Fertile Question: *Is my existence part of a bigger plan?*

Core Content Area 2: Why are we here?

**TOPIC 2.1: Being the best you can be**

**Depthing Understanding: A case study in purpose**

In this lesson students will explore stories about purpose, change and disappointment.

**Teachers: Before You Start!**

1. Review the resources referred to in this lesson.

**For students to explore stories about purpose, change and dealing with disappointment, complete the following activities:**

1. Explore stories of purpose, change and dealing with disappointment.

   a. Explore the story of 1968 Australian Olympian Peter Norman.
      
      i. Read the story of Peter Norman in [Useful Resources](#) and complete the following activities:
      
      View the [YouTube clip](#) which shows Carlos speaking about Norman at an Occupy rally in 2011.
      
      View the [statue](#) of the podium at San Jose University.
      
      Discuss with a partner how Peter Norman's life changed after the 1968 Olympics. Peter Norman's life was changed in a split second when he made an instinctive decision to stand in solidarity with his fellow athletes against racism. This decision in many ways altered his destiny, challenging the world to reflect on injustices. How might this story be an example of how life purpose, freedom of choice and destiny are connected?
      
      ii. Reflect on the words of Peter Norman "I'll stand with you". How were these words and his actions an example of Christian purpose in action. Compare the words and actions of Norman with the actions and lack of acknowledgment by Hitler of black African American sprint star [Jesse Owens in the 1938 Berlin Olympics](#).

   b. Olympic gold medallists seem to represent what is considered to be the epitome or best of human physical capability. Explore the story of one Olympic or Paralympic athlete.
      
      i. Research the story of one Olympic or Paralympic athlete. Locate information about their early years, their hopes and dreams, disappointments or difficulties they have overcome, and identify values you admire. Locate a digital image of the person or a symbol to represent that person.
      
      ii. Use the information to create a [motivational poster](#) that embodies one of the best human values.
Peter Norman:

In August 2012, the Australian Parliament delivered an apology posthumously to an Australian athlete who died in 2006. Peter Norman was an outstanding sprinter who won the silver medal for the 200 metre event at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics in a time of 20.06 seconds. This remains an Australian record and, in fact, had he competed in the Sydney 2000 Olympics, he would have won the gold medal. The 1968 Gold and Bronze medals were won by two black American athletes, John Carlos and Tommie Smith.

1968 was a tumultuous time for the Olympic movement. Ten days before the opening ceremony, Mexican government special forces machine-gunned crowds protesting against the extravagance of the games. Martin Luther King’s assassination had polarised the United States and some of the American athletes, including Carlos and Smith, had joined the Olympic Project for Human Rights. As the three runners prepared for the medal presentation, Carlos and Smith discussed their plan to make a political gesture on the podium. They brought Norman into their conversation, letting him know their intentions. “I’ll stand with you,” Norman told them, and asked for one of the Olympic Project for Human Rights badges the Americans were wearing. Carlos said he expected to see fear in Norman’s eyes. He didn’t. “I saw love.” They’d also planned to wear black gloves but Carlos had left his pair at the athletes’ village. Norman suggested they split Smith’s pair and wear one each on alternate hands.

The medals were handed out and the three turned toward the flags for the US national anthem. As his track rivals stood shoeless with arms upraised in the Black Power salute and the crowd fell silent, Norman didn’t move a muscle. He stared forward, their willing accomplice, an Olympic Project for Human Rights badge pinned over his heart.

Peter Norman returned home but was effectively written out of Australian sporting history, ostracised by the Australian media and reprimanded by the AOC. Despite record times in the trials for the 1972 Munich Olympics, the Australian Olympic Committee refused to allow Peter Norman to compete. In fact, they sent no male sprinters at all.

However, Peter Norman has not been forgotten. Following his death from a heart attack in 2006, Carlos and Smith returned to honour him as pallbearers at his funeral and to deliver the eulogy. On 17 October 2003 San Jose State University unveiled a statue commemorating the 1968 Olympic protest. Norman was not included as part of the statue itself — his empty podium spot intended for others viewing the statue to “stand in the place of a great man”.

Independent MP Rob Oakeshott said Norman’s actions remain relevant for reconciliation in contemporary Australian society.

“His words when approached by Carlos and Smith ‘I will stand with you’ are outstanding words in the immediate circumstances following the race and the timeless legacy that we celebrate tonight,” he said.

“These five words in my view speak as loudly to the challenges of reconciliation today in Australia as they did to racial equality in the US in the late 60s.”

Acknowledgement

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