

Sample Excerpt
TOEFL – Reading Comp and Essay

Reading Passage 3 – History

Rosa Parks

In December 1955 in Montgomery Alabama, a slight, soft-spoken black woman became a figurehead for the civil rights movement in the United States. What did she do? She refused. Most everyone in the United States knows the name of Rosa Parks. She was the courageous woman who stood up to a society that had **oppressed** her and millions like her, for far too long. We're going to briefly examine her case and its enormous and continuing implications on everyday life in the United States.

In 1955, segregation laws in Montgomery were complex and deeply, personally instilled in the community. The public transport system had its own code of conduct that was rarely spoken, but always obeyed. Black passengers paid the driver in the front of the bus, then exited and re-boarded through the back door, to take a seat in the designated "colored section", which was the last several rows of the bus. If the white section was filled, a black passenger was required to **relinquish** his or her seat to any white passenger who would otherwise be forced to stand. But on her way home from work that day, no more tired than usual, Rosa Parks, a 42 year old seamstress, refused. She was ordered to surrender her seat under threat of arrest. She calmly remained where she was, and was promptly arrested.

Many people don't realize that Rosa Parks was not the first black citizen to defy Alabama law in this way. A handful of others had previously refused to give up their seats, and were also arrested for the crime. Black civil rights activists had **long been searching** for a case they could confidently try in court. They needed a solid, upstanding, and irreproachable citizen to make their case without fear of being personally attacked. This would have clouded the issue and hurt the cause and ultimate goal, which was the abolishment of a **segregated** transport system in Alabama.

In Rosa Parks, the quiet, hardworking mother of four, the NAACP found what it had long been seeking. The day Rosa was arrested the "Montgomery Improvement Association" was formed, headed by a charismatic activist at the very beginning of his infamous career: Dr. Martin Luther King. Preceding Rosa's trial, King's organization circulated 35, 000 handbills that were distributed throughout the black community urging for a citywide **boycott** on the buses. Although their section of seats was the smallest in each bus, black citizens constituted over two-thirds of bus passengers at the time. On the day of the trial, blacks found alternate ways to work and school. They walked, found rides, or took a taxi. In support of the movement, black cab drivers lowered their fares and offered rides for the same ten-cents that the bus would charge.

As expected, Rosa's trial ended quickly and she was sentenced. She paid the fine, was released, and then the real fight began. The NAACP challenged the constitutionality of the segregation laws

in court. The boycott on buses held for the entire fight. Within one year, the state of Alabama **repealed** the segregation laws and integrated the transit system on Dec 21, 1956. Although following this time Rosa was forced to move her family to stay with relatives in Michigan in order to avoid continued harassment from angry whites, her legacy has only grown stronger throughout the years. In 1999 she was granted the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor by President Clinton. In many history books she is known as Rosa Parks: a woman who changed a nation. A favorite photo is often included. It is Rosa sitting on bus, glancing quietly out the window while a white man, unconcerned, sits behind her.

Based on the information in the preceding passage, answer the following questions.

1. The word “**oppressed**” in bold in the passage is closest in meaning to which of the following definitions?

- A) To be acted upon by unjust authority.
- B) To be ignored.
- C) To be separated.
- D) To be laughed at.

Correct Answer:

- A) The word “oppressed” in means to have been kept down, or acted upon unjustly by force and authority.

Incorrect Answers:

- B) Although the rights of black citizens were ignored, the word “oppress” means to be kept down, or acted upon unjustly by force and authority.
- C) Although the article deals with forced separation of blacks from whites, the word “oppress: means to be kept down, or acted upon unjustly by force and authority.
- D) This passage does not describe the ridicule that must have also occurred in the atmosphere of Alabama at the time. The word “oppress” mean to be kept down, or acted upon unjustly by force and authority.

2. The word “**relinquish**” in bold in this passage is closest in meaning to which of the following?

- A) To give up or release control of.
- B) To switch one for another.
- C) To retain control of.
- D) To present, as a gift.

Correct Answer:

- A) The word “relinquish” means to give up. In this case, black riders were required to give up their seat.

Incorrect Answers:

- B) Although the black passengers were made to switch one seat for another further to the back, or switch sitting for standing, the word “relinquish” means to give up.
- C) Relinquish actually means the opposite; it means to give up, or pass control to another.
- D) Although the black passengers were made to give their seats to white passengers, the word "relinquish" specifically means to give up.

3. The phrase “**long been searching**” in bold in this passage is closest in meaning to which of the following?

- A) Had searched for a long amount of time.
- B) Had searched over a far amount of territory.
- C) Had searched for answers that were long and complex.
- D) Had been searching with no results.

Correct Answer:

- A) The phrase “long been” always refers to the amount of time something has taken place, in this case “searching”. It is usually used with an active, ongoing verb such as in “long been trying”, or “long been wondering”.

Incorrect Answers:

- B) The phrase “long been” always refers to the amount of time something has taken place, not how far over which something has occurred.
- C) The phrase “long been” always refers to the amount of time something has taken place, not the complexity of what is sought.
- D) The phrase “long been” always refers to the amount of time something has taken place, not the effectiveness of the activity.

