

"★★★★★" BOOKS+PUBLISHING

# FREEDOM RIDE



Would you take a stand against injustice?

## SUE LAWSON

EDUCATION RESOURCE BOOKLET



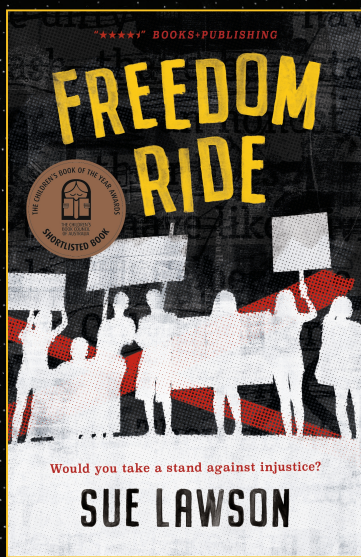
# ABOUT



## About the Author

Sue Lawson writes fiction and non fiction books for children and young adults. Her books have won and been shortlisted for numerous awards, including the Family Therapists Award, the Prime Minister’s Literary awards and the Children’s Book Council of Australia awards.

## About the book



ISBN 9781760658298  
PAPERBACK

**The uncomfortable truth of racism embedded within 1960s Australian society, set against the backdrop of the Freedom Ride.**

Australia 1965. Racial tensions around the country are flaring, and the town of Walgaree is no exception. Robbie just wants to keep his head down, concentrate on his summer mowing job and avoid the wrath of his intolerant family. After all, there’s nothing he can do about how the Aborigines are treated. He’s only one person.

But when a group of university students arrive in Walgaree with the Freedom Ride, Robbie realises it’s time to make a stand. Will he blow up everything he holds dear to change things for the better?

*Freedom Ride* is a thought-provoking reminder of the past, especially powerful when the Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for a future in which all Australians walk together.

Short-listed for the Children’s Book Council Book of the Year Awards, the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards, the Western Australian Premier’s Book Awards and long-listed for the Davitt Awards.

“Powerful historical fiction that features an important milestone in the development of Aboriginal rights ... It's a tale of bravery and resilience in the face of an evil that blighted our history and should never be forgotten.”

– **Cameron Woodhead, *The Age***

“This compelling, charming novel is unflinching in its interrogation of the role of the individual in history, and it captures a moment of immense political change”

– ***Australian Book Review***

"A brilliant evocation of the racism in Australia of the 1960s and the Freedom Ride that challenged it."

– **Ann Curthoys, original Freedom Rider**



# CLASSROOM IDEAS

## Australian Curriculum Overview

		Year 9	Year 10
ENGLISH			
Language	Language variation and change	ACELA1550	ACELA1563
	Language for Interaction	ACELA1551 ACELA1552	ACELA1564 ACELA1565
	Text Structure and Organisation	ACELA1553 ACELA1770	ACELA1566 ACELA1567 ACELA1568
	Expressing and developing ideas	ACELA1557 ACELA1561 ACELA1562	ACELA1569 ACELA1570 ACELA1571
Literature	Literature and context	ACELT1633	ACELT1639
	Responding to Literature	ACELT1771 ACELT1635	ACELT1640 ACELT1641 ACELT1812
	Examining literature	ACELT1636 ACELT1772	ACELT1642 ACELT1643 ACELT1774
	Creating Literature		ACELT1815 ACELT1644
	Texts In Context	ACELY1739	ACELY1749
Literacy	Interacting with Others	ACELY1811	ACELY1750
	Interpreting, Analysing, Evaluating	ACELY1742 ACELY1743 ACELY1744	ACELY1752 ACELY1753 ACELY1754
	Creating Texts	ACELY1746 ACELY1747 ACELY1748	ACELY1756 ACELY1757
HISTORY			
Historical Knowledge and Understanding	Rights And Freedoms (1945 – The Present)		ACDSEH105 ACDSEH134

\*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian Curriculum.  
However, this is not an exhaustive list of Australian Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.  
For more information visit [www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au).

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## Discussion Questions and Activities

### Before Reading

- View footage of Charles Perkins in 1999 discussing the significance of the Freedom Ride at: <http://dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/1554> (National Film and Sound Archive)
- Listen to the ABC radio interview on 17 February 2015 between Mark Colvin and Gerald Stone, who covered the Freedom Ride as a young journalist. (Visit <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2015/s4181818.htm> then search by date or using the keywords “Gerald Stone” and “Freedom Ride”)
- Analyse the front cover of the novel. Based on the title and design, what can you infer about the subject, setting, style and intended audience of the book? How have visual techniques such as font, colour, framing, vectors and positioning influenced these inferences?

