

Lesson Three: Reflecting on the Freedom Charter

Summary

Students engage with the Freedom Charter, reflecting on and discussing its contents.

Duration

One 50-minute class period.

About this Lesson

This lesson is focused on helping students reflect on the content of the Freedom Charter. Students will begin the lesson by reflecting on freedom, what it means to them and what it looks like in practice. They will then engage in a silent conversation, exploring different sections of the Freedom Charter, before having a discussion on the charter in groups.

Guiding Questions

- What did the Freedom Charter reveal about the lives of South Africans?
- How does the Freedom Charter connect to, extend and/or challenge ideas of freedom?

Learning Objectives

- To understand and analyse the demands contained within the freedom charter and what these reveal about the lives of South Africans in early apartheid.

Notes to Teacher

1. Lesson Preparation

Apartheid can be a challenging topic to discuss in the classroom.

We recommend that you revisit your classroom contract before teaching this lesson. If you do not have a class contract, you can use [Teach for Tomorrow's contracting guidelines for creating a classroom contract](#) or another procedure you have used in the past.

We also recommend that you teach the first two lessons in the Teach for Tomorrow unit [Discussing Race and Racism in the Classroom](#): Preparing to Discuss Race in the Classroom and Introducing the Concept of Race.

2. Silent Conversation Preparation

To prepare for the [Silent Conversation](#), please print out slides 8–19 in the **PowerPoint: [Lesson Three: Reflecting on the Freedom Charter](#)** and stick each one in the middle of an A3 or A2 sheet of paper. You may also wish to give students different coloured marker pens for completing this activity. There are twelve sections to the charter of varying lengths.

3. Exam Style Questions

This resource can be used and adapted by those teaching Apartheid at GCSE and A-level. To this end, we have included a range of exam style questions in the extensions section of each lesson, which are intended as discussion prompts, extension activities and/or homework tasks rather than formal examination questions. They are designed to encourage students to engage with second-order historical concepts and assessment objectives commonly assessed across GCSE and A-level History specifications, including causation, consequence, change and continuity, significance, source analysis and historical interpretations. Teachers can select and adapt the questions that are relevant to their teaching and their students.

4. Classroom-ready PowerPoint Slides

Each lesson in this unit includes a PowerPoint of student-facing slides. The PowerPoints are intended to be used alongside, and not instead of, the lesson plans because the latter include important rationales and context that teachers should familiarise themselves with before teaching each lesson. The PowerPoints include basic content and student-facing prompts from the lesson plans but are minimally designed because we anticipate teachers will adapt them to fit the needs of their students and class.

Materials

1. **PowerPoint:** [Lesson Three: Reflecting on the Freedom Charter](#)
2. **Handout:** [The Freedom Charter \(Full Text\)](#)
3. **Handout:** [The Women's Charter \(Full Text\)](#)

Activities

1. Reflect on Freedom

Inform students that they will be reading and engaging with the Freedom Charter. Before doing so, ask them to reflect on the following questions in a [journal](#) response.

1. What is freedom?
2. What does it look like in practice?
3. What does freedom mean to you?
4. How, if at all, do people have different understandings of freedom?
 - What tensions can exist when people have different understandings of freedom?
5. The anti-apartheid activist and President of South Africa Nelson Mandela said 'to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others'.
 - What ideas about freedom does Mandela capture in this statement?
 - How far do you agree with him?

Invite students to share their reflections in pairs before leading a short class discussion.

Then invite students to complete the statement 'Freedom is _____' independently.

2. Engage with the Freedom Charter

Explain to students that in this part of the lesson, they will be exploring the Freedom Charter.

Ensure that they understand that the Freedom Charter was written by thousands of South Africans who responded to the Call to the Congress of the People and sent in their visions for a free South Africa. Their ideas were then compiled into the Freedom Charter which was shared, agreed to and adopted by several thousand people at the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955.

Explain that they will be using the [Silent Conversation](#) teaching strategy which contains several key steps. Explain the key steps and then initiate the activity and hand out slides 8-19 from the **PowerPoint: [Lesson Three: Reflecting on the Freedom Charter](#)** (see Note 2 to teachers).

1. Students will work in small groups (ideally of two to three students) to reflect on a different section of the charter in silence. Instead of speaking, they will communicate by writing their thoughts, questions and responses on the text they have been given.
2. Each group will receive a large piece of paper with their section of the Freedom Charter. They will begin by reading the text in silence. After reading, they will comment on the text, ask questions of each other and share responses by writing on the paper. They can all write at the same time. The written

conversation must start on the topic of the text but can stray wherever the students take it. Students can also draw lines connecting a comment to a particular question.

3. Next, still working in silence, students will leave their groups and walk around reading other groups' papers. Students take their pen with them and can write comments or further questions on the other papers.
4. Next, the groups will reassemble back at their own paper. They should look at any new comments written by others. Now they can have a free verbal conversation about the text, their own comments, what they read on other papers, and the comments their fellow students wrote for them.

You may choose to share these questions to guide their discussion:

1. What different areas of life are referenced in the Freedom Charter?
 - a. What does this reveal about the lives of non-white South Africans at the time?
 2. What do you find surprising, interesting and/or troubling about content contained in the Freedom Charter? Why?
 3. How do the ideas in the Freedom Charter connect to, extend and/challenge your understanding of freedom?
 4. What most resonates with you in the Freedom Charter?
 5. How, if at all, are ideas in the Freedom Charter relevant to the UK today?
 - a. To the world?
5. Finally, students will debrief the process and share reflections on the charter as a class.

