Sit-ins and Freedom Rides

Describe what happened at sit-ins and on the Freedom Rides.

Explain why student groups started sit-ins and went on Freedom Rides.
What were sit-ins?

• Black students created the Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee in April 1960 to help co-ordinate, support and publicise the sit-in campaign.

• The first target of the SNCC were segregated lunch counters across the South.

• At the counter there were stools for white customers only. When a mixture of white and black SNCC students sat down at lunch counters, it marked the beginning of sit-ins, an effective method of using civil disobedience in peaceful protests.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xbbcjn4d1cE
The students of the SNCC were well organised and well prepared.

Protest classes were run by a student called Jim Lawson at the University of Nashville.

In his classes students prepared for the day they would have to remain non-violent even when they were being assaulted or insulted.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aAhGGY6Dec
February 1\textsuperscript{st} 1960 four black students sat down and attempted to order some food at a whites only lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. They were refused service but remained in their seats until closing time. They returned each day and by February 5\textsuperscript{th} there were more than 300 students, black and white, taking part in the protest.

TV news showed local white youths attacking the demonstrators but when the police arrived it was the demonstrators who were
The police, the prisons and courts all over the South were being overwhelmed by the campaign to ‘fill the jails’.

By the end of the year, more than 700,000 protestors had participated in sit ins across the country. Although thousands of the students were arrested and physically assaulted, they refused
How successful were the sit-ins?

• In many ways the sit-ins were very successful. National television coverage highlighted the violent racist reaction of many southerners, while the courage, commitment and sacrifice of the demonstrators won them support across the USA.
• By the summer of 1960, many lunch counters in the South had been desegregated. However, the sit-ins did not end all segregation in the South and their impact was only really felt at a local level.
What were the Freedom Rides?

- In 1960 the Supreme Court banned segregation in public areas such as toilets, waiting rooms and restaurants for bus travellers going from one state to another.
- In 1961, a group of black and white members of a non-violent protest group called The Congress of Racial Equality wanted to see if such segregation really had ended.

[YouTube Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTUs_rl6oE8) (24 MINS TO END)
In May 1961, 13 CORE members travelled from Washington DC to New Orleans in the southern state of Mississippi. The bus journeys were called Freedom Rides.

The plan was to travel South on interstate buses. Service areas on these routes were under federal authority and should have no segregation.

Black students would try to use whites-only toilets and white students would use black only toilets.
The Freedom Riders expected a violent reaction from Southern racists. At first, there was little violence, but as they travelled south, bus tyres were slashed, buses were firebombed and the Freedom Riders were beaten up.

When buses arrived in Alabama, the KKK was waiting for them. In Anniston, Alabama two buses were stopped and burned. Passengers who tried to get off were beaten.
A bus was stopped in Birmingham, Alabama and 8 white men boarded. They brutally beat the students with sticks and chains. One of the students, James Peck, had to have 50 stitches in his head. Even when faced with such vicious attacks, the students stuck to their non-violent protest beliefs.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sxe9dJoZAQ
Did the Freedom Rides help to gain civil rights?

- Achieved publicity for the cause. TV news coverage of the attacks on the Freedom Riders deeply shocked the American public.
- MLK Jr tried to persuade the riders to stop as he feared they would be killed, but they continued.
- The Freedom Riders wanted the federal government in Washington to take action. After one of JFK’s advisers was beaten unconscious police escorts were provided for the riders although this did not...
The FBI was asked to investigate the violence used against the students and US law officers were also sent in to protect the students. MLK Jr once again attempted to get the students to stop, but they refused. Eventually, in the face of national publicity and pressure to change new orders were sent to all interstate bus companies that ended segregation at interstate bus stations. In late 1961, the US government ordered the end of segregation
How important were the Freedom Rides?

- CORE publicity leaflet
- The Freedom Rides, like the sit-ins before them, demonstrated that anyone who opposed segregation could take action themselves to work towards ending Jim Crow Laws. They helped the spread of civil rights in the south.

Jim Lawson writing in the Southern Patriot newspaper 1961
The Freedom Rides won concessions but not real changes. Police help keep the peace and let us use interstate restrooms but there will be no revolution until we see Negro faces in powerful positions in this country.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcvsWXrS2PI Freedom Riders Film PBS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLlqr7luB70 Phil Ochs- Freedom Riders song