

The Gurindji Strike: Protest Song as Historical Source

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Syllabus content

Stage 5 – The Modern World and Australia, Core Study – Depth Study 4: Rights and Freedoms (1945–present).

Duration

One lesson

Rationale

This teaching idea is based on the Gurindji strike (also known as the Wave Hill Walk-Off) of 1966, when 200 Aboriginal stockmen, domestic workers and their families stopped work at Wave Hill station in the Northern Territory. The strike action against the station owners led to a long dispute and, eventually, the return of some of their traditional land to the Gurindji people in 1974. The lesson emphasises comprehension skills by offering multimodal resources and scaffolded written tasks. Further, it extends students by requiring them to consider the value of popular music as a source of socio-cultural history. Although the syllabus does not explicitly cite the Gurindji strike, this important event helps to consolidate several learning outcomes concerning the need for activism and methods of protest.

Lesson outcomes

Explain the purpose and significance of the 1966 Gurindji strike (Wave Hill Walk-Off).

Lesson outline

The Gurindji Strike: Protest Song as Historical Source	
Activity 1. Reading comprehension and short answer responses	
Read the National Museum of Australia online article and digital classroom resource.	Defining Moments: Wave Hill Walk- Off https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/wave-hill-walk-off https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/wave-hill-walk-off

Complete the following comprehension questions (modified from the Australia's Defining Moments Digital Classroom resource): - Describe the experience of Australian First Nations peoples on pastoral stations up to the 1960s. - Writing target: respond using three sentences - Optional sentence starters: <i>Pastoral stations were ... for First Nations peoples prior to the 1960s.</i> <i>First,... Second, conditions were...</i> - Outline the aims and protest methods of the Gurindji people. - Writing target: respond using four sentences. - Aim to include one simple, one compound and one complex sentence. - Optional sentence starters: <i>The Gurindji people demanded... Eventually, the movement took on another aim, to...</i> <i>To achieve this, they...</i> <i>Additionally, Vincent Lingiari...</i> - Using Source A, explain the significance of the Wave Hill Walk-Off. - Writing target: respond using the following PEEL scaffold.	Source A: Quote from Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, when he arrived in Daguragu and poured a handful of soil through Vincent Lingiari's fingers: 'Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof, in Australian law, that these lands belong to the Gurindji people'.
POINT: One to two sentences answering the question directly and outlining your argument. Optional sentence starters: <i>The Wave Hill walk-off is considered a... in the Indigenous civil rights movement.</i> EXPLAIN: Four to five sentences of historical detail showing your knowledge of the Wave Hill Walk-Off. Optional sentence starters: <i>First, it achieved... More broadly, it also... This represented... However,...</i> EVIDENCE: Discussion of Source A and what it reveals about the Wave Hill Walk-Off. Optional sentence starters: <i>Source A ...which reveals...</i> LINK: One to two sentence summary, restating your main ideas. Optional sentence starter: <i>In conclusion...</i>	
Activity 2. Audiovisual Reflection	
Watch this video from the National Film and Sound Archive. In this film singer-songwriters Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly talk about the process of writing the protest song 'From Little Things Big Things Grow' (1990), which tells the story of Vincent Lingiari and the Wave Hill Walk-Off.	https://www.nfsa.gov.au/latest/from-little-things-25-years
Record five insights. You may like to use a dot point or mind map format. The following optional sentence starters may help you structure your ideas and express your insights: <i>This film makes me think...</i> <i>This film makes me feel...</i> <i>This film makes me wonder...</i> <i>This film helps me to understand...</i> <i>If I could ask Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly a question, it would be...</i>	

Activity 3. Critical thinking activity - music as an historical source

Listen to Paul Kelly singing 'From Little Things Big Things Grow' (1990).
You may like to read the lyrics below as you listen.

Gather 'round people, I'll tell you a story
An eight-year long story of power and pride
British Lord Vestey and Vincent Lingiari
Were opposite men on opposite sides
Vestey was fat with money and muscle
Beef was his business, broad was his door
Vincent was lean and spoke very little
He had no bank balance, hard dirt was his floor

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Gurindji were working for nothing but rations
Where once they had gathered the wealth of the land

Daily the oppression got tighter and tighter
Gurindji decided they must make a stand
They picked up their swags and started off walking

At Wattie Creek they sat themselves down
Now it don't sound like much but it sure got tongues talking
Back at the homestead and then in the town

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Vestey man said, 'I'll double your wages
18 quid a week you'll have in your hand'
Vincent said, 'Uh-uh we're not talking about wages

We're sitting right here 'til we get our land'
Vestey man roared and Vestey man thundered

You don't stand the chance of a cinder in snow

Vince said, 'If we fall, others are rising'

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Then Vincent Lingiari boarded an airplane
Landed in Sydney, big city of lights
And daily he went 'round softly speaking his story

To all kinds of men from all walks of life
And Vincent sat down with big politicians
'This affair', they told him, 'It's a matter of state'

'Let us sort it out while your people are hungry'

Vincent said, 'No thanks, we know how to wait'

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Then Vincent Lingiari returned in an airplane
Back to his country once more to sit down
And he told his people, 'Let the stars keep on turning

We have friends in the south, in the cities and towns'

Eight years went by, eight long years of waiting

'Til one day a tall stranger appeared in the land

And he came with lawyers and he came with great ceremony

And through Vincent's fingers poured a handful of sand

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

That was the story of Vincent Lingiari
But this is the story of something much more
How power and privilege cannot move a people

Who know where they stand and stand in the law

'From Little Things Big Things Grow' (1990)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN0Q_S75itE

Choose one of the following critical reflection activities:

Option 1. Challenging

Assess the value and limitations of these lyrics for an historian examining the following topics:

- The cultural significance of the Wave Hill Walk-Off.
- The role of Vincent Lingiari in the Indigenous Civil Rights Movement.
- The success of the Wave Hill Walk-Off protesters in achieving their aims.

To do this, identify at least three values and one limitation per topic (a total of 12 points minimum).

Option 2. More Challenging

Do you think music can be a legitimate source of history? Why or why not? Justify your reasoning.

Aim to write at least 100 words.

TEACHING HISTORY

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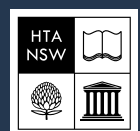
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