### While Reading

- Create a visual summary of the novel. For each chapter, draw an image which represents the most important event that occurs. This does not have to be a literal representation of the event; it could also incorporate symbolic elements. Consider how you can use visual techniques to reinforce your ideas. Compare your work with a classmate’s. Have you focused on the same events? Discuss any differences, explaining your choices.
- Choose a key quote for each chapter. This should be one that relates to the most important event that occurs in that chapter. Make sure you include the page reference.

### Comprehension: Chapter by Chapter

#### Chapter 1

- Barry Gregory is clearly identified as being different to others in the town when he attempts to allow an Aboriginal woman to be served before him. How does Lawson’s description of Barry identify him as an outsider? How do you think Robbie feels about Barry at this stage?
- Foreshadowing is used when Wobbly warns Barry, “you know how this town works. Don’t go stirring up a hornet’s nest.” (Page 13) What does this suggest about future events?

#### Chapter 2

- When realising that his Gran has been into his bedroom, Robbie uses the metaphor, “The air was somehow bruised”. (Page 16) What does this reveal about the effect Nan’s constant chiding and nagging has on him?
- The magpie carolling in the gum tree in the backyard contrasts with Bluey the “neurotic budgie” (Page 16) trapped screeching and indignant inside his cage. What does this juxtaposition suggest about Robbie’s own situation and his attitude to it?

#### Chapter 3

- Keith relates how his father, the local Police Sergeant, was called into the RSL because Reggie Jenkins, a “Bloody boong decided to try to have a drink there” (Page 23) Reggie is locked up in prison for the night to remind him “of his place” (Page 23) What is ironic about this phrase, and about Reggie being denied access to the RSL? Can you find a similarly ironic statement made by Keith later in the chapter?

#### Chapter 4

- While reading the newspaper, Mr Bower indignantly states, “those layabouts are planning to travel across the state to look at the bloody boongs’ living conditions! For the love of God” (Page 30) What is ironic about Nan’s response to this statement? Think particularly about what she finds most offensive, compared to what a contemporary reader might.
- “The words “I’m not your boy” danced in bold red letters through my mind.” (Page 32) What is Lawson again trying to highlight through Robbie’s resistance to Nan’s use of this idiomatic phrase? As you read, stay alert to other uses of this phrase in the novel.

#### Chapter 5

- Why does Robbie instinctively conceal Barry’s offer of a job from “Bat Face Fielding”?



# CLASSROOM IDEAS

## Chapter 6

- When Mr Bower mentions the plan to let Aboriginal students into Walgaree High, Nan shuts down the topic with, “This really isn’t a dinner conversation.” (Page 40) What does this suggest about how Aboriginals were viewed in the 1960s?

## Chapter 7

- Robbie observes, “The room somehow became lighter when Mrs Gregory entered. ... I thought of apple cake and fluffy towels.” (Page 46) A foil is a character who is set up as a contrast to another in order to highlight particular qualities about them. Which character is Mrs Gregory being set up as a foil against? How would you summarise the main differences between them?

## Chapter 8

- “Even though it was late December, the lawns were lush, nothing like Bat Face Fielding’s patchy grass.” (Page 53) What other quotes can you find in the chapter that highlight the contrast between the open, nurturing world of the Gregorys and the constrained, emotionally arid environment Robbie is accustomed to?
- “There was something soothing about the work, and for the first time in forever, I had room to think.” (Page 53) What language device is used here to emphasise Robbie’s emerging sense of freedom and independence?

## Chapter 9

- “I’ve never spoken to one [an Aboriginal]. I see them around. ... It’s just the way it’s always been around here.” (Page 60) What does this exchange reveal about Robbie, and more broadly, about attitudes to Aboriginal people at the time? In your opinion, is Robbie’s attitude culpable or can it be understood and excused given the context?

## Chapter 10

- In what ways does Robbie demonstrate diplomacy and persuasion in this chapter? What is the effect of this?

## Chapter 11

- “I rode into town with my chest pumped out.” (Page 67) What other signs are there that Robbie’s new job is having a positive impact on his morale and maturity? Think particularly about how he is portrayed in contrast to Keith and Billy.

## Chapter 12

- From Barry’s account, how was living in London different to living in Australia?
- How is Barry’s response to the integrated high school plan different to Nan’s and Mr Bower’s?

