

## Teaching the Case of Oscar López Rivera

### **Introduction**

This lesson has been created by the National Boricua Human Rights Network to engage youth in learning about the case of Oscar López Rivera, an internationally respected leader in the Puerto Rican Independence movement and one of the longest held political prisoners in the history of the United States and the world. Rivera has served over 33 years in prison for the charge of seditious conspiracy. While fellow champions for independence, such as Nelson Mandela and George Washington, are acknowledged and celebrated in our society, few know the history and injustice behind the case of Oscar López Rivera. With this lesson plan, we hope to offer the opportunity for educators to learn and educate students about this important human rights issue. The activities here are meant to be used flexibly by instructors and adapted to meet the various interests and needs of diverse learners.



### **Background: Who is Oscar López Rivera?**

Oscar López Rivera was born in San Sebastian, Puerto Rico on January 6, 1943. At the age of 12, he moved to Chicago with his family. He was a well-respected community activist and a prominent Puerto Rican independence leader for many years prior to his arrest. Oscar was one of the founders of the Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School and the Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center in Chicago. He dedicated himself to various social justice issues including, but not limited to: the struggle for bilingual education in public schools; putting pressure on universities to actively recruit Latino students, staff and faculty; and working in his community against drugs and police brutality. He and other young Puerto Ricans, inspired by heroic guerilla movements throughout the world, decided their work for the independence of Puerto Rico could best be conducted in clandestine fashion. He was arrested in 1981, accused of being a member of a clandestine group, *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña* (FALN), seeking independence for Puerto Rico, and sentenced to 55 years for seditious conspiracy. In 1988, as the result of a government-made conspiracy to escape, he was given an additional 15 years, a sentence which will begin only after he has finished serving the 55 year sentence. His release date is 2024, when he will be 81 years old.

### **Learning Objectives**

Discuss the different notions of freedom

Students will:

- *Expand their knowledge on freedom movements in a national and international context*
- *Research Oscar López Rivera and his views of freedom*
- *Understand the case of Oscar López Rivera and place his sentence within the context of world-wide anti-colonial struggles*

(Also: Common Core State Standards, [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.)

### **Critical Vocabulary**

Before activity, instruct students to look up following words and use in a sentence:

- *Freedom* • *Human Rights* • *Apartheid*
- *Colonialism* • *Revolution* • *Seditious Conspiracy*
- *Political Prisoner* • *Contradiction*

### **Reading/Case Studies** (See Supplemental Lesson Materials for Readings)

- *Oscar López Rivera and the Puerto Rican Independence Movement*
- *Nelson Mandela and the Struggle to End Apartheid*
- *George Washington and the American Revolution*

Instructors could use other figures (such as Rigoberto Menchu, Aung San Suu Kyi) as case studies and find appropriate articles as resources for activity described below.

### **Procedures**

Begin with a discussion around the concept of freedom. This activity can be done as a class, in small groups or individually. See Supplemental Lesson Materials for graphic organizer model.

- *What does freedom mean to you?*
- *What does freedom look like? What are examples of freedoms? Ex: Being able to vote*
- *What is the opposite of freedom look like? Ex: Having the government decide where you can or cannot live*

After the students have defined what freedom is and examples of freedom, ask them the following self-reflection questions: (Their answers can be written down or discussed as a class.)

- *What freedoms do we (as human beings) have a right to fight for?*
- *Choose 2-3 freedoms that you would be willing to risk your life to defend? Why did you choose these particular freedoms?*

Transition from discussion about the concept of freedom into related discussion on Independence/Human Rights Struggles in the United States and globally, which you will explore with your students with three cases studies. See Supplemental Lesson Materials for articles.

Break students into three groups. Each group will read one of the articles and answer the discussion questions included at the end of each article.

As a class use the graphic organizer provided in the Supplemental Lesson Materials section to guide a discussion about the three articles the students have read. (It is suggested that this graphic organizer be written on the blackboard in order for the entire class to see.)

Ask students to critically reflect specifically on the case of Oscar López Rivera with the following reflection questions: (Their answers can be written down or discussed as a class.)

- *Do you see any contradictions of the United States in the case of Oscar López Rivera?*
- *How can a country like the United States, which fought a war to end colonial rule by Britain and become an independent nation, punish Oscar López Rivera with a 70 year prison sentence for his desire for the independence of Puerto Rico from the colonial rule of the United States?*
- *What do you believe is fair treatment for Oscar López Rivera?*

### **Student Action Projects**

There are many ways you and your students can contribute to the international campaign for the release of Oscar López Rivera. We offer the following suggestions as part of this lesson guide, however we encourage you to tap into your own creativity and that of your students to come up with other ideas. (A copy of the petition and letter to elected official are provided as Supplemental Lesson Materials.)

- *Sign a Petition.*
- *Write to your local Elected Official and/or President Barack Obama.*
- *Write a letter to Oscar López Rivera. Students can show support to Oscar by writing to him in prison:*

Oscar López Rivera, #87651-024  
FCI Terre Haute, P.O. Box 33  
Terre Haute, IN 47808

### **Thank You**

Thank you for opening your minds and your students' minds to this important issue. If you have further questions on this curriculum please feel free to contact Juan Morales at: [juanm@boricuahumanrights.org](mailto:juanm@boricuahumanrights.org)

## Resource kit on Oscar López Rivera

The letters to his granddaughter, Karina published on Saturdays at El Nuevo Dia Interactivo (endi.com)

Current collection as of 10-13-2014 (More added regularly)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BIEb8IveusjKVEjmmNAHrKTf63PmjRsEkiHhHZFIONY/edit?usp=sharing>

Brochure

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B42E-1BqQlwaNzZTemhKZ19UbKkE/edit?usp=sharing>

Pres. Obama's visit to Robben Island

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23116760>

Letter to President Obama

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B42E-1BqQlwaZEoyb1h3NlNCeE0/edit?usp=sharing>

Informational packet

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B42E-1BqQlwabUdIMUJ0SF93SEk/edit?usp=sharing>

Video

31 days:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjgzCAf-UZA&feature=share&list=PLD862D3F63BDB209C>

32 days

<http://youtu.be/bSszBhlZmMc>

Latin America with Oscar

[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xsbl4i\\_latinoamerica-con-oscar-lopez-rivera\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xsbl4i_latinoamerica-con-oscar-lopez-rivera_news)