Viola Desmond

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| The Fisher Street bus stopped in front of Sara. She waited for the door to open. Sara went up the steps into the bus. She put $2 in the meter and said hello to the bus driver.  Sara looked for a seat. She saw a seat near a window and sat down. More people came on the bus. An older woman with nice white-grey hair and dark skin sat beside Sara. The woman smiled at Sara. Sara smiled back. | Image Idea: City Bus |
| The bus drove down the street and hit a bump in the road. Sara bounced in her seat. She looked down and saw something purple. Sara picked it up. It was a $10 bill.  Sara asked the woman next to her, “Is this yours?”  “No, it isn’t,” said the woman.  Sara looked at the $10 bill. There was a picture of a mixed-race woman on the money. The name under the picture was Viola Desmond (Vi-o-la Dez-mund).  Sara said out loud to herself, “Who was Viola Desmond?”  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Mixed-race: a person with parents who are of different races. | Image Idea: Canadian $10 bill with Viola Desmond on it |
| “I can answer your question,” said the woman sitting beside Sara. “I know the story of Viola Desmond. Do you want to hear it?”  “Yes, please,” said Sara.  Sara’s bus stop was still twenty minutes away. She was happy to have something to do to help pass the time on her bus ride. She also wanted to know what a person had to do to have their picture put on Canadian money.  “Viola’s sister Wanda is one of the reasons Viola is on our $10 bill. It was Wanda’s determination (de-ter-min-a-shun) to tell Viola’s story that made Viola famous,” said the woman.  “What was Viola famous for?” Sara asked. | Image Idea: two women of colour sitting side by side on a city bus |
| “Some people say Viola’s story helped start the civil rights movement in Nova Scotia (No-va Sco-sha).  Some people say Viola was someone who faced racism (ray-ci-zim) one too many times.  Everyone agrees that Viola was a strong, independent businesswoman of colour who helped with racial equality (e-kwall-e-ty) in Canada.”  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Civil Rights Movement: a group fighting for equal rights for people of all colours.  Racism: a belief that one race of people is better than a different race of people.  Racial equality: when every race of people is treated equally. | Image Idea: Civil Rights Movement of Nova Scotia Photo |
| “Viola’s story began in 1914, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She grew up in a large, middle-class family with ten siblings. Viola’s parents were hard-working and well-liked in the community.  When Viola grew up, she wanted to be a successful businesswoman. Viola knew that black women needed special hair and skin products. These things were hard to find. Viola wanted to make and sell these products.” | Image Idea: Viola’s family |
| “Viola needed to go to school to become a beautician (beu-ti-shun). The beautician school in Halifax did not allow people of colour to be students.  Viola had to go far away from home to go to school. She did not let that stop her dream.  She went to school in Montreal (Mon-tree-all), then in Atlantic City, and finally, Viola finished her schooling in New York at the famous Madam C.J. Walker’s beauty school.”  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Beautician: a person whose job is to improve a person’s looks on their hair, skin, and nails. | Image Idea: An image of a beauty school from the 1940s or Madam C.J. Walker’s Beauty School. |
| “When Viola was done school, she came back to Halifax and opened her own hair salon called Vi’s Studio of Beauty Culture. Her business was a success!  Viola did not stop there.  She also opened a beauty school called the Desmond School of Beauty Culture. Now, women of colour did not need to leave Halifax to become a beautician.  Viola was not done yet!  She also made her own line of beauty products. She made hair and skin products for Black women. She sold her products in her salon and in other salons, too.  Viola had become a successful businesswoman.” | Image Idea: an image of Viola’s beauty salon or her beauty school.  Or an image of Viola Desmond as a successful businesswoman. |
| “It was on a business trip that Viola’s trouble started.  On November 8th, 1946, on her way to Sydney, Nova Scotia, Viola’s car broke down in the city of New Glasgow. The mechanic told Viola that it would take until the next day to fix her car.  To pass the time, Viola decided to see a movie.  It was this decision that helped shape Canada’s history.” | Image Ideas: broken down car |
| “Viola liked to go to the movies. She liked to sit on the main floor so she could easily see the movie screen. In Halifax, where Viola lived, this was not a problem. Everybody could sit anywhere they wanted.  Viola asked for a main floor ticket. Viola took her movie ticket and found a seat. Soon after Viola sat down, she was asked to move.  Viola was told that she had a balcony ticket, not a main-floor ticket. Viola thought that a mistake had been made. She went back to the ticket counter and asked to change her ticket for one on the main floor.  The ticket seller refused to sell Viola the ticket.“  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Balcony :the upper floor that looks over the main floor below. | Image Idea: Roseland Film Theatre (this is the theatre where she was arrested) |
| “Viola knew that this was about the colour of her skin. Unlike Halifax, this theatre still discriminated (dis-krim-in-a-ted) against people of colour. Only white people could sit on the main floor. People of colour had to sit on the balcony.  Viola did not let that stop her.  Viola went back into the theatre and sat back down in her seat.  The manager walked up to Viola and told her to move to the balcony.  Viola said no. Viola told the manager that she had tried to buy a main floor ticket but was refused.  Again, the manager told Viola she had to move. Viola refused to move.  The manager called the police. The police dragged Viola from her seat and took her to jail.”  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Discriminated: to treat someone differently because of the colour of their skin or appearance. | Image Idea: Police or jail cell |
| “Viola spent the night in jail. She was charged with tax evasion (e-vay-shun). Viola was taken to court the next day and fined $26.  The judge told Viola that she had failed to pay 1¢ in tax. Viola had paid for a balcony ticket, and she had sat on the main floor. The main floor tickets were more money. Viola had not paid enough tax to sit on the main floor.  Viola was convicted of tax evasion for not paying 1¢ of tax.  Nothing was ever said about the colour of her skin or that only white people could sit on the main floor. Viola knew that it was her skin colour on trial.  She had sat where only white people were allowed and for sitting there she was put in jail and convicted of a crime.”  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Tax evasion: not paying the full amount of tax. | Image Idea: Court |
| “Viola went back home.  Some people told Viola that Black people would always be treated badly. There was nothing she could do about it.  Other people told Viola that she should get a lawyer and fight back.  Viola chose to fight back.  With help from the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSAACP) and her community, Viola went back to court to fight her conviction.  It was a long battle. They tried to win, but in the end, nothing changed.  The Supreme Court of Nova Scotia said that Viola’s case was about tax evasion, not racial discrimination.  Even though Viola lost her case, her fight for justice helped end Nova Scotia’s segregation (seg-ra-ga-shun) laws.”  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Segregation: a law or belief that people of different races should not be allowed to be in the same place as each other. | Image Idea: NSAACP or Supreme Court of Nova Scotia or a trial or a demonstration against racial segregation. |
| “Many years after Viola died, she was finally given a pardon. Viola was the first Canadian to be given a pardon after they were dead.  It was Viola’s sister, Wanda, who helped make Viola’s story famous. Wanda did not want Viola’s story to be forgotten.  Wanda was proud of her sister. Viola had stood up for herself and for other Black Canadians.  Wanda spent many years telling Viola’s story to schools, reporters, and everyone she could.”  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Pardon: the act of removing a criminal charge from a person’s record so that they are no longer guilty of that crime. | Image Idea: Wanda Robson (Viola’s sister) |
| “In April 2010, Nova Scotia’s premier, Darrell Dexter, and the Lieutenant Governor, Mayann Francis, gave Viola Desmond a free pardon for her crime and an apology.  The government of Nova Scotia said that Viola had not committed any crime and that Viola had been treated unfairly.” | Image Idea: The news conference where Viola was pardoned posthumously. |
| “Viola’s story did not end there.  Shortly after Viola was given a free pardon and an apology, she was put on a Canadian postage stamp.  There are schools, parks, and a ferry boat named after Viola. There are portraits and statues of Viola found in many places in Nova Scotia and in other provinces.  Then in 2018, Viola Desmond became the first Black person and the first woman (except the Queen of England!) to be put on the $10 bill.” | Image Idea: A collage of images (or just one or two) of parks, statutes, the ferry boat in Halifax, the stamp all dedicated to Viola Desmond |
| “So that’s why Viola Desmond is on the $10 bill,” said Sara amazed at the story she just heard.  “It’s important to remember that change takes time and for people to never forget the past,” stated the old woman. | Image Idea: The news conference where the new $10 bill was revealed with Viola Desmond on it. |
| Sara looked out the bus window. She saw that her stop was coming.  Sara turned to the nice old woman and said, “Thank you. Thank you for telling me Viola’s story.”  “You are most welcome,” replied the woman.  Sara got off the bus and started walking home. She smiled to herself and thought, “not only am I $10 richer, but I also have a good story to tell my friends.” | Image Idea: A happy bi-coloured woman walking away from a city bus smiling |
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Viola Desmond