## Chapter 13

- “Dad reckons he’s weird ... Probably a homo ... Are you a poofter too, Bower? ... homos don’t go to Rolling Stones concerts in London.” (Page 75) What does this exchange reveal about perception of masculinity at the time?

## Chapter 14

- “Even though they’d spent an hour praying and promising to act like Jesus, the moment they were outside, not even off church grounds, they burst into a gossip session.” (Page 79) What does this ironic remark reveal about Nan and her cronies?
- Keith reveals that Rhook, Wright and he “sent ‘em a message” (Page 80) at the Station school. Look back at the description of the boys in the previous chapter. How is this vandalism anticipated in Lawson’s use of figurative language? (Hint: Think particularly about the broken windows.)

## Chapter 15

- Consider the shattering of Nan’s china figurine on Page 86. What is particularly galling about this episode? Could this event be symbolic in any way? How might you interpret it?

## Chapter 16

- “The moment I entered the house, smells of pine tree and roast meat and the sound of Christmas carols from the record player wrapped around me, as comforting as a hug.” (Page 89) What language technique does Lawson employ here to contrast the warm, festive atmosphere at the Gregorys’ place, with the dour, joyless Christmas Robbie has just experienced with his family? In what other ways is Christmas at the Gregorys’ different to Christmas at Robbie’s house?
- When describing his first beer, Robbie states, “The smell reminded me of snorts and rants, silences and scoffs.” (Page 91) What is he alluding to through this sensual/olfactory imagery? Could Robbie also be making a broader observation about the effects of alcohol?

## Chapter 17

- “What did my mum have to do with Nan?” (Page 96) How does this rhetorical question help engage the reader in the novel? At this point, why do you think Robbie’s father has warned him not to raise the subject of his mother before his grandmother?



## Chapter 18

- Compare the list of jobs Robbie completes before he goes out with the type of chores a teenager might do today. In your opinion, is this information intended to develop the setting/historical context of the story, or is it more illustrative of Robbie's personal home and family situation?
- "His lips curled into a grin. He knew better than anyone how much I hated that thing." (Page 102) How else is Keith's disloyalty to Robbie illustrated in the chapter? What do you think his motive is?

## Chapter 19

- "The way I heard it, the Abo jumped the poor Wright lad. ... What was the point in telling them the truth? Town gossip was as real as the Bible to Dad and Nan." (Page 110 - 112) What does this simile reinforce about the town?

## Chapter 20

- When Robbie observes Mrs Gregory's affection for her son, "A sharp pang of longing stabbed my chest." (Page 118) What is the effect of this powerful metaphor?
- "Maybe it wasn't unprovoked. ... Maybe something made them do it. Someone might have attacked something of theirs." (Page 119) Why do you think Robbie decides to question this version of events, when in the previous chapter, he didn't challenge the account of the altercation at the river?

## Chapter 21

- Robbie states "But I didn't see any of it ... Maybe I was too busy to notice" (Page 121) in reference to the rumours of Aboriginals creating trouble in the town. How do you interpret his response? Is Robbie starting to question the purported truths and realities he is presented with? Think particularly about the last phrase, "Maybe I was too busy to notice". Is he trying to offer a defense or explanation, still unwilling to recognise the extent of the racism in his hometown?
- "The problem isn't Wrighty. It's you, Bower. You're not from a normal family, so you don't know how normal people act." (Page 124) How do you react to this accusation from Keith? Is there any truth to it in your opinion? What does it signal about the shifting of loyalties in the book?

## Chapter 22

- Why do you think Barry employs Micky at the caravan park?
- What evidence can you find to indicate that Robbie feels threatened by Micky? Why does he feel this way?

## Chapter 23

- Robbie remarks, Micky "reminded me of a rabbit on the side of the road, constantly on the watch." (Page 133) How does Micky's behaviour and demeanour alter when he is invited into the Gregorys' house for lunch? Why do you think this is the case?
- What evidence is there that Robbie's attitude towards Micky has softened? What has caused this change?

## Chapter 24

- After Mrs MacIntosh announces that she and her husband will be leaving the caravan park, Barry accuses her of being "ignorant and ill informed". (Page 141) What technique is used here? How does Barry's measured and articulate language contrast with Mrs MacIntosh's histrionic abuse? What is Lawson trying to highlight through this contrast?
- Compare Barry's sardonic statement with Micky's deadpan remark to Robbie, "Only way we survive ... Catch fish, chuck a boomerang at a kangaroo, spear a possum." (Page 144). Could this be implying a similarity in attitude between Robbie and the MacIntoshes? Is Lawson suggesting that Robbie is a bigot or is she trying to make a broader point about ignorance and systemic racism?

