

Character and Life Skills

Video Title: Freedom, Inside Out Series

Lesson Title: Freedom Riders

Grade Level: Middle School



Project and Purpose

Students write a first person narrative for a Freedom Rider of the Civil Rights era.

Essential Question

Why do some people take great risks in the name of freedom?

Materials

- Board or chart to record brainstorm session
- Writing materials and/or computer writing programs
- Access to the Freedom Rider article on History Channel website: www.history.com/topics/black-history/freedom-rides
- If possible, access to the 2010 documentary film *Freedom Riders*, written and directed by Stanley Nelson
- Writing tools and/or computer writing program

Procedure

1. Ask students how the video *Freedom* shows us Andrew Wolpa's interpretation of the term. Within his freedoms, he took great risks. Many people say that freedom and risk go hand in hand. What are some of the historical events, actions, and rights they associate with the terms "freedom" and "risk"? Make a list on the board/a chart.
2. Talk about how the study of US history documents the evolution of freedom in our country and the great risks people took to secure and guarantee those freedoms. Ask students to add events in American history to the list on the board.
3. Explain that during the Civil Rights era, a group of Americans calling themselves "Freedom Riders" rode on interstate buses — at great risk to themselves — into the segregated southern United States to test a Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation. Read or present this information from the History Channel's article on the Freedom Riders:

Freedom Riders were groups of white and African American civil rights activists who participated in Freedom Rides, bus trips through the American South in 1961 to protest segregated bus terminals. Freedom Riders tried to use "whites-only" restrooms and lunch counters at bus stations in Alabama, South Carolina and other Southern states. The groups were confronted by arresting police officers — as well as horrific violence from white protestors — along their routes, but also drew international attention to their cause.

4. Use the History Channel website to provide videos and articles on the Freedom Riders to give students background information on the civil rights activists. If possible, show the 2010 documentary film *Freedom Riders*, written and directed by Stanley Nelson.
5. Ask students to imagine taking the point of view of one of the Freedom Riders. Why did that person go? What did that person hope to accomplish? What was the greatest risk for this person? How was the risk worth the freedom?
6. Using what you know now about that time period, imagine yourself as a Freedom Rider. Write a letter home describing a challenging moment of your journey that includes the answer to the question: *Why do some people take great risks in the name of freedom?*

Conclusion

When all letters are done, have students share with a trusted partner in the class. Consider posting their letters and having the students title the posting.

Notes