4. The word “**segregated**” in bold in this passage is closest in meaning to which of the following?

- A) Forcibly separated.
- B) Forcibly oppressed.
- C) Severe.
- D) Unjust.

Correct Answer:

- A) The word “segregate” as used throughout this passage, means to be separated unfairly and by force. In this case it refers to the sections of the bus.

Incorrect Answers:

- B) Although the black passengers were oppressed by segregation, the word “segregate” as used throughout this passage, means to be separated unfairly and by force.
- C) Although the laws were severe, the word “segregate” as used throughout this passage,

means to be separated unfairly and by force.

- D) Although the laws were unjust, the word “segregate” as used throughout this passage, means to be separated unfairly and by force.

5. The word “**boycott**” in bold in this passage is closest in meaning to which of the following?

- A) To abstain, individually or as a group, from a certain activity as a sign of protest.
- B) To show great disrespect.
- C) To verbally accuse.
- D) To be destructive in small, devious ways.

Correct Answer:

- A) To boycott something means to abstain, individually or as a group, from a certain activity, in this case riding the bus, as a sign of protest. A boycott usually has economic consequences. The bus companies lost a lot of money during the boycott of 1955.

Incorrect Answers:

- B) Although the black population doubtlessly had not respect for the buses and Alabama’s laws, the boycott was their refusal to use the bus system as a sign of protest.
- C) The passage does not discuss any verbal abuse by blacks toward white laws or society. It implies, in fact, that this would not be tolerated. A boycott is a refusal to partake in a certain activity, individually or as a group, as a sign of protest. In this case the activity was riding the bus.
- D) The passage does not discuss any destruction or deviousness on the part of the black population. The boycott describes their refusal to ride the bus.

6. The word “**repealed**” in bold in this passage is OPPOSITE in meaning to which of the following?

- A) Instituted
- B) Reversed
- C) Taken back
- D) Revokes

Correct Answer:

- A) To institute something is to establish or introduce it into being. In this case, the laws were taken back, not introduced.

Incorrect Answers:

- B) The word “repeal” means to revoke, or take back. The laws were reversed, an act that was once illegal, is now legal.
- C) The word “repeal” means to revoke, or take back.
- D) The word “repeal” means to revoke, or take back.

7. Why was Rosa Parks arrested?

- A) She refused to give up her seat to a white man.
- B) She would not move from the white section of the bus.
- C) She would not leave the white bus and take the bus that was for blacks.
- D) She refused to pay a fare to the white bus driver.

Correct Answer:

- A) Rosa Parks was seated in the black section when the white section was full. She was required to give her seat to a white man. She refused.

Incorrect Answers:

- B) She sat in the black section, when the white section is full, a black passenger is expected to relinquish his or her seat so a white passenger doesn't have to stand or sit further back.
- C) There was one bus for both white and blacks. They were segregated into sections of the same bus, whites in the front and blacks in the back.
- D) Rosa paid her fare like all the passengers. She refused to give up her seat to a white man.

8. Why was Rosa made a figurehead for the de-segregation of Alabama and the civil right movement in general?

- A) She was an upstanding citizen and was chosen by the NAACP to fight in court for the elimination of the segregation laws.
- B) She was the very first woman brave enough to refuse to give up her seat.
- C) She was the first to insist on fighting in court to repeal the segregation laws.
- D) She brought Dr. Martin Luther King to the cause.

Correct Answer:

- A) Although others had refused to give up their seat and were arrested for the crime, Rosa was chosen to lead the fight by the NAACP because of her outstanding character.

Incorrect Answers:

- B) The author expressly states that "Rosa Parks was not the first black citizen to defy Alabama law in this way." She was simply the most upstanding citizen to do so and in the best position to fight the law.
- C) The author expressly states that "Rosa Parks was not the first black citizen to defy Alabama law in this way." The NAACP had long held the idea of fighting the laws in court.
- D) Although Dr. King lead the group that sprung up from her case, the passage give no information that Rosa herself, or this case in particular, introduced Dr. King to the movement itself.

9. Why were the hand bills important?

- A) They circulated the news of the boycott to the black community.
- B) They circulated news of the boycott to the white community.
- C) They announced Rosa's fight to all who would listen.
- D) The announced Dr. King's inauguration as head of the "Montgomery Improvement Project."

Correct Answer:

- A) The passage explicitly states that the handbills "were distributed throughout the black community urging for a citywide **boycott** on the buses."

Incorrect Answers:

- B) The passage explicitly states that the handbills "were distributed throughout the black community urging for a citywide **boycott** on the buses." The white community learned of the boycott simply by observing the suddenly near-empty buses.
- C) The passage explicitly states that the handbills "were distributed throughout the black community urging for a citywide **boycott** on the buses." Although it is implied that the handbills addressed the reason for the boycott, Rosa's fight, A is still the best answer because it is explicit in the passage.
- D) The passage explicitly states that the handbills "were distributed throughout the black community urging for a citywide **boycott** on the buses." According to this passage, the bills do not address Dr. King specifically.

