

Dear 5th Grade Teachers,

As you prepare to teach Unit 4: *Young Heroes: Children of the Civil Rights Movement*, we wanted to share important news connected to the unit's central historical figure.

Claudette Colvin, whose courageous stand helped spark the Montgomery Bus Boycott, recently passed away.

At only age 15, months before Rosa Parks, Claudette Colvin refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. Her bravery paved the way for what ultimately became the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In Lessons 8-13, students read, write, and talk about Claudette Colvin as an everyday young person who had a huge impact. Her passing adds meaning and urgency to that work.

Bring the real world into the classroom: Why staying connected matters

The science of learning tells us that students gain content knowledge faster when they make meaningful connections to their world. In addition, an attention to current news in a developmentally appropriate way builds civic awareness, curiosity, and lifelong learning.

Here are some things you can do to bring this news of Claudette's passing into the classroom:

- **Share the news with students** in age-appropriate terms. "The person we are about to read about actually just died a few weeks ago, at 86-years-old. Her death was written about in major newspapers and tributes to her legacy were all over the news because of the tremendous impact she had on the Civil Rights Movement. Let's find out why."
- Highlight that **history is not as far away as it may seem**. Claudette was a living figure until very recently, and might have even been younger than students' own grandparents or great-grandparents! Ask students to consider:
 - How do we determine what gets considered history?
 - How does knowing Claudette Colvin was alive until very recently shape what you think about her actions as "history"?
 - What does this make you think about the Civil Rights Movement? About the ways things have changed in one person's lifetime?
- **Share authentic, relevant news media and other current artifacts.** For example:
 - [Claudette Colvin Foundation Memorial Page](#) - teachers may also consider exploring the site, which is centered on inspiring youth activism
 - [NYTimes Claudette Colvin Obituary](#)
 - [NPR Remembrance & Transcript](#)

Adjust instruction: Use what's already in the unit to honor her story

In addition to informing students of Claudette's passing, you can also adjust the framing of lessons for relevance. For example, [in Lesson 13](#), students are asked to write a poem honoring the life of either Claudette Colvin or Rosa Parks. You may choose to focus the project solely on Claudette Colvin, using narrative poetry for students to write a tribute to her life and legacy.

Support socio-emotional moments

Students may feel surprised or sad to learn that someone they're reading about has recently passed away. Support students by providing space to reflect and name their feelings; reinforce that learning about her life is itself a way to honor her; and encourage students to ask questions.

Thank you for guiding students through both the history of the Civil Rights Movement and the ways it continues to shape our present. Claudette Colvin's story reminds us of the power of young people to change the world.

With gratitude,

The Fishtank Learning Team