

'KIDS...THE REAL HEROES'

Nonfiction Reading Comprehension & Comparative Performance Task

Title 1: 'It Took Courage'
By Benjamin Taylor, Globe Staff

Reading Level: Common Core Band: 6-8
Word Count: 808

The Boston Globe, page 1
South Boston, Mass.
September 13, 1974

For many of the 56 black students who attended classes in previously all-white South Boston High School, yesterday was a day of apprehension and concern for their safety.

But several of the blacks said in interviews they would do it again, expressing a basic belief that what they were participating in would eventually be beneficial for themselves, the black community and the city of Boston.

One English teacher who asked that her name not be used said: "Whether you're talking about the black kids or the kids from the community, it took a lot of courage to come to school today."

The most frightening part of the day for the black students was entering and leaving the school, located on G Street in the heart of South Boston, a predominantly white working class neighborhood.

After boarding buses in Roxbury, the South End and black sections of Dorchester, the small group of black students braved taunts, stones and debris from an angry crowd of several hundred whites while entering the building under the protection of a police cordon.

And when the buses left the high school, stones were thrown again, frightening some of the students to the point of tears.

But while they were inside the 73-year-old building, the mood was dramatically different -- one of calm and business-as-usual during the first day of court-ordered school integration in Boston.

One 15-year-old black student from the South End paused at a window on the second floor of the building, and looking down at the crowd around the front of the building, said: "I feel safe here, but all this makes you feel like a prisoner -- all these cops and everybody."

She added that she was going to continue to come to the high school for one reason: "I was assigned here and I want to get a good education."

Her friend, who was also watching the crowd below, concurred: "I thought about not coming today,

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but I really don't have any choice. South Boston High School is now the only school I got."

The sense of calm inside the building was undoubtedly aided by the fact that most of the 1,300 students who were scheduled to attend -- including more than 500 blacks -- stayed home. Teachers often found themselves teaching only one or two students instead of the usual 20 or 25, and school officials said fewer than 150 students were inside the building all day.

In fact, because of the meager attendance and the attitudes of students who did show up, the orderliness inside the building did not surprise school officials.

Frank DiMaggio, an administrative assistant to headmaster W.J. Reid, said: "The few white and black kids we have in here now are not the belligerent ones. Those kids are outside. The make-it-or-break-it point will come when the other kids decide to come back to school."

And even calm inside could not mask the disruption outside the building as occasional racist chants or the sound of bottles breaking were heard in the classrooms.

In the cafeteria during the lunch break, most of the blacks and whites sat at separate tables, generally sticking with friends from years past.

While eating lunch, one 16-year-old black youth who last year went to the previously all-black Jeremiah E. Burke High School, talked about the day's events.

"A lot of the black kids on the buses and even in here are acting funny and fooling around a lot," he said. "But they're just doing that to break the tension. We're pretty scared."

The 16-year-old student said he "really wanted" to go to South Boston High School both because he felt he would get a better education there, and because of the school's football team.

"I like to play middle linebacker, and the Burke school didn't have a football team last year," he said.

Most observers were greatly impressed with the way the black students conducted themselves while entering and leaving the school. In calm and quiet fashion they walked to and from the school despite the yells of "n----- go home."

But every student who was interviewed said they had received no special training and attributed their actions to being scared.

By the end of the day, the tension and the rock-shattered windows in some of the buses had gotten to some of the black students who attended schools in South Boston.

When Allen Sisco's 13-year-old daughter was dropped off at the corner of Elm Hill Avenue and Seaver Street in Roxbury by a bus which had several shattered windows, she was in tears.

Sisco, of Roxbury, didn't like to see his daughter crying and he didn't like the look of the smashed windows.

Still, he said: "She'll go back tomorrow even if I have to take her myself. Integration in Boston is something that's been put off too long."

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Title 2: 'A Little Hairy...'
By Ron Hutson, Globe Staff

Reading Level: Common Core Band: 6-8

Word Count: 749

The Boston Globe, page 1

Roxbury, Mass.

September 13, 1974

It took John almost an hour to get from his home in Dorchester to Roxbury High School yesterday morning.

He took a bus to the Fields Corner MBTA station in Dorchester, got a train to Washington station and then another train to Dudley station in the heart of Roxbury. Then he walked three long blocks to the high school.

John, 17, is white and lives in the Neponset section of Dorchester. Last year he studied sheet metal work at South Boston High School. This year he was reassigned under the racial balance plan.

He is one of a handful of white students who ignored a boycott of classes and decided to go to Roxbury High the first day. Of about 525 white students assigned to Roxbury High, only about 10 showed up yesterday. Approximately 225 of 475 black students attended classes.

"I didn't know what to expect when I came," John said yesterday at the end of the school day. "But this was just like any other regular school day to me."

"It was a little hairy getting here from Dudley station," he continued, smiling wryly. "A couple of times people looked at me a little hard, but nobody bothered me. I asked a policeman at the station how to get to the high school, and I walked over.

"I knew the high school was in a black area, and I really didn't want to come, because I didn't have anybody to come with me. My parents made me come. But when that train stopped at Andrew station (in South Boston) I didn't know whether to get off the train or go on."

