

Directions: Read the story and answer the questions that follow.

A Woman of Courage and Conviction

- 1 With a satisfied smile, Keisha finished writing the last sentence of her English essay. She had written about one of her heroes, Rosa Parks, an important figure in the Civil Rights Movement. Keisha felt inspired by Rosa Parks' actions, and in her essay she had tried to depict the courage and conviction Rosa Parks had shown the world.
- 2 "Keisha," her mother shouted from downstairs. "It's almost 4:15. Have you finished your homework?"
- 3 "I finished a minute ago, Mom," Keisha answered. "Don't worry, I won't be late getting to the assisted living center. I just have to put some things in my backpack." Keisha pulled down a collection of Maya Angelou's poetry as well as a book of funny anecdotes from her bookshelf. She liked to be prepared with a selection of literature to read to the center's residents. On an impulse, she added her English notebook as well.
- 4 Keisha ran down the stairs, poked her head into the kitchen, and said, "I'll be back by 5:45, Mom. See you later." Keisha grabbed her jacket and ran out the door. She had to jog the three blocks to the center to make it by 4:30, when her hour of volunteering began.
- 5 As Keisha came running in the door, Mrs. Ellis, the assisted living center manager, told Keisha, "We have a new resident this week. She's still adjusting to her new surroundings, and I think you'll be able to make friends with her."
- 6 "What's her name?" Keisha asked, nervously wondering what this new woman was like.
- 7 "Her name is Ruby Watson, and she's lived in Alabama all her life until now," Mrs. Ellis explained. "Her only daughter lives here in the city and wants her mother to be near. You'll find Mrs. Watson in Room 28. And by the way, Keisha, good luck."
- 8 Keisha walked down the hallway to Room 28 at a quick, determined pace. She knocked on the door and heard a strong voice ask what she wanted. As Keisha walked into the room, she met the gaze of two piercing brown eyes staring at her suspiciously.
- 9 "I'm Keisha Jackson, a student volunteer," Keisha explained as she walked over to Mrs. Watson and sat down in the chair beside her. "I come here every Thursday afternoon to help pass the time with residents, or read to them, or, or . . ." Keisha started to stumble over her words as Mrs. Watson continued to stare at her with an almost belligerent gaze.
- 10 "I didn't request anyone to keep me company," Mrs. Watson interrupted. "I'm alone most of the time, and that's how I prefer it."
- 11 "But it must be nice to see your daughter," Keisha said, hoping to give the conversation a more positive turn.

- 12 "My daughter has to work two jobs, so she seldom comes here to visit me," Mrs. Watson said. "And my two grandchildren are so involved with their school activities that they hardly have time to come to see me."
- 13 Keisha decided that a change of subject would be beneficial. "I brought along some books to read," she said, pulling the books out of her backpack. "I have Maya Angelou's poetry and a book of funny stories."
- 14 "I don't like poetry, and I'm not in the mood for funny stories," Mrs. Watson retorted. "What else do you have?"
- 15 Nervously, Keisha pulled out her English notebook and opened it to her essay. She read the title aloud: "Rosa Parks: A Woman of Courage and Conviction." She glanced at Mrs. Watson to see what kind of reaction she might have, but to her surprise, Mrs. Watson's face had relaxed and her eyes shone with anticipation.
- 16 "Read to me about Rosa," Mrs. Watson said.
- 17 Keisha started to read the essay haltingly, but she soon fell into the natural, dramatic rhythm of her narrative. She read how Rosa Parks had staunchly refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus to a white passenger in 1955; then she read how Rosa's action had inspired the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a protest that became a turning point in the struggle for civil rights.
- 18 After Keisha read her last sentence, she looked at Mrs. Watson's face. It was lit by a radiantly happy smile.
- 19 "I marched in Montgomery too, you know," Mrs. Watson said with pride. "I walked with Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The march was the greatest moment of my life because . . ." Mrs. Watson paused, seemingly overwhelmed by her memory of the event.
- 20 Keisha finished the sentence for her. "Because . . . you were a woman of courage and conviction too."
- 21 "Yes," Mrs. Watson said, sitting up straighter. "Yes, I was a woman of courage and conviction too, and I still am. Thank you for reminding me, Keisha."
- 22 "Mrs. Watson, I'd like to see you again next Thursday, if that's okay," Keisha asked, hoping her voice wasn't shaking with the emotions she felt.
- 23 "Next Thursday will be fine, Keisha, just fine," Mrs. Watson said with a warm smile. "And next time we see each other, I'll tell you some of my stories."
- 24 "I'd like that," Keisha answered. "I'd like that very much."