## Chapter 25

- "I wanted to yell this wasn't a John Wayne movie or one of Wright's stupid horror films, this was real life and Micky Menzies was a real person. All Micky had done was make Wright look stupid, and those neanderthals had beaten him bloody because of it." (Page 155). Although Robbie reacts to the attack on Micky with dismay and horror, when Wright accuses him of being "mates ... with stinking niggers" (Page 155), he violently denies having anything to do with Micky. Consider his denial in light of the biblical account of Peter's denial of Jesus. Do you see any resonances?
- What language and structural techniques are used on Page 156 to highlight Robbie's disgust at his cowardice? How do you interpret his final action in the chapter; letting the air out of Wright's bike tyre?

## Chapter 26

- Barry responds to Robbie's warning by telling him, "It will all die down, soon enough. Only it didn't sound like he meant it." (Page 159) Predict how you think the plot will develop from this point. Think particularly about the portentous closing line of the chapter.

## Chapter 27

- How does Miss Gert's intervention compare with Robbie's more passive attempts to support Micky?

## Chapter 28

- Robbie tells his father that he doesn't ever work alongside Micky. How do you interpret this? Is it diplomacy, cunning, cowardice or a combination?

## Chapter 29

- "You're a cracker, Robbie Bower." (Page 171) Barry consistently sees the small acts of courage Robbie displays, rather than the areas in which he falls short of his own expectations. What does this reveal about Barry?



# CLASSROOM IDEAS

## Chapter 30

- Throughout the text, snakes feature as a motif; that is a recurring image or idea, often with symbolic value. At this stage, what do you think snakes might represent?
- “Great work, team.” (Page 185) How does the episode with the snake consolidate relationships between Robbie, Barry and Micky?

## Chapter 31

- When confronted with the evidence of the handkerchief, Keith “snarled like the guard dog at Bull Jackson’s yard.” (Page 189) How does this imagery reinforce his connection with Wright and the others?
- What makes Robbie rein in his anger at Keith’s disrespectful remark about Mrs Gregory?

## Chapter 33

- Ted Noffs, the Methodist Minister, and Charles Perkins, President of Student Action For Aboriginies, are real people, as well as characters in the novel. Have you heard of either of these people previously? What do you know about them?
- “A real Aborigine? Wasn’t Charles Perkins a real Aborigine?” (Page 196) What does this reveal about perceptions of aboriginality at the time? Do you think people today have different ideas about what a “real” Aborigine is? Why is this notion of authentic Aboriginality problematic? Think particularly about its implications for diversity and cultural identification.

## Chapter 34

- Micky responds incredulously to Robbie’s ignorance about the reality of life for Aboriginal people. Is there any truth to his accusation, in your opinion?
- What does Robbie learn about the living conditions of the Aboriginal population in Walgaree? What technique does Lawson use to show how disturbed and overwhelmed Robbie is by this new knowledge? Make reference to the text in your answer.

## Chapter 35

- Read the description of Robbie’s treatment in Mr Simmons’s class. From this passage, how might the experience of going to school in the 1960s have been different to contemporary times? Think particularly about the relationship between teachers and students. Did anything surprise you about Mr Simmons’s behaviour or attitude?
- How is the tension between Wright and Robbie developed in this chapter? Look particularly at the violent connotations underpinning much of the imagery. For example, “Wright’s burst of laughter smashed against the blackboard and sprayed back at me.” (Page 211) What might this be preparing the reader for?

## Chapter 36

- Sensual imagery (description which appeals to the senses) is used to create suspense and intrigue at the start of the chapter. What examples can you find in this chapter? What other language techniques does Lawson use to develop the taut, furtive atmosphere? Use quotes from the text to support your response.

## Chapter 37

- Barry tells Robbie that Micky’s uncle, Dwayne, was “hit by a car. Left for dead on the side of the road like a bloody kangaroo. ... Actually, not a kangaroo – people pull them off the asphalt.” (Page 221) What does this revised analogy suggest about the valuing of Aboriginal people in the town?
- Robbie is terrified that his father was somehow involved in Dwayne’s death. What detail convinces him that this could not be the case? Are you similarly convinced? Do you think Robbie’s conviction is genuine? Why or why not? Consider the role of language in creating this uncertainty and doubt.