John said he used public transportation because the School Dept. has provided no buses from near his home to Roxbury High.

John, who is freckle-faced, short and muscled, and who wore a green football jersey to school, was conspicuous by his skin color at Roxbury yesterday. Headmaster Charles Ray was prepared for about 950 students, but only 234 students, most of whom were black, went to classes.

The boycott had been expected, but so few whites got off the buses from South Boston that black students joked all day about the "whities who couldn't deal with Roxbury."

Most of the white students said they went to school because their parents had forced them.

Bill, 15, who lives on Fifth Street in South Boston, is also taking sheet metal at Roxbury High this year. "At first I didn't want to come to school," said the tall blond youth. "But my parents said I would eventually have to go. Besides, my father still has a few inches on me, so I decided that I

had better come to school.”

Suzanne, 15, a white Columbia Point resident who also attended South Boston High last year, said she came to school because she wants to be a nurse and “I’ve only got one more year to go.”

“My parents said to come. They said it was up to me. I can’t quit now. I really wanted to go to Southie, but I decided to come to Roxbury High,” Suzanne said while eating lunch in the cramped fourth-floor cafeteria. “But I haven’t had any racial problems today,” she said.

Opening day was relatively quiet at Roxbury High.

There were no large crowds of parents or students waiting to greet students who were being bused. There were no racial slurs voiced.

Fifteen buses were schedule to transport 560 students to the school from South Boston, Columbia Point and parts of Dorchester. Three buses that arrived at 8 a.m. from Columbia Point and Dorchester were half-filled with blacks. All but one bus from South Boston arrived empty.

At the end of school at 2 p.m., black and white students boarded buses for the return trips without incident.

The only major confusion came late in the morning when about 50 students were allowed to leave school for the day because their class schedules had been filled out incorrectly by the School Dept. computer. James Mullan, assistant headmaster, said the students would be rescheduled within a week.

Ray, the headmaster, said he had expected that few whites would attend classes yesterday, but thought more blacks would. He said he expected more blacks to attend school today.

“Our kids are good kids,” said Ray, who last year worked quietly to organize several private discussion meetings between Roxbury and South Boston students. “Our kids are a lot more mature than most people realize,” he said.

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READING-COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS (circle correct answer)

1. The primary focus of these two articles is on

- A. the number of students who boycotted the first day of school at South Boston and Roxbury High Schools.
- B. the protests that took place outside both Roxbury and South Boston High Schools.
- C. how unexpectedly peaceful the first day of court-ordered school integration was throughout the city of Boston.
- D. the experiences of high school students who attended new schools on the first day of court-ordered integration.

2. What action did Boston Public Schools take to achieve “court-ordered school integration?” (See paragraph 7, “It Took Courage”)

- A. Broke the law by ignoring the court order
 - B. Assigned and bused students to achieve racially balanced schools
 - C. Returned to the practice of limiting the number of students on a bus
 - D. Changed bus routes so an equal number of black and white students were on each bus
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3. The descriptions of opening day at Roxbury High School and at South Boston High School suggest that one purpose of these articles was to

- A. show that busing black students to white schools caused more controversy than busing white students to black schools.
 - B. support the decision to have a greater police presence in Roxbury than in South Boston.
 - C. advocate for the use of public transportation as a safer and more cost-effective way to bring children to and from schools in different communities.
 - D. prove that the concerns voiced by the mayor and other school and government officials were unreasonable.
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4. In the article, “It Took Courage,” which one of the following excerpts from the text supports the English teacher’s statement that “whether you’re talking about the black kids or the kids from the community, it took a lot of courage to come to school today”?

- A. “I was assigned here and I want to get a good education.”
 - B. “In the cafeteria during the lunch break, most of the blacks and whites sat at separate tables, generally sticking with friends from years past.”
 - C. “The make-it or break-it point will come when the other kids decide to come back to school.”
 - D. “In calm and quiet fashion [black students] walked to and from the school despite the yells of ‘n----- go home.’”
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E. Which one of the following characteristics is NOT shared by most of the students described in these two articles?

- A. Persists in the face of fear
 - B. Accepts challenges
 - C. Shows physical strength
 - D. Works toward a goal
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PERFORMANCE TASK

Writing Situation

The two articles you have just read describing the experiences of students who were bused to new schools as part of Boston's court-ordered school integration were published together under the heading, "KIDS...THE REAL HEROES OF THE DAY." Now, you will write an essay in which you explain why the students in both of these articles are worthy of the title hero.

Student Directions for Writing

Step 1: Close reading

- a) Reread the two texts using the following question to guide your reading: **What makes the students in these two articles heroes?**
- b) As you read, note the specific characteristics that the students demonstrate individually, and as a group, which could be considered heroic.

Step 2: Your writing assignment

Write an essay in which you explain how the students in the two articles you have read can be called heroes. Use evidence from both articles and your personal knowledge and experience to support your opinions and ideas.

Remember to...

- plan your essay before you write;
- establish your position with a clear thesis statement;
- support your ideas and opinions with specific evidence from the text;
- give your essay a title;
- proofread your essay.

'KIDS...THE REAL HEROES'

READING-COMPREHENSION ANSWERS

1. D
2. B
3. A
4. D
5. C