

Rosa lost her job as a result of her arrest and the boycott. To earn money, she tailored clothes in her home. She spent the rest of her time helping the boycott stay organized. The boycott rolled on for more than a year. Finally, on December 20, 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that in the state of Alabama segregated buses were illegal. Black people went back to riding buses the very next day, and you can best believe that on buses in Montgomery—and throughout the state—black people sat in the front, enjoying their view of justice.

The Montgomery bus boycott was an important triumph for African Americans. It was the beginning of the end of *all* segregation. But it was a victory that came at a cost to Rosa. Soon after the boycott ended, Rosa received angry threats from white people who were in favor of segregation. A few months later Rosa and Raymond Parks, and Rosa's mother, Leona, moved to Detroit, Michigan, where Rosa's brother had settled.

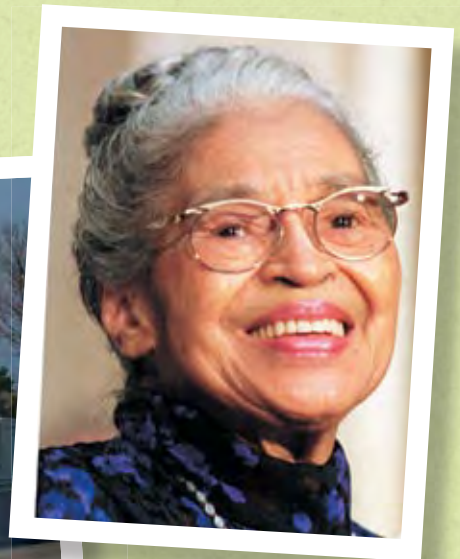
Living in the North enabled Rosa to continue her civil rights interests peacefully. In 1965 she began working in the office of John Conyers, a young black congressman. As she had done at the NAACP, Rosa kept the congressman's office running smoothly. She also helped him find housing for the city's homeless.

Whenever Rosa saw an opportunity to serve fellow African Americans, she took it. In 1987 she founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, a means for teaching young people about civil rights.

Over time Rosa has gained many impressive titles. She has been called the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement and the Patron Saint of the Civil Rights Movement. She even has two streets named after her, one in Detroit, the other in Montgomery. Montgomery's Cleveland Avenue, where Rosa caught the bus on that landmark day in 1955, was later renamed Rosa Parks Boulevard.

No single pronouncement can ever fully capture the impact that Rosa Parks has had on the condition of civil rights in America—and beyond.

*Opening of the Rosa Parks Highway*



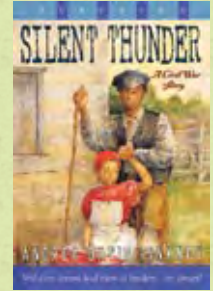
*Rosa Parks in 1999*

# Meet the Author

## Andrea Davis Pinkney



Andrea Davis Pinkney writes every day. Some of her best story ideas come to her when she is riding on the subway in New York City, where she lives with her husband, artist Brian Pinkney, and their children. Andrea grew up surrounded by civil rights activists. Maybe that is why all her books are about people who did extraordinary things to help change the world.



