

LESSON 1: MEET CLAUDETTE COLVIN

CIVIL RIGHTS ICON, ACTIVIST, & SPEAKER



Claudette Colvin, (b. September 5, 1939)

“When it comes to justice, there is no easy way to get it. You can’t sugar-coat it. You have to take a stand and say, ‘this is not right.’”

-Claudette Colvin

INTRODUCTION

To “keep your eyes on the prize” means to determine what is important and to muster up the courage to take action towards making the vision a reality. This year’s VocalEssence WITNESS School Program introduces us to three women who continue to make a positive impact on our society as they speak out about and stand up for change. As you learn more about them and their life’s work, we hope each of you are inspired to consider, What is the prize that your eyes are on? What issues or causes are you willing to work and stand up for to make our society a better place?

PROCESS

1. Divide students into small groups to read the short biographical article, “Meet Claudette Colvin” (one copy per group, or per student).
2. Direct them to read out loud and share the reader’s role within their group.
3. Remaining in groups, students then discuss what they’ve learned about Claudette Colvin, highlighting some of the events, experiences, and key details of her life they find interesting or significant.
4. Encourage note taking as they share information and comments on her background, achievements, and other interesting and important events and circumstances that led to her becoming an important figure in the American Civil Rights Movement and the impact and legacy of her work.
5. Provide a copy of the “A Portrait of Claudette Colvin” worksheet for each individual student to complete. They can work in their group or as individuals. You may also make it a homework assignment.
6. As time allows, consider doing some of the suggested EXTENSION ACTIVITIES to engage student’s creativity and student-led projects to further their learning and understanding while meeting other MN Academic Standards. These extension activities can be done with any of the three “biographical” lesson plans (Claudette Colvin, Ruby Bridges, Mari Copeny)

OBJECTIVES

LEARNING GOALS:

- Students will learn about Claudette Colvin’s role as a civil rights activist and her contribution to the desegregation of public transportation.
- Students will compare the experiences of Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks, and analyze how Colvin’s actions contributed to legal changes and the broader Civil Rights Movement.
- Students will read a biographical article about Claudette Colvin, identifying key events and achievements in her life.
- Students will create a portrait activity highlighting Claudette Colvin’s key accomplishments and life events.

MATERIALS:

- Copies of the Biographical Article: Meet Claudette Colvin
- Copies of the Student Worksheet: A Portrait of Claudette Colvin
- EXTENSION ACTIVITIES call for other resources or materials not included with this lesson.

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ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

Students' written descriptions on the biographical "A Portrait of Claudette Colvin" worksheet provide evidence of critical thinking and understanding, and their ability to summarize and describe Claudette Colvin's life's work, impact and achievements toward racial justice.

Additional assessments may include any student-created projects as outlined in the EXTENSION ACTIVITIES section below.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES

- **VISUAL ARTS:** Students may work individually or in pairs or small groups to create an artistic collage using the information they learned and recorded on their "Portrait" worksheets. Encourage the use of a variety of art supplies, materials, and student creativity (paints, markers, colored paper, found materials, student-created illustrations, etc.) These can then be displayed in the classroom or school hallway for others to enjoy and learn from.
- **LANGUAGE ARTS:** Students may work individually or in teams to create an acrostic poem, using each letter of Claudette's first and last name to create statements reflecting her impact and legacy.
- **DANCE & MOVEMENT:** Students may work in teams to create tableau, choreography or other sequences of movement to highlight important aspects of Claudette's life and work. Consider encouraging students use the acrostic poems they created, or to write a new spoken word poem or rap to accompany their movement.
- **SONGWRITING:** Students in music classes may work individually or in teams to create an original song about Claudette Colvin, which could be performed for their peers. Use instruments or found objects to create a rhythmic soundscape.
- **DEEPER DIG FOR OLDER STUDENTS:** Students can explore more about Claudette Colvin by researching and writing an essay about her life and aspects of her work and legacy. Students can present highlights from their research for the rest of the class.

