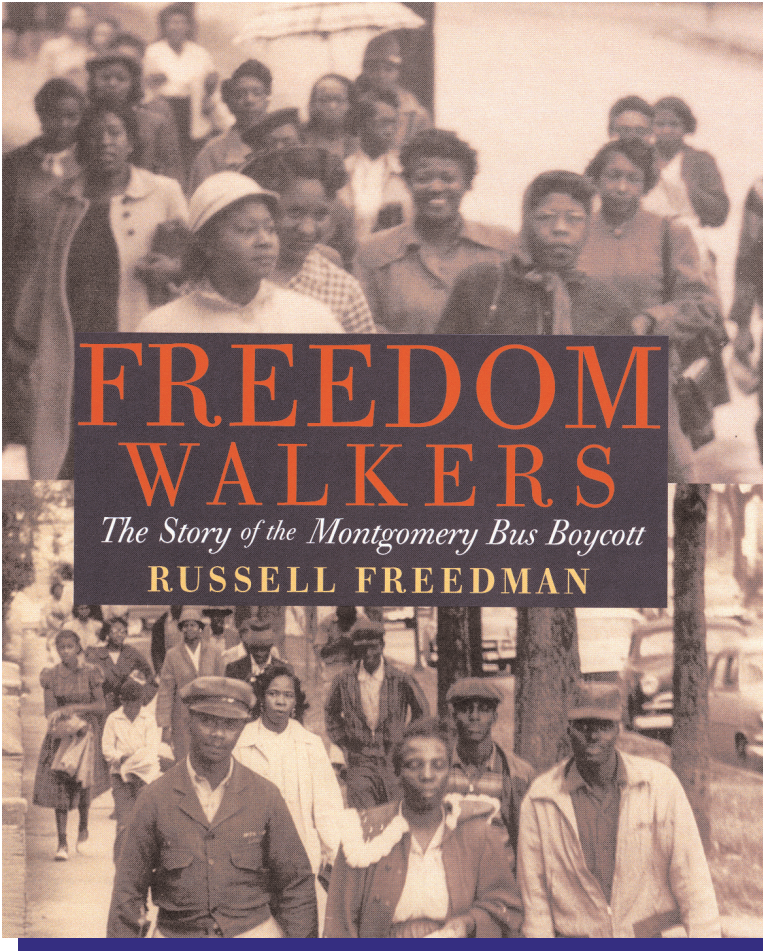


# Holiday House Educators' Guide



## Freedom Walkers

The Story of the  
Montgomery Bus Boycott

Russell Freedman

HC: 978-0-8234-2031-5 • Grades 4–8

“One day a half century ago, the black citizens in Montgomery  
**rose up in protest** and united to demand their rights—  
by walking peacefully. **It all started on a bus.**”

—RUSSELL FREEDMAN, from *Freedom Walkers*

# About the Book

## A defining moment that inspired radical social reform in America

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a forty-two-year-old seamstress at Montgomery Fair department store in Montgomery, Alabama, walked as usual to her regular stop, boarded a city bus as she did twice daily, and took



Rosa Parks  
AP/Wide World Photos

a seat in the middle section of the bus. When the driver demanded that Parks give up her seat to a white man, she quietly refused but was arrested, taken to the city jail, and ultimately fined fourteen dollars. At this point the Negro community, led by E. D. Nixon, began mobilizing their efforts to put an end to segregated buses. Ministers organized through their churches and elected Martin Luther King, Jr., a young minister at the historic Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, to help plan a “nonviolent” fight for their cause. They



King (in center wearing hat) is one of the first bus riders on December 21, 1956.  
AP/Wide World Photos

walked instead of rode, setting off a bus boycott that lasted 381 days. This courageous act was the beginning of the modern civil rights movement. Thousands of people bravely and peacefully walked their way to freedom. They were known as freedom walkers, and this is their story.

## Pre-reading Activity

Ask students to find out about the NAACP ([www.naacp.org/about/history/](http://www.naacp.org/about/history/)).

When was it formed?

What was its purpose?

Read the constitution of the organization.