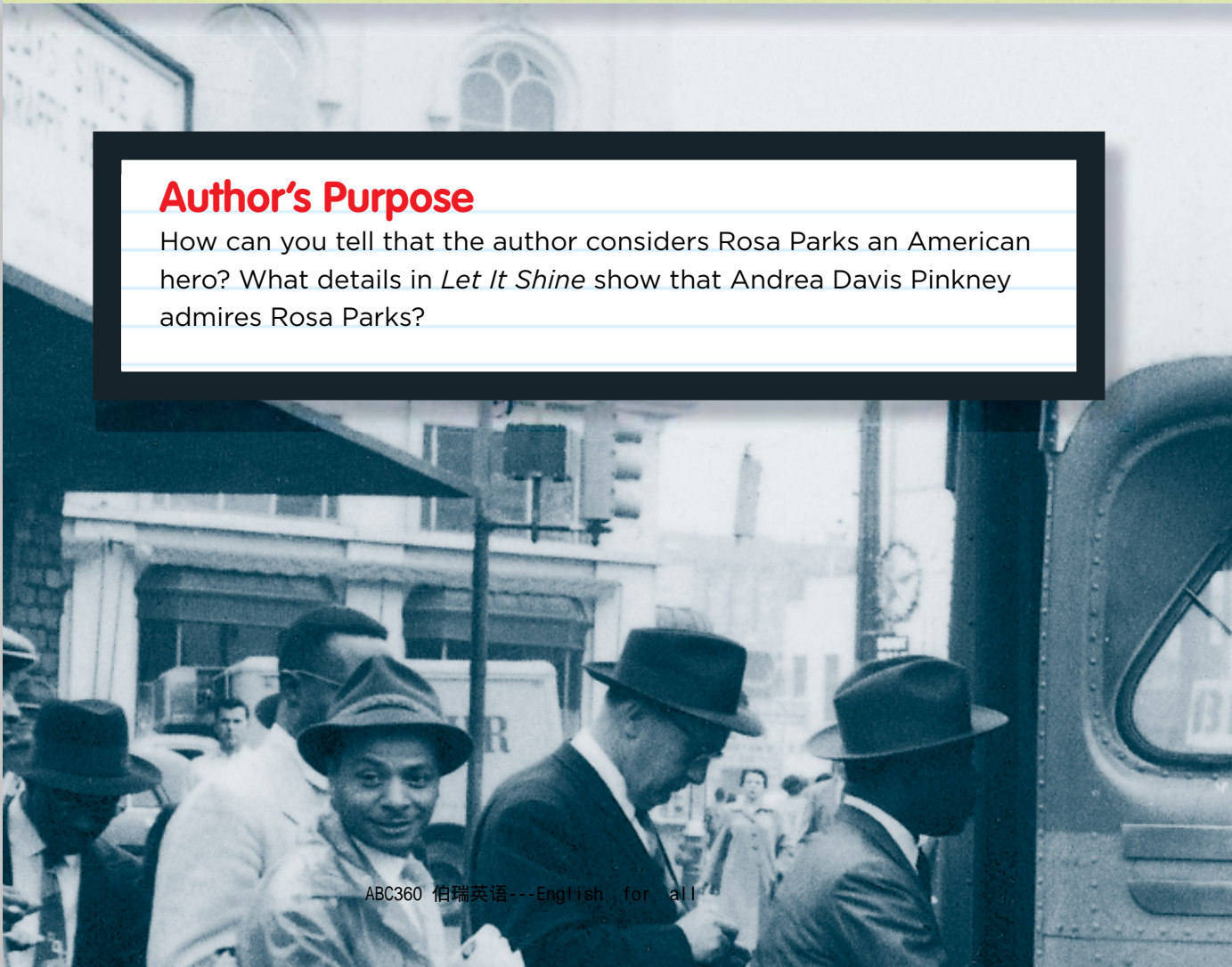
**Another book**  
by Andrea Davis  
Pinkney:  
*Silent Thunder*



Find out more about  
Andrea Davis Pinkney at  
[www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)

### Author's Purpose

How can you tell that the author considers Rosa Parks an American hero? What details in *Let It Shine* show that Andrea Davis Pinkney admires Rosa Parks?



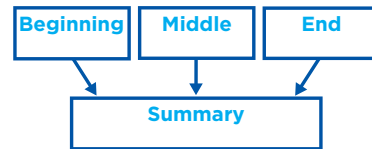


# Comprehension Check



## Summarize

Use your Summary Chart to help you summarize *Let It Shine*. Why is Rosa Parks known as “the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement”?



## Think and Compare

1. How did the events and people in Rosa Parks’s early life shape her work in the civil rights movement? **Monitor Comprehension: Summarize**
2. How would you describe Rosa Parks’s personality? Pick an event described in *Let It Shine* to illustrate her character. Use specific evidence from the text. **Evaluate**
3. Think about a time when someone you know stood up for his or her **convictions**. What happened? What were the potential consequences? **Synthesize**
4. Think about the bus driver, the man to whom Rosa was supposed to give her seat, and the police officer who arrested her. Why would some people support such an unjust law? **Evaluate**
5. Read “Rosa Parks and the Institute” on pages 570–571. How do the activities at the Institute reflect the goals of Rosa Parks in *Let It Shine*? **Reading/Writing Across Texts**