

Speaker, students recreate Rosa Parks' bus boycott

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AT WARNER

Warner Middle School sixth-graders didn't just learn about Rosa Parks and the famous Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott she initiated during the 1950s.

population. "They have to get active in their learning," said Taylor, about the Chapman program. "And they'll remember this."



Role players: The bus driver, portrayed by Brandon Jacobs, talks to Rosa Parks (Sierra Tate) after the bus boycott ended. At right, Joseph McLemore (as Dr. King) listens to Miz Rosie's instructions.



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL BECKER

They got up on stage Monday morning and recaptured the experience during two 45-minute sessions with noted story-teller Miz Rosie Chapman.

Her programs weren't just about seamstress-turned-heroine Rosa Parks. They also highlighted another pretty important figure in the American civil rights movement - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the very man whose birthday was honored Monday.

During the second program of the morning, the parts of Rosa Parks and King were portrayed by Warner students Sierra Tate and Joseph McLemore, respectively.

"I was able to learn more by doing it," Sierra said afterward. "It was very nice to play in a play and learn about him (King)."

Sierra also said it was inspirational to learn about the topic from Miz Rosie, who in 1998 earned the Michigan Education Association's 1998 Women's Cultural Award for her storytelling efforts across the state.

"I think she's a great woman and she really inspired me," Sierra said.

Started with one Chapman, noted for her portrayal of Harriet Tubman, began the Warner programs by inviting youngsters on stage to play some of the 25 African instruments she brought, such as a reed shaker.

Each instrument lent something different to the musical proceedings, until all combined for a unique, wonderful sound. She tried to relate that to the issues of civil rights and human diversity.

"It warms them up," Miz Rosie said following the program. "Each plays a rhythm (instrument) one at a time. Then, I talked about the civil rights movement, how it started with one person and then built upon itself over many years."

The episode where Rosa Parks spearheaded a year-long boycott of buses because of segregation took place in late 1955 and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech was in 1963. But Chapman emphasized, the civil rights movement actually began during the time of slavery.

"What I want them to leave here today with is the message that the civil rights movement was not an overnight success," Miz Rosie continued. "It took years to complete."

Not only did the special guest use instruments to help teach the subject, she also encouraged youngsters to come up on stage and sit in folding chairs on "the bus" when Rosa Parks balked at the bus driver's instructions to get up so that a white person could sit down.

Making an impression Parks was arrested and fined for breaking the segregation law. Meanwhile, one minister who banded together with Parks in peacefully protesting the segregated bus conditions was Baptist minister King.

"The next day his bus was empty," Miz Rosie told the students. "Ninety percent of the people who rode were black. All walked past the bus. ... They boycotted the Montgomery buses for one whole year."

Finally, on Dec. 21, 1956, Parks, King and a white minister (the Rev. Glen Smiley) shared the front row of a public bus. The United States Supreme Court had just declared that Alabama's segregation laws regarding buses were illegal.

"And that's how the civil rights movement really began," Miz Rosie said.

Warner Principal Mildred Taylor said Miz Rosie's MLK Day workshop was augmented by classroom projects and discussions. A movie about the bus boycott, "The Long Walk Home," will also be shown at the Farmington district middle school, which has a very diverse student

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