Book: Rosa Parks: My Story

Reviewed by: Gail Myers

Level of Difficulty: Medium

My thoughts about the book and its suitability for my group:

Rosa Parks was a very efficient secretary by all accounts, and witnessed an important period of our history, which she recorded in great detail. Unfortunately, she was not a very engaging author. Nevertheless, this is a book worth reading with your group if done thoughtfully (see “tips” below).

The vocabulary was not difficult for my group; most of the new words for them were related to the ambience of the times: “segregation,” “ostracized,” “discrimination,” “lynching,” etc. I did a lot of pre-teaching of American history before beginning the book, including the slavery era and Jim Crow laws in the South. This was an eye-opener for many, and it gave an important context for the Civil Rights battle.

We got a little bogged down on some chapters, which had a lot of detail about people and events that were only peripheral to the story. I finally wised up and began to summarize and skip some chapters in the book, so we could get to the interesting parts.

Students’ reaction to the book:

My students were fascinated and amazed by the accounts Rosa gave about her family and childhood. As children, she and her brother had encountered several rather dangerous situations, and had to be taught by their elders how to interact safely with white people. Another very strong part of the story was her experiences with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Also, the students found it interesting that the white people in the North and those in the South were so different in how they interacted with Rosa.

Tips for other tutors who may want to use this book:

If I had it to do over, I would definitely plan out which chapters we should delve into and which ones could be summarized so we could move on. At the end of the book I gave the students some excerpts from King’s “I have a Dream” speech to read and discuss, which was very meaningful to them after having learned what Rosa had gone through.

If you are interested in having your students read about this part of our history, another book is Jackie Robinson, which is a more accessible read, and has some interesting characters. And they can learn about baseball!