

# theslowdown\_20200224\_20200224\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, rosa parks, voice, bowl, miss muffet, hauled, december, jim crow, childhood memories, speaker, ride, written, recognize, hemming, sat, feets, miraculously, montgomery, eye, flies

00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith. And this is the slow down.

00:21

One of the most exciting things you discover, when you get serious about writing poems is this, the speaker of your poem doesn't always have to be you. Sometimes, you can write a poem in the voice of another person, you know, like your mother, or like your mother before she was your mother, when she was still a girl. One of the first times I tried very hard to put myself in another person's view of the world, someone whose life seemed nothing like my own. I felt myself transported past the limitations of my own experience, even my own voice. And then, something surprising happened, I made the discovery that a little tiny piece of one of my own childhood memories seemed miraculously to shed light on the life of my speaker. I thought we were as opposite as opposites can be, but I was wrong. My speaker had taught me to recognize something about me. The next most exciting thing you discover, when you get serious about writing poems is this. Even when you are writing about something real from your actual life? The person speaking in your poem isn't exactly you. She's bigger than you, perhaps braver, too. And she might also teach you to recognize something new and meaningful about yourself. Today's poem is written in the voice of Rosa Parks. But what I really want to say is, today's poem is written in the imagined voice of a version of Rosa Parks. Perhaps it's the voice of someone like the poet's own inner Rosa Parks. Ms. Rosa rides the bus by Angela Jackson. That day in December, I sat down by Miss Muffet of Montgomery. I was myriad weary feet swole from sewing seams on a filthy fabric. Tired sore peddlin the rusty singer, dingy cotton thread jammed in the eye. All lifelong. I'd slide through century reams load some with tears, dreaming my own silk self. It was not like they all say Miss Liberty muffet. She didn't jump at the side of me. Not exactly. They hauled me away. 1000 kicking legs pinned down. The rest of me. I tell you a cloud beautiful trouble on the dead

December horizon. Come to sit in judgment. How Many Miles as the jim crow flies over oceans and some. I rumbled. They couldn't hold me down. Long. Know my feet were tired. My eyes were sore. My heart was raw from hemming dirty edges of Miss I muffed. garment. I wrote again 1000 bloody miles after the crow flies that day in December, long remembered when I sat down beside miss muffed of Montgomery. I said like the joke say, what's in the bowl thief. I said, that's your curse. I said this my way. She slipped her frock disembarked, settled in the suburbs deaf, mute, lewd and blind. The bowl, she left behind the empty bowl mine, the spoiled dress. Jim Crow dies and ravens come with crumbs. They say, eat and be satisfied. I fast and pray and ride. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.