Refer to the *Freedom Walkers* poster or to the poster time line on the Holiday House website ([www.holidayhouse.com](http://www.holidayhouse.com)) and write a brief paper that discusses how the objectives and mission of the NAACP applied to Jo Ann Robinson, Emmett Till, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and all of the freedom walkers.

# Classroom Discussion

- Discuss the involvement of the black clergy in the civil rights movement. Why were the churches the logical places to communicate the plans for the Montgomery bus boycott to the 40,000 black bus riders? Discuss how a bus boycott was the best weapon the black community could have used to fight segregation.
- In October 1955, Mary Louise Smith was arrested for not giving up her seat on a Montgomery bus. She pleaded guilty and was fined five dollars. Discuss why Mary Louise Smith had the courage to “sit here” but wasn’t the right person to inspire a battle.
- Why was E. D. Nixon such an important person in the black community of Montgomery? Explain what he meant when he scolded the black ministers, saying, “You ministers have lived off the sweat of these washerwomen for the last one hundred years and ain’t never done nothing for them” (p. 42). Why did he call the ministers cowards?
- Discuss the role of the white activists for equal rights. Why did it take courage for them to support the efforts of the black citizens of Montgomery?
- A test case was needed to prove that segregated buses were illegal under the U.S. Constitution. Explain why E. D. Nixon and other leaders of the black community didn’t feel that Claudette Colvin or Mary Louise Smith were the proper candidates for a court case. Why was Rosa Parks the best person?
- Explain why the act of being arrested became a badge of honor in the black community. How were the blacks “freed from fear”?
- Freedman says of Martin Luther King, Jr.: “More than any other leader of his turbulent era, he had been able to give America’s conscience a voice” (p. 96). Define the term “America’s conscience.” How did King give it a voice? How was King different from other leaders of the civil rights era? Discuss how his teachings and leadership are as important today as they were when he so passionately fought for human rights.
- What obstacles did the freedom walkers face? How did their plight become more difficult as days of boycotting turned into weeks? What and who gave them the courage to continue their efforts?
- There were a few people in the black community who didn’t choose to participate in the bus boycott. Discuss how they might have been viewed as courageous among the white population and cowards among the people in their own neighborhoods.
- Discuss the relationship between “human rights” and “civil rights.” Many blacks involved in the Montgomery bus boycott began to realize their self-worth. Explain how self-worth might be considered a “human right.” How does racism and bigotry destroy self-esteem? What did Rosa Parks and the thousands of people who participated in the bus boycott teach others about self-worth?
- What did Martin Luther King, Jr. learn about the true purpose of segregation? How did his goal of eliminating injustice and inequality take his work beyond the Montgomery bus boycott? Discuss how King dealt with fear.
- Describe the treatment that Rosa Parks enjoyed in Montgomery when she returned for the 40th anniversary of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1995. How did this celebration prove that “time heals”? Rosa Parks died on October 24, 2005. In his eulogy on Mrs. Parks, Kwame Kilpatrick, mayor of Detroit, said, “She stood up by sitting down.” Explain how this statement summarizes the poignancy and power of Rosa Parks’s act.
- In August 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. Why did the organizers of the Civil Rights March on Washington select the Lincoln Memorial as the place for King to deliver this speech?

**“I had no idea when I refused to give up my seat on that Montgomery bus that my small action would help put an end to the segregation laws in the South.”**

**— ROSA PARKS**



# Curriculum Connections

## Language Arts / Writing

In 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act in the same room where President Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Find out about the Emancipation Proclamation and the Voting Rights Act. Write a brief paper that compares the basic tenets of each of these laws. Comment on why it is symbolic that both were signed in the same room off the Capitol Rotunda.

Find out about the freedom riders. How was their mission similar to the freedom walkers? Write a brief paper titled “Riders and Walkers for Freedom.”

On December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks walked to the bus stop after work, she passed a banner that read “Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men.” Write a brief essay that discusses the irony of this banner.

Mother Pollard, an elderly black woman, was encouraged to ride in private cars rather than walk during the boycott. She chose to walk, and responded, “My feet is tired, but my soul is rested.” Her words later became a slogan for the protesters. Write a eulogy on Rosa Parks called “My Soul Is Rested.”

