



Before Rosa Parks: The Susie King Taylor Story

At the age of 13, Susie King Taylor escaped from slavery. When the Civil War broke out, she went to sea on a gunboat. She wanted to help the soldiers who saved her life. She showed a commander at the army camp that she could write. The camps were on the Sea Islands off South Carolina's coast.

An army commander asked her to start a school. Susie taught children who, like her, had escaped slavery with their families. She ran a small school at each army camp. She had 40 students and taught some of the adults at night.

Susie traveled with Union soldiers as they moved to new camps. Some of the soldiers formed the first black troops in the U.S. Army. Some of them were hurt in the war. Susie learned how to nurse them back to health. She was a teacher and a nurse, and also worked in the laundry.

Susie wrote her story, which was later published as *Reminiscences of my life in camp with the 33d United States Colored Troops late 1st S.C. Volunteers*. Susie's story talks about these black soldiers. They demanded equal pay when the army wanted to pay them less than white soldiers. The black soldiers pulled cannons for five miles if they didn't have a horse. Some of them got smallpox. Susie treated black and white soldiers equally. Black or white, they worked together for freedom and justice.

As you read different sections of Susie's true story, you will see that she was brave and smart. Susie used her intelligence to solve problems. When she was in danger, she took care of herself. When the soldiers ran out of food, she found things for them to eat. Her story tells us about courage, but some parts of it are funny.

As you read about her, think of what kind of person Susie King Taylor was. Imagine her talking to friends and the soldiers. Consider this: If you were going to write about Taylor's life during the Civil War, what part of the story would you focus on?