10. According to this passage, what was the goal of the NAACP in 1955?

- A) To abolish all segregation laws in Alabama.
- B) To prosecute all who implemented the segregation laws.
- C) To free Rosa Parks.
- D) To give blacks buses of their own.

Correct Answer:

- A) The passage explicitly states that "the cause and ultimate goal...was the abolishment of a **segregated** transport system in Alabama."

Incorrect Answers:

- B) The passage explicitly states that "the cause and ultimate goal...was the abolishment of a **segregated** transport system in Alabama." It does not mention retribution or prosecution of anyone.
- C) Rosa was free at the time of the court hearings. The passage explains that she "paid the fine, was released," and then began the battle to change the law.
- D) Separate buses would further continue the segregation (separation) of the black and white. The goal was for no segregation, everyone traveling together with no rules and laws of mandatory separation.

11. In the years following her victory, why did Rosa move to Michigan?

- A) She was harassed and threatened by whites bitter about the changes in the law.
- B) She wanted to be closer to her family.
- C) She was given medals and award money that allowed her to travel.
- D) She wanted to next change the segregation laws of Michigan.

Correct Answer:

- A) The passage explicitly states that Rosa “was forced to move her family to...Michigan in order to avoid continued harassment from angry whites.”

Incorrect Answers:

- B) Although the passage mentions that she will stay with family in Michigan, it also clearly states that she was forced to move because of harassment.
- C) Although decades later Rosa received medals and acknowledgement of her bravery, this did not occur at the time she was forced to move to Michigan.
- D) The passage mentions nothing about Michigan having any segregation laws. Rosa was forced to move to avoid harassment by whites in Alabama.

12. The author ends the passage by describing a photograph. Why is this photo significant?

- A) It shows Rosa, a black woman, riding peaceably in front of a white man.
- B) It shows Rosa riding where she should, before the laws changed.
- C) It shows Rosa free and able to ride a bus again.
- D) It shows Rosa on the day she refused to get up from the bus seat.

Correct Answer:

- A) The photo shows a black woman, Rosa, sitting in front of a white man. The passage describes the man as “unconcerned.” If segregation laws had been in place the man would have been furious and Rosa would have been arrested.

Incorrect Answers:

- B) Rosa is in the front. The segregation laws would have had her in the back of the bus.
- C) Rosa was always free to ride the bus. She was never before free to ride in the front.
- D) The photo is peaceable. The man is “unconcerned”. It shows the tremendous change, made possible by her bravery and dedication.

Essay Question (1 Essay)

When writing your essay, think about the main point you want to make. Make a quick list of what

your main point for the essay is, then list ideas and facts that support this point. When you write, follow your list. Usually the test will ask for a 200-300 word essay. Do not try to use more than two or three main points. At the end of your essay, repeat your main point again. Make sure the flow of ideas is clear and easy to follow. Don't write more than you need to. Clarity is most important.

Always proofread your work. Re-read your essay at least twice. Examine sentence structure and vocabulary. Try to leave at least 5-7 minutes to go over your work.

There are three main types of essays you will likely come across. One will be a compare/contrast question where you will be presented with two alternate view points and you must compare them.

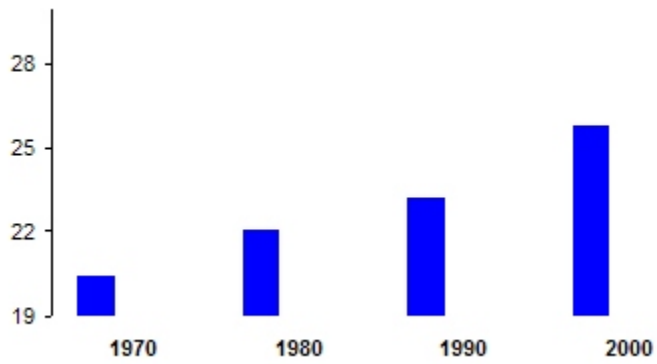
The second type is an analysis essay, where you are given information and asked to analyze its implication on another subject. Sometime this includes information or statistics in graph or chart. If you are given statistics, always use them in your essay.

The third type is description. Often this will be about technological advancement and its implications on society.

A sample of each follows:

1. Some people feel that choosing a spouse should be an analytical process. That you can use reason to find the person who is much like you and will best suit your personality. Burning passion fades, but a carefully selected match will stand the test of time. However, others feel you must follow your heart, and it doesn't matter if you are alike or different. True love is lasting love and one should follow instinct rather than reason when finding a husband or wife. Explain arguments for both sides and give reasons why you agree with one side or the other.
2. The age of mothers having their first child in the United States has steadily risen over the past several decades. Teen births are declining and the percentage of women waiting until they are in their 30's is increasing. Today, women even have healthy babies into their 40's. Give reasons for this trend and what it says about society in the US today.

Average Age of First Childbirth



3. The microchip has been an amazing invention. It allows for information to be exchanged virtually anywhere. Handheld computers, wireless phone with internet access and digital cameras. Explain how you think this has impacted our society and how are we different from cultures without these advancements?