The Struggle for Equality

For hundreds of years, most African Americans were enslaved. In 1865, the Civil War ended and so did slavery. But African Americans have been struggling to be treated fairly and equally ever since. Many have helped change laws to make the United States a better country for all people. Here are stories about how some heroic African Americans worked for equality for everyone.

Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 when she refused to give her bus seat to a white passenger. At the time, a city law required black people to give their seats to white people on crowded buses. Parks's actions helped start the civil rights movement, which led to greater equality for African Americans.

Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri. He went to college and became a writer in the 1920s. Hughes published 50 books. He wrote poetry, plays, novels, songs, and children's stories. Many of his books are about the struggle for equality. One of his fictional characters says, "I've been insulted, eliminated, locked in, locked out, and left holding the bag. But I am still here."

Thurgood Marshall

Thurgood Marshall became the first African American to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. Named after his grandfather, who had been enslaved, Marshall always tried to help poor people and other African Americans. Before becoming a justice of the Supreme Court in 1967, Marshall helped end segregation in schools.

Jackie Robinson

Jackie Robinson was born in Cairo, Georgia. After graduating from college, Robinson joined the Army and became a lieutenant. In 1947, he became the first African American to play for a major league baseball team. Robinson's spectacular skills won him many fans, and he became one of the greatest players of his time. Throughout his life, Robinson tried to help other people. He once wrote, "A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives."

Barbara Jordan

Barbara Jordan was born in Houston, Texas, in 1936. She was the first African-American woman elected to the Texas state legislature. In 1972, she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Jordan always believed that if people worked hard, they could overcome any barriers and become successful.
1. What important event happened in 1865?

   A  the Civil War and slavery ended
   B  Langston Hughes published his first book
   C  Thurgood Marshall became Supreme Court Justice
   D  Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama

2. The cause of Rosa Parks’ arrest was that she refused to give up her bus seat to a white person. What was an effect of her actions?

   A  Rosa Parks wrote books about the struggle for equality.
   B  Rosa Parks helped to end segregation in schools.
   C  Rosa Parks was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.
   D  Rosa Parks helped start the Civil Rights movement.

3. In the passage, the lives and work of five African Americans are described. Based on this information, what can you conclude?

   A  these five African Americans are the only ones who fought for equality
   B  the struggle for equality has required the work of many people
   C  the struggle for equality is over thanks to these five African Americans
   D  African Americans are the only people who have to struggle for equality

4. What do the African Americans in this passage all have in common?

   A  they all helped to end segregation in American schools
   B  they were all the first African Americans in their career fields
   C  they all cared about promoting equality and fighting racism
   D  they all wrote books about their experiences with racism

5. What is this passage mostly about?

   A  the effects of slavery on African Americans after the Civil War
   B  the ways people lived life in the United States from 1865 to 1972
   C  how the laws in the United States make the country a better place for everyone
   D  how some African Americans worked to promote equality for everyone
6. Read this sentence from the passage: “Jordan always believed that if people worked hard, they could overcome any **barriers** and become successful.”

What does the word “**barrier**” mean?

- A progress
- B occupation
- C obstacle
- D help

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Many African Americans worked hard for equality. __________, the United States has become a better country for all people.

- A Although
- B As a result
- C Primarily
- D For example

8. Why was Rosa Parks arrested?

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9. How did Thurgood Marshall work towards equality during his lifetime?
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10. How is life for African Americans different from the early 1900s? Support your answer using examples from the passage.
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Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 830

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8. Why was Rosa Parks arrested?

Suggested answer: Rosa Parks was arrested because she refused to give her bus seat to a white passenger. There was a city law requiring black people to give their seats to white people on crowded buses. [paragraph 2]

9. How did Thurgood Marshall work towards equality during his lifetime?


10. How is life for African Americans different from the early 1900s? Support your answer using examples from the passage.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary and should be supported by the text. Students should indicate that life is very different for black people today as compared to the early 1900s. Black people do not have to give their seats to white people on crowded buses. Black kids and white kids can go to the same school together. There have been many African American writers, athletes, judges, and elected officials. [paragraphs 2-6]