MINNESOTA STATE STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS:

Read

-Standard 1: Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details

DANCE: Create

-Standard 1: Improvise a movement phrase using stimulus/stimuli
-Standard 2: Choreograph a movement phrase using the elements of dance

MUSIC: Create

-Standard 2: Generate rhythmic or melodic patterns
-Standard 6: Create or improvise musical ideas that can be combined into a melody
-Standard 3: Organize chosen musical patterns into phrases using a system of notation or recording technology

RESOURCES:

Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice, by Philip Hoose

Rage is Not a 1-Day Thing! (a one-woman performance) tells Claudette's story

South High School in Minneapolis featured a theatrical production last year about Claudette

LESSON 1.1

MEET CLAUDETTE COLVIN

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MEET CLAUDETTE COLVIN

“I felt like Sojourner Truth was pushing down on one shoulder and Harriet Tubman was pushing down on the other—saying, ‘Sit down girl!’ I was glued to my seat.”

– Claudette Colvin



Claudette Colvin, (b. September 5, 1939)

Major movements and revolutions in history are marked by big events, but are always comprised of smaller events which are often overlooked. Claudette Colvin’s story is one of these significant but overlooked events.

Her story begins as a young girl growing up in segregated Montgomery, Alabama. She knew firsthand of the humiliation and violence that black people suffered if they did not toe the line of Jim Crow. Her friend was put to death for an innocent flirtatious gesture toward a white girl. Colvin, a studious child, was determined to get the best education, become a lawyer, and fight for civil rights.

On March 2, 1955, however, Colvin’s life changed forever. The fifteen-year-old boarded a segregated city bus on her way home from school, her mind filled with what she’d been learning during Negro History Week. At one stop,

several white passengers got on, and the bus driver ordered her and three others to move, though there were other seats available for the white passengers. Three got up, Colvin stayed. As she recalled, “I felt like Sojourner Truth was pushing down on one shoulder and Harriet Tubman was pushing down on the other – saying. ‘Sit down girl!’ I was glued to my seat.”

She was taken off the bus by two police officers whose behavior made her fear that she might be assaulted. She was charged with violating segregation laws, misconduct, and resisting arrest. Her conviction and subsequent probation left Colvin feeling she would never get the education and professional life she so desired.

Girl, 15, Guilty In Bus Seat Case

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — A 15-year-old girl who refused to move to the rear of a city bus was found guilty in juvenile court here last Friday on charges of assault and battery, disorderly conduct and with violating a city ordinance which makes it “unlawful for any passenger to remain in the rear of the bus when a Negro woman when seated in the front of the bus.”

The girl, Claudette Colvin, was charged with assault and battery on a white woman seated in the front of the bus. She was also charged with violating the city ordinance which makes it “unlawful for any passenger to remain in the rear of the bus when a Negro woman when seated in the front of the bus.”

Colvin was sentenced to 30 days in the county jail and a fine of \$100. She was also ordered to pay the costs of her defense.

Colvin’s father, Dr. J. P. Colvin, said his daughter was “glad to be found guilty” because she was “glad to stand up for her rights.”

Colvin is expected to appeal the conviction.



The African American community was outraged. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., came to Montgomery to fight her arrest, and leaders in the civil rights movement sought a way to end bus segregation. They looked at Claudette Colvin as a potential “face” of the movement. As Colvin’s friend Reverend Johnson told her, “Everyone prays for freedom. We’ve all been praying and praying. But you’re different – you want your answer the next morning. And I think you’ve just brought the revolution to Montgomery.” However, she was deemed too young and her

complexion too dark to be the right fit. Then she became pregnant (by a man whose name Colvin will not disclose), and that was that.

Nine months later Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus, and the boycott that was contemplated when Colvin was arrested, began. Parks was educated, older, lighter-skinned, and employed as a seamstress. Although her refusal to move was not directly planned, she was already part of the civil rights movement. She had been trained for civil disobedience by the NAACP.



