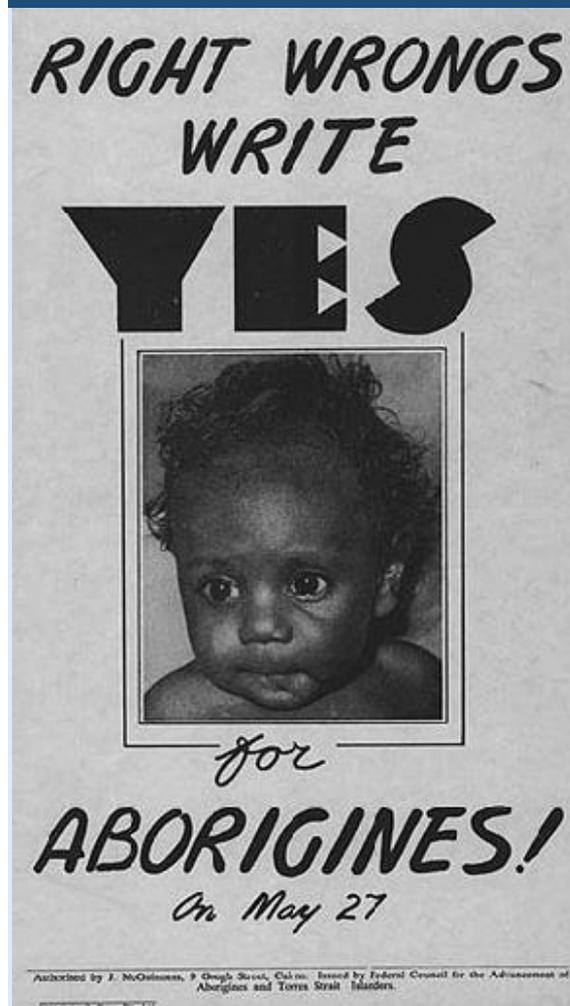


The 1967 Referendum



On Saturday May 27, 1967, the Australian Government held a referendum. 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 Commonwealth Government the power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. What we call a landslide vote!

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

(i) make laws for all Australian people by amending s51 of the Constitution (stating *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. Until then Aboriginal people had been haphazardly included in the census but not counted for the purposes of Commonwealth funding grants to the states or territories.

Until then, each state had jurisdiction.

From 1967, all Aboriginal people were to be 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 Torres Strait Islander People were first classified as Polynesians, then as Pacific Islanders? Prior to 1947, 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 [VCAA 1967 Referendum sample history unit](#), a series of six activities and a historical inquiry which can form part of a unit of learning on *Rights and freedoms (1945-the present)* - Levels 9-10. The unit also contains *Background reading on the 1967 Referendum*, which teachers should consult before beginning the teaching and learning activities.



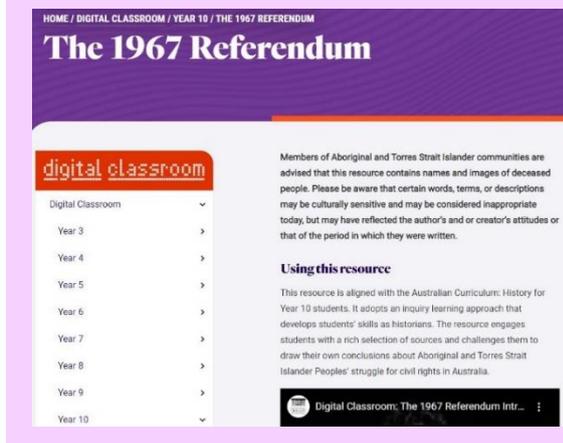
Behind the News (BTN)

Report on the 1967 Referendum [here](#) contains great footage and coverage.



National Library Australia (NLA)

The 1967 Referendum [DIGITAL Classroom](#) resources are well worth exploring - targeted to Year 10.



