



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

A Proclamation About Rosa Parks

Standing up for Civil Rights by Refusing to Stand for Injustice



Clarity and Focus

The essay thoroughly orients the reader to the topic with engaging, relevant context in the introduction. A clear and effective central idea is presented (“that it is not enough to simply “believe” in a cause, you must speak up and stand up for what you believe in order to make a change in this world”) and a consistent focus on the task fulfills the writing purpose and demands of the prompt.



Development

Well-chosen evidence from Obama’s speech (“her courageous act of civil disobedience sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott”) is paired with relevant facts (“The Boycott led to the segregation laws being overturned”), and each is thoroughly explained.



Organization

Purposeful opening and closing paragraphs show not only a well-developed introduction and conclusion, but also two body paragraphs support the thesis by each focusing on a distinct point. Varied transitions (“Here,” “Unfortunately,” “For this reason”) show the relationships between and among ideas and assist in creating a sense of cohesion throughout the essay.



Language and Style

An established formal style and objective tone is maintained throughout, and sentence structure is appropriately varied. Precise, domain-specific vocabulary (“segregation,” “prejudice,” “incidents,” “racial and cultural equality”) is expertly used to address the complexity of the topic.



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait ‘looks like’ in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see “25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays” by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

A Proclamation About Rosa Parks



Standing up for Civil Rights by Refusing to Stand for Injustice

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s focused on the fight for equal rights of African Americans. Leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Lewis organized many of the large-scale protests and marches that are still remembered to this day. But it was the seemingly small action of a seamstress in Alabama that sparked a key turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat at the front of the bus to a white person because she was tired of the segregation laws that viewed African Americans as unequal to white people. In a speech honoring Rosa Parks on the 100th anniversary of her birth, President Obama reflected on her actions that day: "We remind ourselves that although the principle of equality has always been self-evident, it has never been self-executing." While honoring Parks's contribution to the Civil Rights Movement, he was reminding the citizens of today that it is not enough to simply "believe" in a cause, you must speak up and stand up for what you believe in order to make a change in this world.

Positive changes in the world do not just happen on their own. They are caused by the people in the world who see a problem and take action. Rosa Parks did not wake up on December 1, 1955, knowing that she was going to do something to stand up against segregation, but when faced with injustice, she refused to stay silent. In his speech, President Obama stated, "Though Rosa Parks was not the first to confront the injustice of segregation laws, her courageous act of civil disobedience sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott - 381 days of peaceful protest when ordinary men, women, and children sent the extraordinary message that second-class citizenship was unacceptable." Here, Obama recognized how important it is when one person speaks out against unfairness and chooses to act on their

beliefs, instead of just "accepting the way things are". Because Parks was willing to go to jail to prove the system was wrong, others were inspired to take action and support the cause that they believed in too. The citizens of Montgomery organized carpools so they wouldn't have to ride the bus, and after more than a year of losing money, the city gave in. The Boycott led to the segregation laws being overturned and was a significant victory for the Civil Rights Movement. With great courage and a simple act, Rosa Parks was able to make a difference in many lives.

Unfortunately, to this day Americans are still fighting to legally restrict or remove the rights of certain groups of people. These acts of prejudice often go unnoticed, or worse, ignored. From incidents of bullying on the playground to racial or cultural groups not enjoying the same "unalienable Rights" of others, many may say they support equality but few people actually do something about it. The meaning of Obama's quote is actually pretty simple: "We remind ourselves that although the principle of equality has always been self-evident..." means that it is clear and obvious that we are all equal and deserve the same rights. When he says, "it has never been self-executing," though, he means that those rights will not just happen without action. Obama's main message is that everyone has the ability to stand up for equality, but unless they actually speak up for what they believe in and do something about it, it will never get done.

Barack Obama is evidence of the significant changes that have occurred in America because of the activists of the Civil Rights Movement. The brave actions of ordinary folks like Rosa Parks helped move our country forward to a place where an African American can be elected president. For this reason and many more, it is true that our country has undergone some big changes that challenged racial inequality. However, the U.S. is a country that is a work in progress, one in which racial and cultural equality is still an active struggle. It will be through the dedicated actions of ordinary, thoughtful citizens who stand up and demand their voices be heard that this goal will someday be accomplished.