



# Expansion of Rights and the New Jersey Constitution

The purpose of this unit is to introduce several of the ways in which the new nation and its states expanded rights for more people during and after the Revolutionary War, including specifically via the right to vote in New Jersey. Students will explore how women and people of African descent demanded access to the ideals promised in the Declaration of Independence.

## MATERIALS

### When Women Lost the Vote Sources

**BIG IDEA 2:** Expansion of Rights and the New Jersey Constitution

**ONLINE EXHIBIT:** *When Women Lost the Vote: A Revolutionary Story, 1776-1807* (Museum of the American Revolution)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story>

**TIMELINE:** *When Women Lost the Vote Timeline* (Museum of the American Revolution)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/timeline>

**ONLINE POLL INTERACTIVE:** *Discovering America's First Women Voters* (Museum of the American Revolution)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/pages/discovering-america-s-first-women-voters-1800-1807>

**ONLINE POLL INTERACTIVE:** *Women Voted Together* (Museum of the American Revolution)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/pages/montgomery-township-somerset-county-new-jersey-october-1801>

**VOTER BIOGRAPHIES:** *Exploring New Jersey Voters, 1800-1807* (Museum of the American Revolution)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/pages/exploring-new-jersey-voters-1800-1807>

**EXHIBIT ARTICLE:** *Strength in Numbers* (Museum of the American Revolution)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/pages/strength-in-numbers>

### Primary Sources

**TRANSCRIPTION:** Letter from Phillis Wheatley to Mary Wooster, 15 July 1778 (Massachusetts Historical Society)  
[https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item\\_id=7726mode=transcript&img\\_step=1](https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=7726mode=transcript&img_step=1)

**OBJECT:** Ballot Box, Deptford Township, New Jersey ca. 1811 (Gloucester County Historical Society)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/pages/how-did-early-new-jersey-vote>

## AIMS and OBJECTIVES

The modular activities and extensions in this unit provide opportunities for students to:

- Explore voting during different time periods and today.
- Examine rules around voting as written in various state constitutions created during the Revolutionary Era.
- Analyze various ways that people of African descent challenged the existence of chattel slavery in Revolutionary America.
- Discover how the New Jersey Constitution of 1776 and voting laws of 1790 and 1797 expanded the right to vote to women and people of African descent.

### Other Resources

**HANDOUT:** Property and the Vote

**WORKSHEET:** Who Can Vote?

**WORKSHEET:** The New Jersey Exception

**WORKSHEET:** Women Voter Scavenger Hunt

**VIRTUAL EXHIBIT TOUR:** *Liberty: Don Troiani's Paintings of the Revolutionary War* (Museum of the American Revolution)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/liberty-virtual-tour>

**VIRTUAL EXHIBIT TOUR:** *Oneida Nation Theater Meet the Figures: Tyonajanegen* (Museum of the American Revolution)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/meet-the-figures-oneida-nation-theater/pages/two-kettles-together-2>

**VIDEO:** *Meet Elizabeth Freeman* (Museum of the American Revolution)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/meet-elizabeth-freeman-performance>

**VIDEO:** *Revolutionary She | When Women Lost the Vote* (Museum of the American Revolution) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c32P6f\\_EEtY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c32P6f_EEtY)

## PROCEDURES

### Engagement Activities

These activities can be used as hook activities, introductions to concepts, or shorter lessons.

#### PROPERTY AND THE VOTE

**Objective:** Explore voting during different time periods and today.

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Prepare to project or display the quote by Benjamin Franklin found on the handout *Property and the Vote* or prepare copies of the handout to distribute.

Engage students in a conversation around the following questions:

- What are some of the requirements to vote in our state today?  
**National Requirements:** Citizenship, Residency, 18+, Registered to Vote (except ND)  
**Check state requirements:** <https://www.usa.gov/state-election-office>
- Would it be fair if only people who owned property were allowed to vote? Why or why not?

Then, project the quote or distribute the handout *Property and the Vote*. Explain that the term *suffrage* means right to vote.

After students have read the quote, engage them in conversation around the following questions:

- What is Franklin saying about who should be allowed to vote?  
**All men should be able to vote.**
- What is his reasoning?  
**The man has the life experience and understanding of government, not the property he owns.**
- Do you agree with his logic? Why or why not?

#### FIGHT FOR FREEDOM?

**Objective:** Analyze the various ways that people of African descent challenged the existence of chattel slavery in Revolutionary America.

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Review the [Letter from Phillis Wheatley to Mary Wooster, 15 July 1778](#). Have a copy of the verses below ready to project or share with the students.

Project the following verse from Phillis Wheatley's letter to Mary Wooster. Have the students read the lines silently and then out loud as a class.

With thine own hand conduct them and defend  
And bring the dreadful contest to an end —  
For ever grateful let them live to thee  
And keep them ever Virtuous, brave, and free —  
But how, presumptuous shall we hope to find

Divine acceptance with th' Almighty mind —  
While yet (O deed ungenerous!) they disgrace  
And hold in bondage Afric's blameless race;  
Let virtue reign — And those accord our prayers  
Be victory our's, and generous freedom theirs.