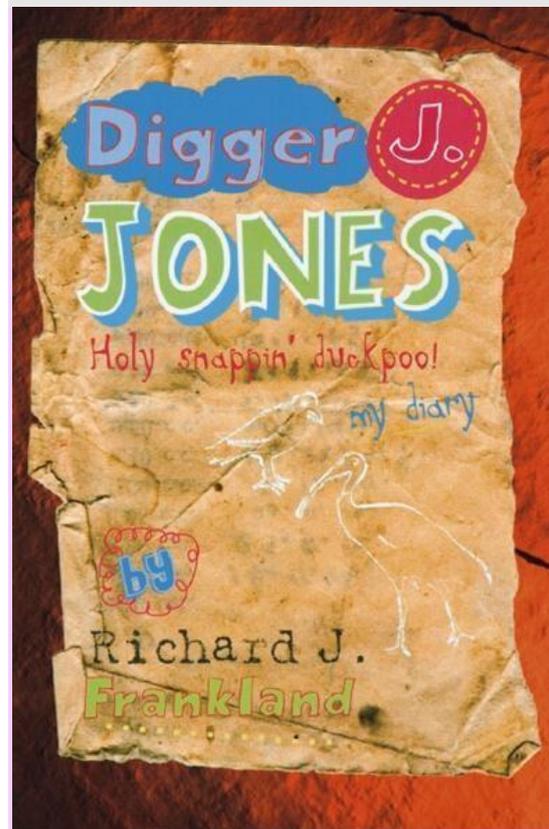
View and Download NSW-AECG's [Australia's Constitution and the 1967 Referendum Fact Sheet](#) and Reconciliation Australia's [1967 Referendum Fact Sheet](#) for more background and activities.

NSW AECG Inc. - Teaching and Learning Activities



Digger J. Jones by prominent Gunditjmara author Richard Franklin is a great read of older students and educators alike. Full of humour and 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 the 1967 Referendum.

[Audio books](#) are available and can be borrowed from [Libraries](#), and [Teaching Notes](#) offer a range of class discussion points.





Learn about A.O. recipient Faith Bandler, daughter of a south-sea Islander slave, 1967 Referendum lobbyist and campaign director in the following videos:

[Remembering our Icon](#) (3.16 min) and [Vote Yes - The 1967 Referendum](#) (SBS 2.52 mins).

Faith Bandler and Oodgeroo Noonuccal (formerly Kath Walker) in this snippet from an episode of [THIS IS YOUR LIFE](#) (1.16 min).

[Oxfam](#) talks to Faith's daughter Lilon Bandler, about growing up in the era, grassroot movements, and some of the key personalities involved at the time, around Martin Place, Sydney (3.57 mins).

On the 40th anniversary of the Referendum, ABC's Kerry O'Brien featured a comprehensive special: [Indigenous rights in Australia, 40 years after referendum](#) (8 min); also you can watch this defining moment in Australia's history brought to life, as told by historian David Hunt and Charmaine Armstrong in [Defining Moments: 1967 Referendum](#) (NMA 6.10).

The 1967 referendum had been a long time coming, As far back as 1913, a committee on Aboriginal welfare established by the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, suggested that 'this unfortunate race whom we have dispossessed' should be made 'a single and National responsibility and cared for in a National way'.

In 1938, the Australian Aborigines League and the Aborigines Progressive Association announced a 'day of mourning' to coincide with Australia's 150th anniversary celebrations:

'That we, representing the Aborigines of Australia ... make protest against the callous treatment by the white men during the 150 years past, and we appeal to the Australian nation of today to make new laws for the education and care of Aborigines, and we ask for a new policy which will raise our people to full citizen status and equality within the community.'

Australian Aborigines Conference, AAL, 1938



Investigate the Victorian [Aborigines Advancement League's](#) role in the 1967 Referendum, with more about the background leading up to it at [State Library Victoria](#).



Two days before the Referendum, The *Sydney Morning Herald* published the photograph above, with the caption: 'Racial discrimination – what's that?' as a nation prepared to vote on a referendum to bring Aboriginal people under Commonwealth legislative power, and included in the census. Significantly, it would give rights to all Aboriginal people to receive social-security benefits, war pensions, child endowments and children's pensions, like other Australians. In the style of the times, the photograph was a set-up, but sent a clear message.

When you write Yes in the lower square of your ballot paper you are holding out the hand of friendship and wiping out nearly 200 years of injustice and inhumanity.

NSW Campaign director, Faith Bandler

The “Yes” campaign was very strong, and uniquely among Australian referendums there was no concerted ‘No’ campaign. Even the government broke with convention by providing in the official advice to voters, only the case for “Yes”. Consequently, campaigners could talk up the importance of the changes they advocated virtually unrestrained. See more in this article written by Russell McGregor, published by [The Conversation](#).



Radio jingles at the time encouraged Australians to do the right thing and vote ‘Yes’. Here is a radio jingle [written](#) by Peter Best, performed by The Pogs.