## Chapter 38

- “It all added up to something too frightening, too sickening, to swallow.” (Page 230). What conclusion has Robbie inevitably reached? Why doesn’t he specify what the clues add up to, instead alluding to it in vague, indirect terms?

## Chapter 39

- Review the fragments of dialogue on Page 236 relating to Dwayne’s death. What is particularly ironic about the context of these comments? (Hint: Where are the conversations taking place?)
- “And these people call themselves Christians. ... A life was lost. Someone’s son, brother. Uncle. I could weep at the uncaring.” (Page 234) Where else in the chapter is the notion of hypocrisy explored? How does Barry’s behaviour contrast with this? What happens to him as a result?

## Chapter 40

- How do the police respond to the assault on Barry?

## Chapter 41

- Robbie says of his confrontation with Wright, “I stared into his eyes, surprised that he didn’t tower over me like I thought he did.” (Page 244) What does Robbie mean by this? Consider the comment, not just on a literal level, but on a symbolic one. What has Robbie realised about himself?

## Chapter 42

- “Couldn’t be the only one who hadn’t spilt blood.” (Page 246) The term “blooding” refers to an initiation into a club or group. How does Robbie’s assault at school strengthen his connection with Micky and Barry? Think particularly about the elements the attacks have in common.
- Barry advises Robbie to “Let it be” (Page 248), referring to Wright and the boys at school. How do you interpret this advice? Is it defeatist, pragmatic, forgiving or something else?



## Chapter 43

- What changes does Robbie notice in the town since Dwayne's death?
- Barry explains that it is an Aboriginal custom not to speak the names of their dead as it might "keep the person's spirit trapped on earth." (Page 255). Have you encountered this cultural tradition before? Where? (Hint: Think about watching TV or movies)

## Chapter 44

- "The wooden garage doors, wide open behind me, felt like a monster's maw, ready to devour me whole." (Page 261) Consider how Lawson uses assonance, alliteration and simile to infuse an ordinary domestic setting with an atmosphere of menace and trepidation. What do you predict Robbie will discover?

## Chapter 45

- What are Robbie's overriding emotions when he discovers his mother is alive? What techniques does Lawson use to reinforce these emotions? Support your answer with reference to the text.

## Chapter 46

- "She is *alive*. ... That's about as simple as it gets. Lying to me, making me believe she was dead, keeping all of these from me, that's complicated. That's sick and twisted." (Page 273) In what way does Mr Bower's and Nan's behaviour here mirror their attempts to cover up their involvement in Dwayne's death? What does this suggest about them?
- "Be free, you poor bastard," I said, throwing the cage aside." (Page 275) At the end of the chapter, Robbie releases Nan's budgerigar, Bluey, from his cage. What might his actions symbolise?

## Chapter 48

- Mrs Gregory observes of Robbie's father, "Seemed more worried about the students than his own son" (Page 283) In your opinion, is this a fair assessment of his character?

## Chapter 49

- "Barry's laugh was louder and his brow smoother with these people. He belonged. I wondered how they saw me. Did I fit, or was I just a country boy way out of his depth?" (Page 290) How does this quote relate to the concepts of alienation and belonging? Consider in particular how it is possible to be an outsider in one group, yet belong to another.

## Chapter 50

- What is the purpose of the students' visit, according to Charles Perkins?

## Chapter 51

- "Seeing the conditions for ourselves is ... confronting." (Page 300) What do the students teach Robbie about the situation on the missions? Consider the irony of outsiders knowing more about Robbie's hometown than he does. Why do you think this is the case?

## Chapter 52

- How are the locals presented in this chapter? Identify and find examples of some of the language techniques Lawson uses to do this. How are the students portrayed in comparison?
- What accusation does Micky's mother, Nancy, make against the men of the town, including Mr Bower? What impact does this have? How does this relate to the themes of concealment and hypocrisy?

## Chapter 53

- "I said I. Am. Not. Going. Back. There." (Page 319) Punctuation is used to reinforce Robbie's disgust with his father and his determination to separate himself from him and his values. How has the balance of power shifted from the start of the book? Why has this change occurred?

## Chapter 54

- What or who do the snakes in Robbie's dream seem to symbolise? What does this dream reveal about his conscious and subconscious fears?
- Robbie says of his father running over Dwayne, "I think I knew; I just didn't want it to be true." (Page 327) In your opinion, is Robbie any different to the people in the town who know of, but don't talk about, the exploitation of the Aboriginal women? Explain your answer.

