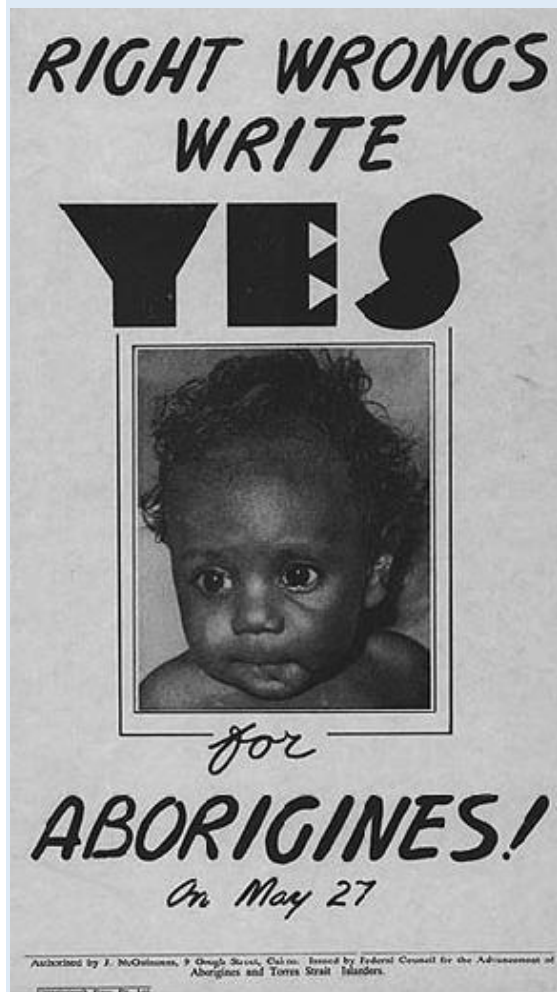


The 1967 Referendum



On Saturday May 27, 1967, the Australian Government held a referendum. This year, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of this historic event.

This was a momentous turning point in Australian history. **More than 90 per cent** of Australian voters chose 'Yes' to count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the census and give the Australian Government the power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The purpose of the **1967 Referendum** was to make two changes to the Australian Constitution. These changes enabled the Commonwealth Government to:

(i) Make laws for all of the Australian people by amending s51 of the Constitution (previously people of the 'Aboriginal race in any state' were excluded) and;

(ii) Take account of Aboriginal people in determining the population of Australia by repealing s127 of the constitution (formerly, Indigenous peoples had been haphazardly included in the census but not counted for the purposes of Commonwealth funding grants to the states or territories)

From 1967, Aboriginal people were counted in the census and included in base figures for Commonwealth funding granted to the states and territories on a per capita basis.

Contrary to popular thinking the 1967 Referendum did NOT

- give Aboriginal peoples the right to vote
- give Aboriginal peoples citizenship rights
- give Aboriginal peoples the right to be counted in the census.

Did you know that from 1947 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People were counted in the official Commonwealth census but were first classified as Polynesians, then as Pacific Islanders? Prior to this, Torres Strait Islander people were regarded as 'aboriginal natives' and were excluded from population figures if they were of more than 50 per cent Torres Strait Islander heritage. See:

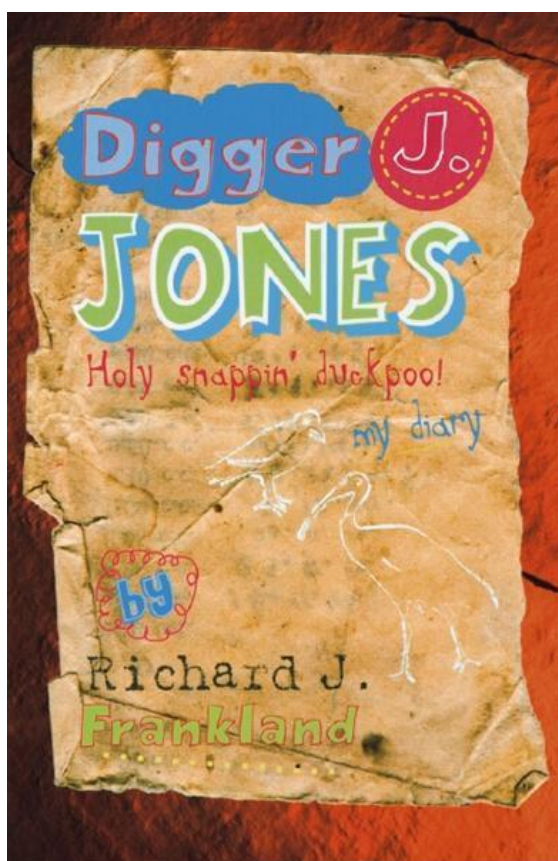
<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/myths-persist-about-the-1967-referendum>
<http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0Feature+Article2July+2011>

Download the revised **VCAA 1967 Referendum sample history unit**. The unit is a series of six activities and a historical inquiry assessment task which could form part of a unit of learning on 'Rights and freedoms (1945-the present)', at Levels 9 and 10. The unit also contains a section 'Background reading on the 1967

Referendum', which teachers should consult before beginning the teaching and learning activities.