Questions – Part A

1. Which Canadian currency has Viola Desmond on it?
2. The $5 bill.
3. The $10 bill.
4. The $20 bill.
5. The $50 bill.
6. Which Canadian province is Viola Desmond from?
7. Ontario
8. New Brunswick
9. Nova Scotia
10. Newfoundland
11. Use the words in the box to fill in the blanks in the sentences below.

racism independent equality civil rights

1. Viola’s story helped start the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ movement in Nova Scotia.
2. Viola was someone who faced \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. Viola was a strong, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ businesswoman who helped with racial \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in Canada.
4. Match the words with their definitions.
5. A pardon \_\_\_\_\_ not paying the full amount of tax needed.
6. Segregation \_\_\_\_\_ to no longer be charged with a crime.
7. Tax Evasion \_\_\_\_\_ to not be allowed in the same place as other people

because of your skin colour

Viola Desmond

Questions – Part B

1. True or False?
2. Viola went to school to become a beautician in Halifax. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Viola sold her own line of hair and skin products in salons. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Viola liked to sit on the main floor of the movie theatre. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Before she died, Viola won her court case. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. In 1946, Viola was fined $26 for tax evasion. She did not pay the full amount of tax to sit on the main floor of the theatre. She was missing 1¢ of tax.

If this was today, would Viola pay more than or less than a $26 fine for this same crime? Why?

1. In your own words, why is Viola Desmond famous?
2. Think about something that happened to you on your way home. Is it a good story to tell your friends? If yes, what was the story? If no, why not?