In 1999 President Bill Clinton presented Rosa Parks with the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation’s highest civilian honor. Write a letter that Rosa Parks might have received from Coretta Scott King, the widow of Martin Luther King, Jr., congratulating her on the award.

## Language Arts / Poetry

Martin Luther King, Jr. strongly believed that “we must meet hate with love” (p. 66). Write a poem that extends the meaning of this quote to our daily lives and to how we treat others.

## Math

Research the “Jim Crow” laws ([www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/](http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/)) and make a chart that reveals how the laws varied among the southern states.

## Communications / Media

Prepare a newscast that might have aired in Montgomery on the day that fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was killed in Money, Mississippi, in the summer of 1955. Discuss how his murder further galvanized the efforts of the Negro citizens of Montgomery. How was he a victim of the “Jim Crow” laws?

## Art and Media

The black community organized the “taxicab army” to help transport those who were boycotting the buses in Montgomery. Create a brochure that explains the “taxicab army” that might have been distributed in the churches.

## U.S. History / Research

Jo Ann Robinson was elected president of the WPC (Women’s Political Council). The formation of this organization was partly because the local League of Women Voters wouldn’t allow black women to join. Find out about both organizations and write a brief comparison of purpose, history, and activities. How was each organization formed because of some type of discrimination?

## Geography / Working with Maps

Find out about Freedom Park in Atlanta, the fifteen-mile greenway that connects the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site with The Carter Center and the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum ([www.nps.gov/malu/pdf/MALU-31.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/malu/pdf/MALU-31.pdf)). Write a brief description of the park for the Atlanta Visitors Bureau. Explain the connection between Martin Luther King, Jr. and former president Jimmy Carter.

## Performing Arts / Music

Freedom songs and spirituals were often sung by the freedom walkers, and some of these songs were sung at the funeral of Rosa Parks. Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to locate and learn one of these songs. Perform them in class.

**“Parks’s defiance on that December evening in 1955 set in motion a peaceful revolution that led to the death of Jim Crow segregation in the South and brought black Americans into the nation’s political life. But the success and true impact of the Montgomery boycott depended on the sacrifices and determination of thousands whose names are lost to history—maids, laborers, teachers, students, cooks, and others—ordinary people who rose above the safe routines of their daily lives to become actors in an historical drama that changed a nation.”**

—RUSSELL FREEDMAN, from *Freedom Walkers*

# Web Links

**The National Civil Rights Museum**  
[www.civilrightsmuseum.org](http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org)

This museum in Memphis, Tennessee, explores the history and lessons of the American civil rights movement.

**Birmingham Civil Rights Institute**  
[www.bcri.org](http://www.bcri.org)

Documents the struggle of Birmingham's African American citizens as they became participants in the city's government and business communities.

**Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church & Parsonage Museum**

[www.dexterkingmemorial.org](http://www.dexterkingmemorial.org)

Information on the civil rights movement and the church where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. pastored from 1954–1960.

**International Civil Rights Center & Museum**  
[www.sitinmovement.org](http://www.sitinmovement.org)

This center marks the site where four North Carolina College freshmen initiated a sit-in at the whites-only lunch section at Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina.

**Ebenezer Baptist Church Museum in Atlanta**  
[www.nps.gov/malu](http://www.nps.gov/malu)

This National Historic Site was established to commemorate Dr. King and his work.

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

## About the Author

**Russell Freedman**, one of America's most honored writers of nonfiction books, grew up in San Francisco and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. After serving with the Second Infantry Division during the Korean War, he worked as a reporter and editor for the Associated Press, and later as a publicist for several network television shows. His first book, *Teenagers Who Made History*, was published in 1961. Since then he has been a full-time writer.

The Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, has called Russell Freedman "America's Historian for Young People." The author of more than fifty nonfiction titles, Mr. Freedman has received numerous awards, including the Newbery Medal, three Newbery Honors, the National Humanities Medal, the Orbis Pictus Award, the Robert F. Sibert Medal, the May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture Award, and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award for "a substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children." Russell Freedman lives in New York City and travels the globe to gather material for his works.

