

Name: _____ Class: _____

Justice for All

By Lynn Rymarz
2016

Ida B. Wells (1862-1931) was an African American journalist and early leader in the Civil Rights Movement. In this informational text, Lynn Rymarz discusses an incident in which Ida refused to give up her seat on a train when asked to move because of the color of her skin. As you read, take notes on how Ida reacts to her treatment on the train.

- [1] One day in May 1884, twenty-one-year-old Ida Bell Wells boarded a train bound for Woodstock, Tennessee, and the school where she taught. Ida sat in the first-class ladies' coach¹ and opened her book. Minutes later the conductor collected passengers' tickets.

"Can't take your ticket here," the conductor told Ida. "You will have to go to the other car."



"Ida refused to budge" by Meryl Henderson is used with permission.

In 1884, African Americans, particularly in the South, did not have the same rights as whites.

They could not attend the same schools or drink from the same water fountains. African Americans were expected to sit in a separate railroad car, one that was usually dirty and smoke-filled, though they were charged full fare.²

Having paid for a first-class ticket, Ida refused to budge.³ It was unfair, she thought. "The other car is a smoker," she told the white conductor. "I propose to stay."

- [5] When the conductor grabbed Ida's arm to drag her out, she bit his hand. Furious, he disappeared, quickly returning with two other railroad men. They yanked Ida from her seat, ripping her sleeve. As they hauled her down the aisle, the white passengers stood and applauded.

Rather than ride in the smoking car, Ida got off the train. The railroad had not heard the last of her. She would fight for equal rights. She would stand up for justice.

Ida was born a slave in Holly Springs, Mississippi, in 1862, the second year of the Civil War. When the war ended three years later, so did slavery. Freedom brought newfound rights and hopes for equality. Education, which had been denied to Ida's parents, was now available to their children. "Our job was to go to school and learn all we could," Ida remembered.

But in the summer of 1878, life changed for sixteen-year-old Ida. While she was away from home visiting her grandmother, a yellow-fever⁴ epidemic⁵ raged through Holly Springs, killing her mother, father, and infant brother.

1. a train car that is considered of the best quality
2. the money a passenger has to pay to use transportation
3. **Budge (verb):** to make the slightest movement

As the oldest of six children, Ida became the head of her family. In need of work, she passed the teachers' examination and found a job in a one-room schoolhouse, a mule ride away.

- [10] It was difficult to raise a family and work. When Ida's aunt offered to help out, Ida moved to her aunt's home in Memphis, Tennessee. Ida's new teaching position took her to Woodstock. A train brought her to and from work.

Ida soon saw "efforts all over the South to draw the color line⁶ on the railroads." Hopes of equality were fading. The railroads' attempt to separate African Americans and whites was demonstrated that day in 1884 when Ida was forced out of her seat. Fuming mad, she sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad.

When the case went to court, the judge decided in Ida's favor. Her ticket, he said, entitled her to a first-class seat — a seat that the smoking car did not provide. He awarded her five hundred dollars in damages.⁷

But Ida's victory did not last long. The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad appealed⁸ its case to the Tennessee Supreme Court. When the verdict was reached, the victory went to the railroad. It determined that the "smoking car was a first-class coach for colored people," thereby providing separate but equal⁹ accommodations. Ida had to return the five hundred dollars and pay more than two hundred dollars in court costs.

Hugely disappointed, Ida wrote in her diary, "I had hoped such great things from my suit¹⁰ for my people... I have firmly believed all along that the law was on our side and would... give us justice."

- [15] Ida had lost her battle with the railroad, but not her determination to stand up for what was right. After losing her court case, Ida wrote an article about the railroad's suit against her. It appeared in a number of African American newspapers. Readers quickly recognized the power of Ida's words.

Ida began a new career as a journalist. Her reputation¹¹ took her to Washington, D.C., in 1913 as a delegate¹² to the National Equal Rights League, a committee formed to address discrimination.¹³ The league appealed to President Woodrow Wilson to end segregation.¹⁴

Ida did not live to see the end of segregation. When she died in 1931, African Americans still attended separate schools, drank from separate drinking fountains, and sat in separate sections on buses and trains. Ida's battle for civil rights would now be fought by others.

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4. a disease that is spread through the bite of an infected female mosquito
 5. **Epidemic (noun):** the spreading of a disease that affects many people quickly
 6. an effort to keep African Americans and whites separate
 7. a sum of money given to someone to make up for a loss
 8. to go to a higher court to reverse the decision of a lower court
 9. the idea that races could be kept separately but given the same quality of goods and services
 10. short for "lawsuit," which refers to legal action
 11. **Reputation (noun):** the beliefs or opinions that are held about someone or something
 12. a person who has the responsibility of representing others
 13. **Discrimination (noun):** the unjust treatment of different groups of people, especially based on race, age, or sex
 14. **Segregation (noun):** the action of separating people based on race

One day in December 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, bringing the Civil Rights Movement to the attention of the nation. In speaking about the courageous woman who went before her, Rosa Parks said, “Ida B. Wells is an inspiration to everyone who knows about her. She did not only fight for her rights but she won. I am sorry I did not know her personally.”

Ida B. Wells helped lead the way in bringing about justice for all. A journalist and organizer, she helped create the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which still fights racial injustice today.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement identifies the central idea of the text?
 - A. Public transportation would have never been desegregated if it wasn't for Ida's hard work.
 - B. Ida bought her train first-class train ticket knowing she would be asked to leave, in order to bring attention to segregation.
 - C. When people saw Ida violently removed from her seat on the train, they realized how unjust racial segregation was.
 - D. Ida fought for racial justice for herself and others, and moved future generations to fight for civil rights.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "African Americans were expected to sit in a separate railroad car, one that was usually dirty and smoke-filled, though they were charged full fare." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "They yanked Ida from her seat, ripping her sleeve. As they hauled her down the aisle, the white passengers stood and applauded." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "When the case went to court, the judge decided in Ida's favor. Her ticket, he said, entitled her to a first-class seat — a seat that the smoking car did not provide." (Paragraph 12)
 - D. "Ida B. Wells is an inspiration to everyone who knows about her. She did not only fight for her rights but she won." (Paragraph 18)

3. Which of the following describes the structure of information in the text?
 - A. The author describes Ida's fight against the railroad, and then how she went on to be further involved in the fight against racism.
 - B. The author describes Ida's difficult childhood, and how this gave her the strength and motivation to never give up her fight for justice.
 - C. The author discusses racial segregation in the South during Ida's life and then explains how racism ended during the Civil Rights Movement.
 - D. The author discusses influential black women who fought for change, and then focuses on Ida's life and accomplishments.

4. Which statement describes the connection between Ida B. Wells and Rosa Parks?
 - A. Neither Ida nor Rosa felt that they were able to achieve racial justice.
 - B. Ida and Rosa both brought segregation to an end on public transportation.
 - C. Ida and Rosa both struggled to end segregation and to achieve racial justice.
 - D. Neither Ida nor Rosa intended to start a movement by refusing to give up their seat.

5. Describe the relationship between the railroad lawsuit and Wells' career as a journalist and activist.
