Main Topic: Social and Political

Sub Topic: Freedom Rides

Most Australians have never heard of the Freedom Rides. However, the Freedom Rides of 1964 and 1965 were significant events in the history of civil rights for Aboriginal Australians. It was only a short time later in 1967 that an overwhelming number of Australians voted “Yes” to the referendum to remove discriminatory sections from the Australian Constitution.

In America, the Freedom Rides of 1961 were designed to test people’s reactions to the segregation laws. A group of Blacks and Whites would board buses heading for the south. The Blacks would sit in the front and the Whites would sit in the back. At rest stops the Blacks went into the Whites-only areas and the Whites went into the Blacks-only areas, including restrooms, water fountains and bus stops.

In Australia, inspired by the freedom riders in America, students from Sydney University formed a group called the Student Action for Aboriginais. Led by Charles Perkins and others, they travelled into New South Wales country towns on what some of them considered a fact-finding mission. What they encountered was de facto segregation. The students protested, picketed, and faced violence, to raise awareness of the inequality that Aboriginal people experienced in their everyday lives.

- **Discovering Democracy** has an entire program devoted to the Freedom Rides, including a video & CD Rom. Most schools will have this resource in the Teachers’ Resource area of their school resource collection. [http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/up4fq1acts.htm](http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/up4fq1acts.htm)
  - As a previewing exercise, start by asking students to brainstorm what they think a “Freedom Ride” might be or entail.
  - Tell them that it was something that happened in Australia’s history to do with human rights and add their suggestions.

- **Watch the video**
  - What does the freedom bus symbolise?
  - Why did Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people take the Freedom Ride together?
  - Was the Freedom Ride a political strategy? Why or why not?


- The DVD **Fire Talker: the Life and Times of Charlie Perkins** has a lot of original film footage and valuable information about the Freedom Rides

- Research the main political activists involved in the Freedom Rides:
  - Charlie Perkins
  - Ted Noffs
  - Jim Spigelman.

- Create a Freedom Bus (out of cardboard).
• Find out what route the bus travelled and which towns it visited along the way and map the freedom journey.

• Make a Timeline and record the distances travelled.

• Find out what happened when the bus stopped in towns? Students could use this information to create ‘bus stop’ information.

• Students use the information gathered to act as journalists reporting on the *Freedom Rides*, interviewing activists, police, citizens and politicians.

• Research newspaper articles from the time to ascertain whether the *Freedom Rides* achieved their goal.

• Use the school bus to make a statement regarding an issue that is relevant to your students, school or community, for example: Racism, Bullying, Graffiti, or going to school.

• What other events have been organised in the pursuit of civil rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
  ○ Bridge Walks
  ○ Sea of Hands
  ○ Michael Long’s Long Walk to Freedom
  ○ Close the Gap campaign
  ○ Tent Embassy
  ○ The National Apology

**Resources:**


• *Freedom Ride* Blood Brothers series (video) Rachel Perkins (director) SBS TV. Distributed by Film Australia. 1993. 55min.

• *Discovering Democracy* Primary Kit Video. 'Freedom Ride' segment

• *Stories of Democracy* (CD ROM) 'People Power' interactive. Discovering Democracy Primary Kit. 1998

• *Stories of Democracy* (CD ROM) biographies: Charles Perkin


• *A Fair Go: Winning the 1967 Referendum* (Video) ABC TV. 1999. 55min.

• *Chicka Dixon* (DVD) Message Stick. ABC TV. 2001. 27min.