You may choose to go through each of the sections in order (as listed) and ask one representative from each group to read the section out loud, before summarising the silent paper reflections:

1. **Opening**
2. **The People Shall Govern!**
3. **All National Groups Shall have Equal Rights!**
4. **The People Shall Share in the Country`s Wealth!**
5. **The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!**
6. **All Shall be Equal Before the Law!**
7. **All Shall Enjoy Equal Human Rights!**
8. **There Shall be Work and Security!**
9. **The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!**

10. **There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!**

11. **There Shall be Peace and Friendship!**

12. **Closing**

In addition to debriefing student reflections, you might also ask students what it felt like to hear the different sections of the charter read out.

3. Reflect on the Charter

Finally, ask students to reflect on the following questions independently.

1. How do the ideas in the Freedom Charter connect to, extend and/challenge your understanding of freedom?
2. How, if at all, are ideas in the Freedom Charter relevant to the (UK) today?
 - a. To the world?
3. Re-read the sentence you wrote at the start of the lesson stating 'Freedom is_____'. What, if anything, would you change about it?

Finally, if there is time, invite students to share their statements 'Freedom is_____ ' in a [wraparound](#).

Extensions

1. Explore the Response to the Freedom Charter

Ask students to research both the government and popular responses to the Freedom Charter, including:

- The Treason Trial
- The repression of the Freedom Charter
- The reemergence of the Freedom Charter in the 1980s
- The link between the Freedom Charter and South Africa's 1996 constitution

When researching the government response, you might also ask students to reflect on why the response was so harsh, and why the calls for Freedom contained in the charter were viewed as so threatening by those in power.

When considering the link between the Freedom Charter and South Africa's 1996 constitution, you might also ask students to consider what the similarities and differences are between both documents, and the possible implications/impacts of these differences.

2. Read and Analyse the Women's Charter

Inform students that the Women's Charter preceded the Freedom Charter. It was created in 1954 and was adopted at the founding conference of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) in Johannesburg, 17 April 1954.

Divide students into groups and distribute a copy of the **Handout: [The Women's Charter \(Full Text\)](#)** to each group. Ask each group to read the charter out loud in turns and then discuss the following questions:

1. For each section of the charter, note down:
 - a. Its focus
 - b. What it reveals about the experiences and treatment of women in South Africa
2. In the final section, a list of aims is outlined. Select two-three aims and for each chosen aim reflect on the following questions:
 - a. What does the aim address?
 - b. How would securing this aim improve the lives of South African women?
 - c. How could it improve the lives of all genders?
 - d. Reflecting on life in the UK, how far do women have the opportunities and rights outlined in the charter in the present day?
3. What most resonates with you about the Women's Charter? Why?
4. Why do you think FSAW felt there was a need for a Women's Charter?
5. The Women's Charter preceded the Freedom Charter, however, it has received considerably less attention. Why do you think this is the case?
6. How, if at all, would a Women's Charter for the UK look like today?
 - a. What would be the similarities and differences with the South African Women's Charter?
7. The civil rights leader and activist Martin Luther King stated that 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere'.
 - a. How far do you agree with him?
 - b. Why might this be the case?
 - c. What does this statement reveal about the importance of ensuring equal rights for all regardless of gender, race, age and any other identity-based category?

You may also choose to further [explore the role of women in the anti-apartheid movement using resources](#) created by the Anti-Apartheid Legacy Centre and the University of East Anglia.

3. GCSE Style Questions

Lesson Three Specific Questions

- Describe the steps that led to the creation the Freedom Charter
- Outline the different areas of life referenced in the Freedom Charter
- Explain what the freedom charter reveals about the lives of Non-White South Africans
- What was the purpose of the Freedom Charter?
- How useful is the Freedom Charter for a historian studying:
 - Life in Apartheid South Africa?
 - Resistance against apartheid?

Cross-Lesson Historical Enquiry Prompts

- Describe
- Outline ...
- Use source ____ and your own knowledge to describe the events that / the role of...
- Describe the impact of changes in...
- Explain why/how...
- How useful are the sources for investigating... ?
- What was the purpose of... ?
- Which of the sources is most useful to a historian studying... ?

4. A-Level Style Questions

Lesson Three Specific Questions

Historical Concepts and Enquiry (AO1)

- Assess the significance of the Freedom Charter in the context of South Africa in 1955.
- To what extent did the Freedom Charter represent the views of all South Africans?
- How far can the Freedom Charter be considered a radical document?
- Assess whether the Freedom Charter was more significant as a political programme or as a symbol of resistance.

Working with Sources (AO2)

- How useful is the Freedom Charter as evidence for understanding the aims and priorities of anti-apartheid activists in the 1950s?
- What are the strengths and limitations of the Freedom Charter as a historical source?

Working with Interpretations (AO3)

- Historians have differed in their assessment of the Freedom Charter. Some view it as a radical blueprint for a future South Africa, while others see it as a broad statement of democratic principles. Which interpretation is more convincing?
- Why might different historians reach different conclusions about the significance of the Freedom Charter?

Cross-Lesson Questions

These questions can be used alongside any lesson.

Historical Concepts and Enquiry (AO1)

- Assess the relative importance of different factors in shaping...
- To what extent was ... a turning point?
- How far do you agree with the view that...
- Assess the significance of...

Working with Sources (AO2)

- To what extent does the evidence support the view that...
- Assess the strengths and limitations of the sources for understanding...
- How useful are the sources for investigating...

Working with Interpretations (AO3)

- Why might historians disagree about...
- Which interpretation is more convincing and why?
- How and why have interpretations changed over time?

View the next lesson in the Exploring the Freedom Charter resource: **Lesson Four: Creating a Modern Day Freedom Charter (Part 1)**