The NSW-AECG has also produced a set of [teaching and learning activities](#) about the 1967 Referendum or Reconciliation Australia with [fact sheet](#) for background and activities.

With older students study the highly readable novel *Digger J. Jones* by prominent Gunditjmara author Richard Franklin. [Teaching notes](#) offer a range of class discussion points. Told in diary form, *Digger J. Jones* tells the story of Digger - an Aboriginal boy caught up in the events of the 1960s and the lead up to the 1967 Referendum which officially counted Aboriginal people in Australia as citizens in the eyes of the Federal Government.



With upper primary school students set up a school [referendum](#) around issues relevant to your school or local community and involve students in electoral processes as a prelude to discussions about the 1967 Referendum.

[Watch](#) the short video with Faith Bandler, former Secretary of the Federal Council for the

Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders talking about why it was so important to have a referendum and discuss with students.

With your students [watch](#) *Vote Yes for Aborigines* (2007) directed by Yorta Yorta woman Frances Peters-Little about the 1967 referendum and the campaign for Aboriginal citizenship rights that led up to it. [Download](#) the teachers' study guide to *Vote Yes for Aborigines* and design some lessons and activities suitable for your students.

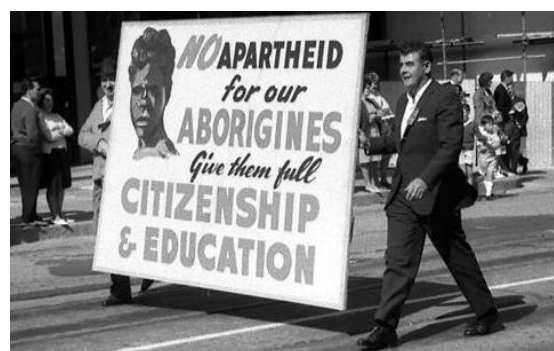
Investigate the role of the Victorian [Aborigines Advancement League](#) in the '67 referendum.



Bill Onus's protest banner in the 1940s.

With secondary students explore the excellent '67 [Referendum site](#) **Collaborating for Indigenous Rights** and teaching resources and incorporate suggested activities into your lessons.

With senior students download the [Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution - school learning guide \(2014\)](#), work through the activities and discuss the case for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our Constitution.



Victorian Curriculum:

[VCHHK094](#) The different experiences and perspectives of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrants, women, and children: *History 5-6*

[VCCCG021](#) Describe the process of constitutional change through a referendum: *Civics and Citizenship 7-8*

[VCCCG030](#) Analysing how citizens' political choices are shaped, including the influence of the media: *Civics and Citizenship 9-10*

[VCHHC121](#) Sequence significant events in chronological order to support analysis of the causes and effects of these events and identify the changes they brought about: *History 9-10*

[VCHHC123](#) Analyse and corroborate sources and evaluate their accuracy, usefulness and reliability: *History 9-10*

[VCHHC124](#) Analyse the different perspectives of people in the past and evaluate how these perspectives are influenced by significant events, ideas, location, beliefs and values: *History 9-10*

[VCHHC125](#) Evaluate different historical interpretations and contested debates: *History 9-10*

[VCHHC126](#) Identify and evaluate patterns of continuity and change in the development of the modern world and Australia: *History 9-10*

[VCHHC127](#) Analyse the long-term causes, short term triggers and the intended and unintended effects of significant events and developments: *History 9-10*

[VCHHC128](#) Evaluate the historical significance of an event, idea, individual or place: *History 9-10*

[VCHHK151](#) Significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including Australia's involvement in the development of the declaration: *History 9-10*

[VCHHK152](#) Causes of the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965: *History 9-10*

[VCHHK153](#) Effects of the US civil rights movement and its influence on Australia: *History 9-10*

[VCHHK154](#) Significance of the following events in changing society: 1962 right to vote federally, 1967 Referendum, Reconciliation, Mabo decision, Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen Generations), the Apology and the different perspectives of these events: *History 9-10*

[VCHHK155](#) Effects of methods used by civil rights activists to achieve change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the role of one individual or group in the struggle: *History 9-10*

[VCHHK156](#) Continuity and change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in securing and achieving civil rights and freedoms in Australia: *History 9-10*



The Rights of the Australian Aborigines AND YOU

"All human beings are born free and equal . . . in dignity and human rights . . . and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

ARTICLE 1. United Nations
Declaration on Human
Rights

**WHAT CAN AUSTRALIANS OF
EUROPEAN DESCENT DO
TO MAKE THIS A REALITY
FOR THEIR FELLOW-AUSTRALIANS
OF ABORIGINAL DESCENT ?**

Vote YES

in the Federal Referendum on
Saturday, May 27, 1967

Appeal by . . .

THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF
SALARIED AND PROFESSIONAL
ASSOCIATIONS