



## Never Lose Sight of Freedom

### Using The Yakima Native American Time Ball Oral History Tradition To Tell the Story of The 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery Voting Rights March

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The idea for this activity is borrowed from the traditions of the Yakima tribe of Native Americans who still live in the eastern part of the state of Washington. Yakima, later renamed Yakama, is pronounced YACK-uh-maw, with a strong accent on the first syllable. In the past much of the tribe's history was passed down from generation to generation by the women of the tribe using an oral tradition known as the time ball. New brides used hemp twine to record their life history starting with courtship. They tied different knots into the twine for days and weeks and added special beads for significant events. They then rolled the twine into a ball known as the "ititamat," which means "counting the days" or "counting calendar." The ball of twine grew in size as time passed and as events occurred. The women would sometimes divide the twine into 25-year lengths to make it more manageable. When the women were very old, they could use the knots and beads of their time balls to recall not only what happened in their lives but when the events occurred. They could easily recount when their children were born, when they moved away, and other major experiences. When a woman died, her "ititamat" or time ball was buried with her.

#### **Using the Yakima Time Ball to tell the story of the struggle for the right to vote in U.S. history:**

##### **Procedures:**

1. Each student will be given a piece of string or yarn that is at least 36 inches long and told that they will use the string as to tell the story of the struggle for the right to vote in U.S. history.
2. Students can make beads from clay or they can use store-bought beads to attach to their time ball. The beads should be in different sizes, shapes, and colors.
3. Tying knots in the string to indicate years, and attaching beads to signify events, students will tell the story of voting in the United States.
4. Students should practice telling their time ball stories orally from their own unique perspectives. They will share their projects with the class using only the time balls to recount the history of voting.

##### **Cross-Curricular connections:**

Being able to create and read timelines is a social studies skill. Organizing events in sequence demonstrates logical-mathematical intelligence. Classifying events is a science skill. Making an oral presentation is a basic language arts skill. The Yakima Time Ball activity will provide a unique opportunity for students to practice all four skills. The concept of using the Yakima Time Ball in the classroom setting to illustrate timeline studies is borrowed from Tarry Lindquist, *Ways That Work: Putting Social Studies Standards into Practice*, as are the activities presented here. Used with permission, Heinemann Press, Portsmouth, NH.