## Chapter 55

- Why does Micky refuse Robbie's apology?

## Chapter 56

- "You're my family."...How did I put it into words? They'd changed my life." (Pages 338) In what ways has Robbie's life and character been altered through his relationship with Barry and Mrs Gregory? In your opinion, what is the most significant thing that they taught him?

## Chapter 57

- Compare and contrast Charles Perkins' use of language with Mr and Mrs Sneadon's. (Pages 344-345) How does this influence the reader's sympathies?
- "'Hey, Bower,'" whispered Micky. "Everyone's watching.'" (Page 350) How does Robbie establish his loyalty towards Micky, Barry and the progressive values of the students, rather than the bigoted and hypocritical attitudes of his family and the town?

# CLASSROOM IDEAS

## After Reading

- Create a collage or visual representation of the novel. Consider the themes, setting, characters and style. Think particularly about how colour, symbolism, framing, composition, juxtaposition and other visual techniques can be used to show your understanding of the text.
- Imagine that you are a director given the task of turning *Freedom Ride* into a film. Write a series of director's notes under the following headings to communicate your vision for the film. Make sure your notes demonstrate your interpretation of the style, subject, mood, context and key themes of the novel.
  - » Actors and acting style
  - » Costume and hair
  - » Setting and locations
  - » Music and sound
  - » Lighting
  - » Camera and film techniques
  - » Motifs and other elements of mise-en-scene

## Character

- On a large sheet of paper or cardboard, construct a "character map" depicting the key characters from the novel and the relationships between them. Draw a picture of each character and around them include:
  - » adjectives to describe them
  - » a summary of their main role in the novel
  - » key quotes to reveal their personality, including page references
  - » links or connections to other characters.
- From the start of the novel, Robbie is set up as a liminal character, positioned between the small-minded, parochial attitude of the town he has been raised in but feels himself resisting, and the more rational, progressive values of Barry. Discuss the ways this ambivalence is developed then eventually resolved in the text, as Robbie's attitude changes. Create a timeline of key events with page numbers to show this shift.
- Nan is aptly summarised with the simile, "It was as though she was a vampire, like Dracula, and scared of the light." (Page 14) How does this simile relate more broadly to her attitudes towards change and progress? Is there anything else it suggests about her character? Think particularly about what it might be implying about her relationships with both Robbie and his father.
- In groups, do a "hot seat" activity where one student chooses a character from the novel to adopt the persona of. Other members of the class ask the student questions which they must answer in character, using voice, vocabulary, body language, expression and details from the novel to convey their understanding of that character. Other members of the group then try to guess which character they are impersonating.
- Barry and Mrs Gregory can be viewed as foils or contrasts to Mr Bower and Nan. Discuss the ways they are similar and different in terms of situation, actions and attitudes. What do you think Lawson is trying to highlight through this?

- How important is Barry as a catalyst for action in the novel? Imagine that he had not returned to Walgaree. In what ways do you think Robbie would have developed differently as a character?
- Match the following quotes from Page 167 with the characters they are used to describe:
  - » "Disgraceful, bohemian, drug-addled hippy."
  - » "Violent, depraved boong."
  - » "Filthy, diseased Abo."
  - » "Feeble-minded, innocent idiot."
  - » "Pathetic, spineless, weak man."For each quote, discuss the extent to which it is an accurate summation of that character. Where you feel a quote is inaccurate or misleading, locate one in the novel which better encapsulates the character.
- Re-read the section on Pages 273 - 274 about Robbie's mother's struggle with sadness and depression after his birth. Research postnatal depression on the internet. (The Black Dog Institute at [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au) is a good starting point.) Could this illuminate her behaviour in any way? Compose a diary entry that Robbie's mother might have written at this point in her life.
- Write an additional chapter to the novel where Robbie meets his mother for the first time.

## Setting

- Walgaree is described as "A town of trees bowed by heat, grass sucked dry and dusty footpaths." (Page 16) What does this imagery suggest about it? Think particularly about how this intrinsic aridity and oppressiveness could operate on a symbolic as well as a literal level.
- Look up the words "insular" and "parochial". In what ways do they relate to the setting of the novel?
- The Freedom Ride was seen as being an attempt by activists to show city dwellers the reality of what was happening in country towns. As a class, discuss the extent to which attitudes in rural areas may have been different to those in urban and suburban Australia.
- Do you think Walgaree is a product of its time? Do you think towns of its type today would exhibit similar attitudes and beliefs?
- Draw a map of the town based on information provided in the novel. Include places such as Robbie's house, the milkbar, the Tip, the Mission, Brindabella Crossing Reserve, the RSL, the pool, Memorial Park, the river and the caravan park.