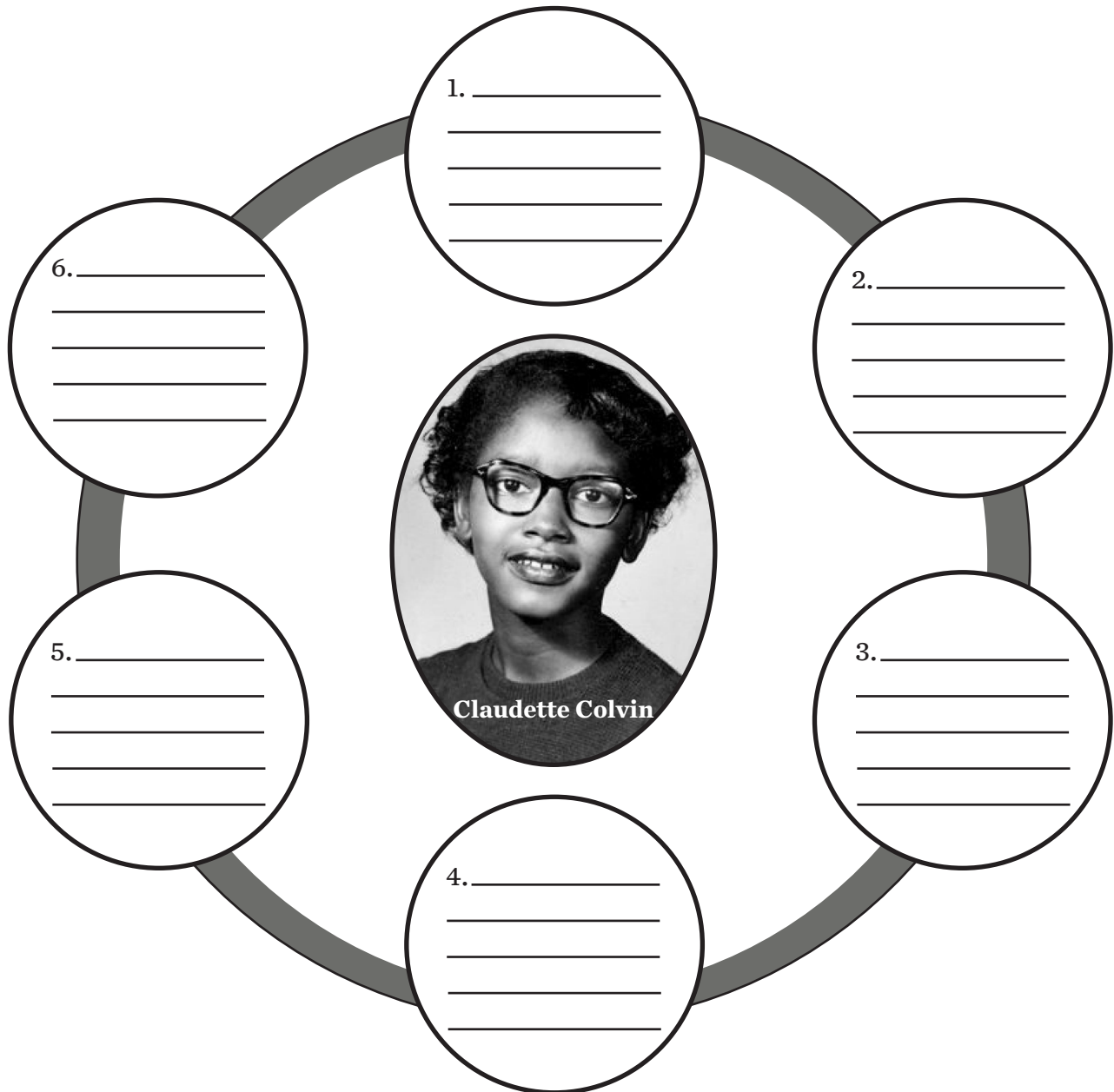
Claudette Colvin’s role was not over. She and the three other young women who were harassed on that bus in 1955, became the plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of segregated buses. Browder v. Gayle and went all the way to the Supreme Court, where the justices found that Montgomery’s bus segregation was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, a significant civil rights victory.

Notes: Claudette Colvin has been largely forgotten. Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice, by Philip Hoose | Rage is Not a 1-Day Thing! (a one-woman performance) tells her story | South HS featured a production last year about Claudette.

LESSON 1.2:

A PORTRAIT OF CLAUDETTE COLVIN

A portrait is a verbal picture or description of a person. If you were going to introduce Claudette Colvin to someone who knows nothing about her, what would you say to paint a short, accurate picture of her life? Read your notes, revisit some of the readings, reflection on some of the events, facts, and/or interesting experiences that you think are important, and summarize six of them in the circles. (You can write inside AND outside the circles.)



1. _____


2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____


Claudette Colvin

Name: _____ Date: _____