# Rights and Reconciliation: Bill Ferguson & Riverbank Frank

## Lesson overview

Frank Doolan (Riverbank Frank) lives in Dubbo and is a highly respected Wiradjuri Elder. He is a lifelong advocate for equality for all Australians. William (Bill) Ferguson founded the Aboriginal Progressive Association in 1937 and led protests at the 1938 National Day of Mourning. He was one of the most famous and important Indigenous rights activists in Australian history during the 1930s and 1940s. Riverbank Frank refers to Ferguson in the video as “Australia’s Martin Luther King”, but Ferguson’s activism took place decades before King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

### Learning intentions

Students will learn about:

* How Riverbank Frank was influenced by Christian teaching and Ferguson’s work
* Bill Ferguson’s life, faith and social justice activities.

### Success criteria

Students will be able to:

* Summarise Ferguson’s motivations and activities as an advocate for equality
* Identify connections between Riverbank Frank’s beliefs, Bill Ferguson’s life and work, and aspects of Jesus’ good Samaritan parable.

### Note to teacher

In the video, Riverbank Frank mentions only a few details about Bill Ferguson’s early motivations for his activism. This lesson allows for students to undertake a small research task to flesh out their understanding of Ferguson’s contributions to the Indigenous rights movement. If you have extra time and wish to broach the topic, it may be interesting to draw out the fact that Ferguson’s Day of Mourning took place on Australia Day 1938 (so the current annual discussions about the appropriateness of this day are not as new as students may have thought), and explore possible Christian responses to the issue of Australia Day.

### Bible content

Luke 10:25–37

### Link to Australian Curriculum

## General capabilities – Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding; Intercultural Understanding.

## Lesson plan

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| Preparing the lesson* View the video content and read the questions that accompany each segment.
* Read through the material provided and select the activities and Bible content you wish to use with your students.

**Note:** there are quite a few activities and Scripture passages provided for this lesson. You may wish to give greater focus to some activities and/or some Bible verses than others. You can omit or modify content as appropriate for your class and the time you have available.* Use the resources listed in ‘Further reading’ if you wish to explore the topic more fully for your own reference before teaching.
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### A. Discussion starter (3 mins)

Say to students: *What do you know about the story of the good Samaritan in the Bible?*

Put students in groups and challenge them to write down everything they know about the story of the good Samaritan in 2 minutes without looking at a Bible. Reassure them that they don’t need to know the whole story; they should just write down anything they can think of, and they will come back to the story later in the lesson.

### B. Show video segment 1 (approx. 7 mins including questions)

While the video is playing/after it has finished, ask students to write answers to the following viewing and listening questions:

1. To what famous figure does Riverbank Frank compare Bill Ferguson?

2. What incident during Ferguson’s youth first motivated Ferguson to try to make a difference?

### C. Research task (approx. 12 mins)

Ask students to search online for information about Bill Ferguson and write a short dot-point summary of his life. Scaffold with the following headings (or a selection of them if time is tight):

* Place and date of birth
* Parents
* Early education and church influence
* Beginning of social justice activism
* The Day of Mourning, Australia Day 1938: reasons and outcomes
* A significant achievement by Ferguson
* A significant quote from Ferguson
* Death

### D. Show video segment 2 (approx. 8 mins including questions)

While the video is playing/after it has finished, ask students to write answers to the following viewing and listening question:

1. Write a few sentences that describe Riverbank Frank’s experience of the church over his lifetime.

2. What do you think brought him back to believing in Jesus?

3. Complete these sentences spoken by Riverbank Frank about Jesus’ story of the good Samaritan:

“Man, it’s a story for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , isn’t it? It’s a story for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. And the sixty-four-dollar question is “Who’s your \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?”

Ferguson \_\_\_\_\_\_ who his \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ was … he had a fairer \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ than the average blackfella … he could have passed … but he chose instead to take up his \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ …”

### E. What does the Bible say? (5 mins)

Give students the following table. Tell them you’re going to read them Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan, and ask them to note any ideas they have about how this story connects with Riverbank Frank and Bill Ferguson while they listen to you reading the story. (Some key ideas in the passage have been highlighted to scaffold this activity. Depending on your class and the time available, you may wish to stop reading and prompt them at these points.)

Read Luke 10:25–37 aloud.

(Alternatively, show the story in video form – e.g. this one, just over 3 mins long: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osfQg4yKtq8&t=98s&ab_channel=SaddlebackKids>.)

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| **Jesus’ story of the good Samaritan** | **Connections to the lives and work of Riverbank Frank and/or Bill Ferguson** |
| On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘**Love your neighbour as yourself**.’”“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” | **Love others** |
| But **he wanted to justify himself**, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” | ***All* others?** |
| In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, **leaving him half dead**. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.  | **A vulnerable person in need of help** |
| But a **Samaritan**, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. | **Samaritan=outsider, not part of dominant group in the community** |
| He went to him and bandaged his wounds, **pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’**“Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:25–37) | **Sacrificial care for others**  |

### F. Closing discussion questions (5 mins)

Say to students: *The expert in the law was quizzing Jesus because he wanted to test him, and also because he wanted to be able to justify being able to divide people into ‘neighbours’ (those worthy of love) and ‘non-neighbours’ (those he didn’t have to worry about).*

*What similarities can you see between the actions of Bill Ferguson and the actions of the good Samaritan?*

Prompt for:

* They are motivated by Christian concern for others, especially the vulnerable
* Their actions are based on the idea that all people are equally deserving of love
* They are the brave actions of marginalised people in a community in which those with power have failed to show mercy
* They both show sacrificial care – the Samaritan stopped at considerable cost to himself, including risking potential danger and giving time, effort and money when he could have just passed by; and Ferguson gave his whole life to the cause when he could have ‘passed’ as non-Indigenous and had an easier time.)

### G. Going deeper: optional extension ideas

Depending on available lesson time, students’ interests and school priorities, teachers may wish to build on this lesson plan and further explore:

* Other Bible verses about the equality of all people under God and how we are to treat each other accordingly (e.g. Acts 10:34–38; Romans 3:22–23 and 10:9–13; Galatians 3:28; Philippians 2:1–8; Colossians 3:11; James 2:1–4)
* The role of Christian missions in providing education for Indigenous children in the past
* Other past Christian Indigenous leaders and activists (see <https://www.commongrace.org.au/past_aboriginal_christian_leaders> for a useful list of brief biographies).

### H. Further reading

* Karl Faase with George Marriot, *Faith Runs Deep Anthology: Unearthing stories of faith in Australia*, Olive Tree Media, 2022
* Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies website: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/william-bill-ferguson>
* Article: <https://christiantoday.com.au/news/bill-ferguson-1882-1950-inspiring-aboriginal-civil-rights-leader.html>
* Blog article: <https://atributetoaustralianchristians.wordpress.com/2013/06/07/bill-ferguson/>
* Did You Know Education: <https://didyouknow.org.au/billferguson/>
* Video version of the Good Samaritan story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osfQg4yKtq8&t=98s&ab_channel=SaddlebackKids>.)