## Historical/Social Context

- In small groups, research and present on one of the following, explaining its role in developing character, setting and themes in the text. Think particularly about attitudes towards it in the 1960s.
  - » The Rolling Stones (Pages 29, 58, 75 and 92)
  - » OZ magazine (Pages 158, 192)
  - » The Vietnam War (Page 171)
- Allocate each student 1-2 chapters of the novel. For your chapters, compile a list of references that help establish the historical context of 1960s Australia. For instance, for Chapters 1-2, references could include Brylcreem (Page 12), the Catholic Ladies' Guild (Page 13), temperature provided in Fahrenheit rather than Celsius (Page 14) and lino (Page 14-15).
- Trace the route of the Freedom Ride on the maps available on the AIATSIS website at: <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/exhibitions/freedomride/ride.html>
- Use the National Library of Australia's Trove database (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/>) to find a range of articles from 1965 responding to the Freedom Ride. Record the citation details of each article, as well as a brief summary of it. Draw up two columns, one headed "Pro" and one headed "Anti". Place the article into the appropriate column according to whether the author supported or opposed the Freedom Ride, including direct quotes as justification for your placement. Neutrality is not an option: remember, bias can often be conveyed in subtle ways, such as through emotive language.
- Imagine you were a member of SAFA back in 1965. Design a poster promoting support for the Freedom Ride.
- In Chapter 57 of the novel, Lawson draws upon a real incident at the Moree Pool where the Freedom Riders successfully challenged the colour ban by attempting to take a group of Aboriginal children swimming. Watch the video on the Guardian Australia website where Aboriginal men from Moree today recall this incident: <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/video/2015/feb/23/freedom-ride-moree-racism-indigenous-people-video> Compare Lawson's narrative depiction of events with this archival footage and series of interviews.
- Look at the Melbourne *Herald* cartoon from 20 February 1965 entitled "Getting in the Swim" ([http://indigenoustrights.net.au/resources/documents/getting\\_in\\_the\\_swim!](http://indigenoustrights.net.au/resources/documents/getting_in_the_swim!)), which comments on the incident at the Moree Pool. What point do you feel the artist, John Frith, is trying to make about this incident? What techniques does he use to do this?
- Research the US civil rights movement on the internet, then, as a class, discuss how this movement influenced Australia. (The education portal, Scootle, has a vast range of resources relevant to this topic. Simply login and search for the curriculum content description "ACDSEH105". If you don't have a Scootle login, visit [http://www.scootle.edu.au/ec/p/accessing\\_scootle](http://www.scootle.edu.au/ec/p/accessing_scootle))
- Ann Curthoys, one of the students who took part in the Freedom Ride in 1965, recorded her experiences and observations in a diary. Read her diary entries at <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/exhibitions/freedomride/ride.html>. As a class, discuss how these provide a different perspective on events to Lawson, considering the text type, purpose, audience, creation and language features of both. Does one have more authority than the other? In your opinion, which is more effective in giving readers today an appreciation of the Freedom Ride's significance?
- On the National Museum of Australia's "Collaborating for Indigenous Rights" webpage, the aim of the Freedom Ride is described as being threefold: "The students planned to draw public attention to the poor state of Aboriginal health, education and housing. They hoped to point out and help to lessen the socially discriminatory barriers which existed between Aboriginal and white residents. And they also wished to encourage and support Aboriginal people themselves to resist discrimination." Choose one of the following civil rights issues to research both in 1965 and today:
  - » Aboriginal housing
  - » Aboriginal health
  - » Aboriginal education
  - » Discrimination in the workplace
  - » Political representation
  - » Representation in the media
- Write an essay in response to the following statement. You may agree or disagree with the statement, but must make direct reference to primary sources to back up your point of view.
  - » The Freedom Ride was successful in improving the living conditions and social status of Aboriginal people in Australian society."
- The Freedom Ride factsheet on the Reconciliation Australia website (<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/The-50th-Anniversary-of-the-1965-Freedom-Ride1.pdf>) includes suggestions for how people today can take a stand against discrimination and promote equal rights. In small groups, brainstorm other ideas for how students at your school could carry on the spirit of the Freedom Ride. Note that your ideas don't necessarily have to focus on civil rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: you may feel that in a contemporary context, there are other social issues which also require greater awareness.