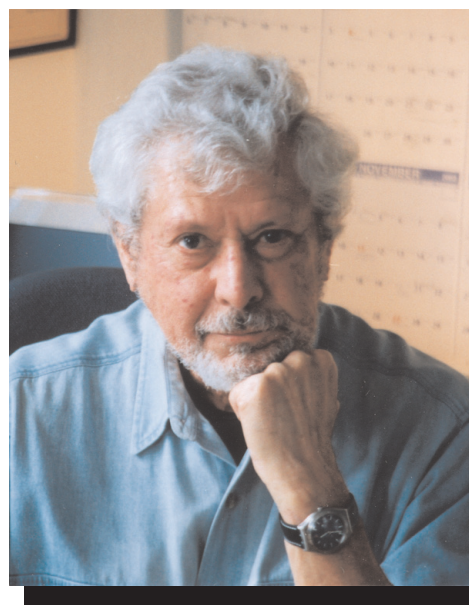


Photo Credit: Evans Chan

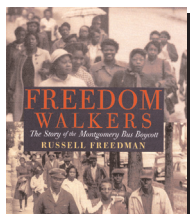
“Like every other writer, a nonfiction writer is essentially a storyteller. Whatever my subject, I always feel that I have a story to tell that is worth telling, and so I want to tell it as clearly and simply and effectively as I can, in a way that will stretch the reader’s imagination and make that reader care.”

— RUSSELL FREEDMAN

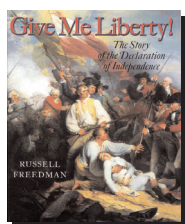
# Books from Holiday House



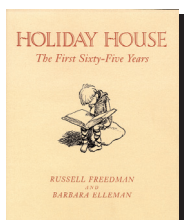
**BUFFALO HUNT**  
Ages 8–12  
HC: 978-0-8234-0702-6 / PB: 978-0-8234-1159-1



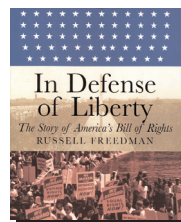
**FREEDOM WALKERS**  
*The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*  
Grades 4–7  
HC: 978-0-8234-2031-5



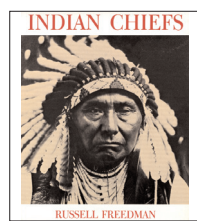
**GIVE ME LIBERTY!**  
*The Story of the Declaration of Independence*  
Grades 5 up  
HC: 978-0-8234-1448-2 / PB: 978-0-8234-1753-7



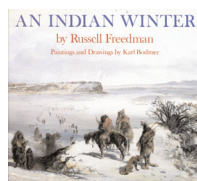
**HOLIDAY HOUSE: THE FIRST SIXTY-FIVE YEARS**  
Russell Freedman and Barbara Elleman  
HC: 978-0-8234-1559-5



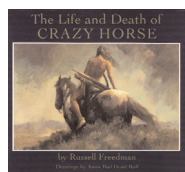
**IN DEFENSE OF LIBERTY**  
*The Story of America's Bill of Rights*  
Grades 5 up  
HC: 978-0-8234-1585-4



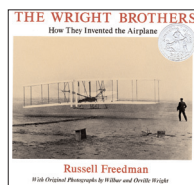
**INDIAN CHIEFS**  
Grades 5 up  
HC: 978-0-8234-0625-8 / PB: 978-0-8234-0971-6



**AN INDIAN WINTER**  
Grades 5 up  
HC: 978-0-8234-0930-3



**THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CRAZY HORSE**  
Grades 5 up  
HC: 978-0-8234-1219-8



**THE WRIGHT BROTHERS**  
*How They Invented the Airplane*  
Grades 5 up  
HC: 978-0-8234-0875-7 / PB: 978-0-8234-1082-8  
Newbery Honor Book

Visit  
Holiday House  
Online!

Log on when you have the time— for free educators' guides and classroom reproducibles.

**Holiday House**  
[www.holidayhouse.com](http://www.holidayhouse.com)

- Reproducible activity sheets
- Educators' guides
- Author and illustrator biographies— with links to their websites
- Sign up for our monthly electronic newsletter for all the latest information!

Click on  
Free  
Materials

HOLIDAY HOUSE  
425 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10017  
[www.holidayhouse.com](http://www.holidayhouse.com)