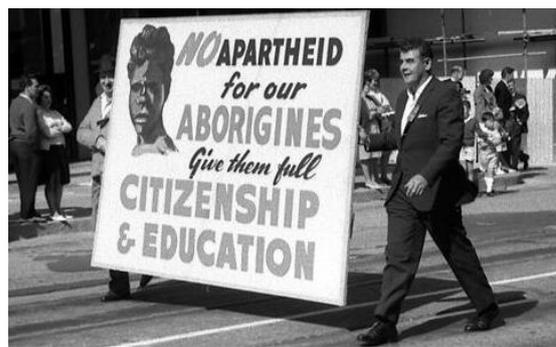
[Watch](#) *Vote Yes for Aborigines* (2007) by Yorta Yorta director Frances Peters-Little about the 1967 referendum and the campaign for Aboriginal citizenship rights that led up to it. [Download](#) the teachers’ study guide to *Vote Yes for Aborigines* and design some lessons and activities suitable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

Explore Collaborating for Indigenous Rights - an excellent ‘67 [Referendum site](#) with teaching resources and incorporate suggested activities into your lessons.



Also, 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.

50 years on from the 1967 referendum WA Nhanhagardi Senior Elder and educator the late Clarrie Cameron shares some memories of this historic event.



Blackfella gotta walk on one side of the street, or not allowed on the street after six o’clock. There’s people in their 50s and 60s who don’t remember that.

Clarrie Cameron (WA)



For a strong contemporary Aboriginal perspective on being an Aboriginal person during this era, watch the short video [Right wrongs](#) and discuss points and issues raised. Significantly, WA and QLD received the least Yes votes at the time.



Right wrongs: Clarrie Cameron

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*.

VCCCG008 Discuss the values, principles and institutions that underpin Australia's democratic forms of government and explain how this system is influenced by the Westminster system: *Civics and Citizenship 5-6*

VCCCG010 Identify and discuss the key features of the Australian electoral process *Civics and Citizenship 5-6*.

VCCCG011 Identify the roles and responsibilities of electors and representatives in Australia's democracy: *Civics and Citizenship 5-6*.

VCCCL012 Explain how state/territory and federal laws are initiated and passed through parliament *Civics and Citizenship 5-6*.

VCCCC014 Identify who can be an Australian citizen and describe the rights, responsibilities and shared values of Australian citizenship and explore ways citizens can participate in society *Civics and Citizenship 5-6*.

VCCCC015 Identify different points of view on a contemporary issue relating to democracy and citizenship: *Civics and Citizenship 5-6*.

VCCCC016 Investigate how people with shared beliefs and values work together to achieve their goals and plan for action: *Civics and Citizenship 5-6*.

By the end of Level 6, students identify the values that underpin Australia's democracy and explain the importance of the electoral process. They explain the role of different people in Australia's legal system and the role of parliaments in creating law. They identify various ways people can participate effectively in groups to achieve shared goals. Students explain what it means to be an Australian citizen and how people can participate as global citizens.

VCCCG019 Discuss the freedoms that enable active participation in Australia's democracy within the bounds of law, including freedom of speech, association, assembly, religion and movement: *Civics and Citizenship 7-8*.

VCCCG020 Explain how citizens can participate in Australia's democracy, including the use of the electoral system, contact with their elected representatives, use of lobby groups, interest groups and direct action: *Civics and Citizenship 7-8*.

VCCCG021 Describe the process of constitutional change through a referendum: *Civics and Citizenship 7-8*.

By the end of Level 8, students explain features of Australia's system of government, and the purpose of the Constitution in Australia's representative democracy. They analyse features of Australian democracy, and explain features that enable active participation. They explain how Australia's legal system is based on the principle of justice, and describe the types of law and how laws are made.

Students identify the importance of shared values, explain different points of view and explain the diverse nature of Australian society. They analyse issues about national identity ... and the factors that contribute to people's sense of belonging. They identify ways they can be active and informed citizens, and take action, in different contexts.

VCCCG030 Analyse how citizens' political choices are shaped, including the influence of the media: *Civics and Citizenship 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*

By the end of Level 10, students evaluate features of Australia's political system, and identify and analyse the influences on people's electoral choices. They compare and evaluate the key features and values of systems of government, and analyse Australia's global roles and responsibilities. ... They analyse a range of factors that influence identities and attitudes to diversity.

Students evaluate a range of factors that sustain democratic societies and analyse ways they can be active and informed citizens in different contexts, taking into account multiple perspectives and ambiguities.



And a final word ...

We are always seeking to improve this bulletin and to make it useful, relevant and highly readable. We invite you to email through suggestions including how you as educators incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, especially Victorian ones in your teaching and curriculum.

Produced by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) May 2024.

Any enquiries, feedback and suggestions are welcome by contacting VAEAI on (03) 94810800 or by emailing the editor-curator vaso@vaeai.org.au.

For more Koorie Perspectives see the VAEAI [Koorie Education Calendar](#).