# CLASSROOM IDEAS

## Themes

### Discovery

- Compose an analytical essay in response to the following: “The concept of discovery underpins *Freedom Ride*, with Robbie’s journey to maturity shaped by his discoveries about his family, his town, his beliefs and his character. Discuss with close reference to the text.”

### Racism, Discrimination and Resistance

- Consider the Brisbane Collective quote which is used as a preface to the novel. Why do you think Lawson has chosen this particular quote? Consider how it relates to the main themes and events in the novel.
- “‘I’ll show you the shower blocks.’ ‘Goodo. We blacks have never seen those before.’” (Page 128) In this quote, Micky deftly employs irony and deadpan humour to skewer common perceptions of Aboriginals in the town. In what other ways does Micky use his intelligence to challenge stereotypes? How does his way of fighting back compare with Wright’s and Rhook’s?
- In the confrontation at the RSL, an Aboriginal woman asserts her common humanity, stating “It’s skin. Just bloody skin. Under this, I have bones, blood, lungs. A heart. Same as you lot.” (Page 311). Compare her speech with Shylock’s famous monologue from Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (Act III, Scene 1). What common themes can you identify?
- On Page 307, fragments of idiomatic dialogue are used to sum up the townspeople’s prejudiced attitude towards Aboriginals. Perform this section of the book as readers’ theatre, experimenting with rhythm, volume, expression and tone to develop atmosphere. What does this invective reveal about attitudes at the time? How does it reflect upon the speakers’ themselves?

### Outsiders

- In Chapter 3, Robbie observes of Keith, Billy and himself: “The glue that stuck the three of us together was we were outsiders.” (Page 20) Discuss the ways that Robbie is presented as an outsider. How does his situation shift, so that by the end of the novel, he has gained a sense of belonging?
- What other characters can also be viewed as outsiders? Is being an outsider necessarily presented negatively in the novel? In particular, consider the role of outsiders in challenging perspectives and being a catalyst for change.

### Courage and cowardice

- “My whole body throbbed, but my mind was clear. ‘Cowards,’ I spat ...” (Page 245) Discuss how this courage/cowardice binary is explored in the novel.
- Debate the following statement as a class: “Robbie is fundamentally a courageous character.” Use evidence from the text to support your argument.

## Identity/Masculinity

- “Because, to Dad, whether or not you had fought during the war was a measure of character.” (Page 42) “I remembered the time Nan had made Dad teach me how to shake hands, like a man. Firm grip. No wet-fish grip. Look into their eyes. According to Nan and Dad, a handshake reflected your character.” (Page 44). As a class, discuss what these statements reveal about perceptions of masculinity. What other assumptions about masculinity underpin the novel? Do you think different characters would have different ideas about what it means to be “a man”?
- In contemporary times, what do you feel masculinity is measured by or defined as?

## Language and Style

- *Freedom Ride* can be viewed an example of a bildungsroman. Research this term online. In what ways does the novel fit this definition?
- The novel is narrated in the first person from the perspective of Robbie. What words would you use to describe Robbie as a narrator? How important is narrative voice to our understanding of events?
- Colloquial language and idiomatic language are used by Lawson to convey character and evoke the atmosphere of a small Australian town in the 1960s. Choose one chapter from the book and record all the examples of colloquial and idiomatic language you can find, along with the page references.
- Retell a key event in the novel from the perspective of another character. Some ideas could be the altercation at the river from Micky’s perspective, the scene at the RSL from Nancy’s perspective or the events leading up to Dwayne’s death from Mr Bower’s point of view. Consider the role of colloquial language, idiom and imagery in creating an authentic and sustained narrative voice.
- Design the front page of the “*Walgaree Times*” the day after the protest at the RSL. You may like to use an online newspaper template program such as Printing Press (available at <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/printing-press-30036.html>)
- Write a letter to the editor as someone supporting the Freedom Ride then someone opposing it. Think particularly about your use of persuasive language.
- “Embarrassment coiled like a python around my chest and squeezed.” (Page 103) Snakes feature as a motif in the text; that is, a recurring image or idea which has symbolic value. Make a list of all the references to snakes. What feelings or emotions are usually associated with them? What do you think snakes might ultimately represent in the novel?
- Animal imagery is used throughout the novel to negatively portray the Walgaree locals. What other examples of animal imagery can you find? For each example, explain what Lawson is trying to emphasise about the character.