

★ ★

## Enrichment Activity 22



### Fighting for Equal Rights

The civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s drew national attention to the southern states where bus boycotts, lunch counter sit-ins, and attempts at school desegregation often resulted in dramatic, violent confrontations between protestors and those determined to stop them. Throughout the movement, people like Rosa Parks risked abuse, arrest, and the upheaval of their daily lives to support the struggle for civil rights. Young people especially were willing to do things they never thought possible, even when their parents were too fearful to become involved. Some of these acts were small, but they became a part of a wider effort to make changes.

**DIRECTIONS:** As you read the following recollections of African Americans who were teenagers at the time of the civil rights movement, try to imagine what it would be like to be a part of and a witness to efforts to make major changes in society and in government. Think about how you would feel and what you might do. Then respond to the items that follow.

#### *Pat Shuttlesworth—Birmingham, Alabama*

I remember getting out of high school early one day. I was about fourteen. Some of my girlfriends and I went downtown to go to the movies. We decided to get hot dogs, hamburgers, and pop before we got to the theater because in the theater we didn't get the same caliber of goods as white people got. There were about fifteen or twenty of us, and we went in this restaurant. Most of us ordered two hot dogs, or a hot dog and a hamburger, and the big 16-ounce pops. You know how you splurge your allowance when you're with your friends.

The man opened all the bottles. When he fixed everything, we asked him where we could sit to eat. He said, "Oh, you can't sit in here."

I said, "We can't? After buying all this food, we can't sit in here and eat it? Well, then, we don't need it." He used a couple of choice words, saying that we had to buy it.

I said, "I don't have to buy anything. I'm hungry, but I can go where I can be accommodated the way I want to be accommodated."

"What am I going to do with this food?" he said.

"Whatever you want to do with it. We don't want it." And we turned around and left.

#### *Gwendolyn Patton—Montgomery, Alabama*

The key in the sixties for me as a young person was the Freedom Riders. When they arrived in Montgomery in May 1961, I wanted to go down to the bus station. We heard on the radio that people were being beaten up—chains, baseball bats, all kinds of stuff. I thought it was important for me to go, but my aunt Chick, who I was staying with, did not participate much in civil rights activity. So I got mad at her because she had the car and would not take me down to the station.

Two or three days later we had a mass meeting, and some of the Freedom Riders came. I brought some of them back to my aunt Chick's house. We were sitting in the living room when my aunt came through the door. She was just outraged. She said, "Gwendolyn, come to the kitchen with me." Then she said, "You have white people in there."

I said, "Yes, ma'am, I do. They're the Freedom Riders."

She said, "I'm going to tell you, I don't want them in my house." That's when I discovered her militancy. She said, "I cannot go in their homes, and I don't want them in my home. I can't go through the front door of anything that they own and I don't want them coming through my front door. Now you be just as ladylike as you can and serve them lemonade and cookies, and I want them out of the house."



**Enrichment Activity 22** *(continued)*



Somehow that weighed on me. I said to myself, Well, she has a point. Then I turned around and I said, "Aunt Chick, these aren't the

white people like that. This is a different kind of white group."

Source: *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*, edited by Ellen Levine, Avon, 1993.

**1. Making Generalizations** How would you describe these young people?

---



---



---



---

**2. Making Comparisons** How were their experiences similar and different?

---



---



---



---

**3. Predicting** Place yourself in one of the situations described. How would you have felt? What would you have done?

---



---



---



---

**4. Making Comparisons** Compare the situations these young people experienced with your impressions of the relations among young people of different races today. Do you think that the problems today are similar or different? Why or why not?

---



---



---



---