Discuss the following questions with the students:

- What idea or ideas is Wheatley writing about in this verse? What lines or words make you say that?  
**Student answers may vary, but draw their attention to the "dreadful contest" referring to the Revolutionary War and the negative feeling the poet has towards the enslavement of people of African descent ("hold in bondage Afric's blameless race;").**
- If needed, how do these lines call attention to the contradiction between the Revolution and the institution of slavery? Draw attention to words like "presumptuous," "ungenerous," and "disgrace" in relation to the line "hold in bondage Afric's blameless race." Another example could be the word "virtue" connected with the line "Be victory our's, and generous freedom theirs."

Explain to the students that many people of African descent, particularly those enslaved, wondered if the call for freedom would apply to them. Some people, like Elizabeth Freeman, used the words from the Declaration and similar documents to gain their freedom in the courts.

**EXTEND:** Discuss the lives of Phillis Wheatley and/or Elizabeth Freeman.

#### A PRIVILEGE OR A RIGHT?

**Objective:** Explore voting during different time periods and today.

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Prepare to project the images of the [1811 Deptford Township, New Jersey Ballot Box](#) (Images 3-5), including reading the descriptions of each image.

**Teacher note:** By 1811, only white men who paid taxes were allowed to vote in New Jersey. Until 1807, women and men, including free people of African descent, who owned property could vote in New Jersey. See *Big Idea 2: Expansion of Rights and the New Jersey Constitution* for more information.

Project the images of the 1811 Deptford Ballot Box and engage students in conversation around the following questions:

- How would you describe this object to someone who isn't looking at it? (Prompt students to think about size, shape, color, materials, construction, attachments, etc.)
- What do you notice about the writing on this object? What does it tell you?  
**Vox Populi. = Voice of the People (Side of Box)**

Deptford Township West District (Gold Circle)  
Deptford, Town-ship. September. 17-1811. (Latch Label)

- What do you think this object was used for?

Then, explain to students that this object is a box that was used to collect ballots, or votes, in the early 1800s and that other ballot boxes from the time period would have looked very similar to this one.

**EXTEND:** Explain to the students that this ballot box was used in 1811, when only white men who paid taxes were allowed to vote in New Jersey. Four years earlier, women and men, including free people of African descent, who owned property were able to vote. Have a discussion around the question: was voting actually “vox populi” at that time?

### JUDE OR ISAAC?

**Objective:** Discover how the New Jersey Constitution of 1776 and voting laws of 1790 and 1797 expanded the right to vote to women and people of African descent.

**Time:** 15-20 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Review the article [Jude or Isaac Blue?](#) from the *When Women Lost the Vote* exhibit. Ensure students can access computers, tablets, or other devices with working internet connections to access the article, or print out copies of the article for students.

Poll lists from New Jersey in the early 1800s list the names of voters in specific townships. There are different opinions about a name recorded on a Montgomery Township poll list from 1801. Is it Jude Blue, a formerly enslaved woman of African descent, or Isaac Blue, a man of Dutch descent?

Share the link to Jude or Isaac Blue? with your students and have them read the name and decide for themselves. Biographies of Jude Blue and Isaac Blue, both residents of Montgomery Township in 1801, are included. Ask students to defend their choice in a written piece or debate the issue as a class activity.

## Development Activities

These activities can be used for an entire class period.

### WHO CAN VOTE, THEN AND NOW

**Objective:** Examine the rules around voting as written in various state constitutions created during the Revolutionary Era.

**Objective:** Explore voting during different time periods and today.

**Time:** 30-45 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Prepare copies of the *Who Can Vote?* worksheet.

Ask students to define what a constitution is. Explain that a constitution is a framework or set up of a government. Then, explain to students that after the Declaration of Independence broke political ties between 13 American colonies and Britain,

the Continental Congress in 1776 called upon each of the new states to create constitutions.

Distribute the worksheet individually or in small groups. Have students read the passages about voting rights and then, underneath each passage, write down who could vote in each state and who could not.

Afterward, engage students in a conversation around the following questions:

- Of the four states represented, which state allowed the most people to vote?  
**Pennsylvania - property holding is not a requirement**
- What did all of these four states have in common in terms of voting rights?  
**Age requirement, residency, male**
- Which groups of people were excluded from voting in these new state Constitutions?  
**Women (all), non-property holders (¾), people of African descent (Georgia), enslaved people of African descent (all)**

For homework or the remainder of class, ask students to research current voting laws for their state. Who can vote? Who cannot? What connections, if any, are there to the laws from the Revolutionary Era?

**EXTEND:** Have students research how states impact voting through state laws. today. What are examples of different voting laws between states? How does their own state differ from surrounding states?

**EXTEND:** Assign the students one of the remaining states and ask them to research the voting regulations during the Revolutionary War for that state. How does this state compare to the four you’ve already examined?

**Teacher note:** You may also decide to include Vermont’s 1777 State Constitution.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY “SHE”

**Objective:** Discover how the New Jersey Constitution of 1776 and voting laws of 1790 and 1797 expanded the right to vote to women and people of African descent.

**Time:** 35-45 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Review *Big Idea 2: Expansion of Rights and the New Jersey Constitution*. Prepare copies of the *New Jersey Exception worksheet* and prepare to show the [“Revolutionary She”](#) video.

Individually or in small groups have the students examine the following clauses from the New Jersey Constitution (found on the worksheet), underlining the sections regarding voting qualifications. After students have completed the handout, engage them in conversation around the following questions:

- What were the qualifications for voting in New Jersey in 1776, 1790, and 1797?

1776	1790	1797
All inhabitants	All free inhabitants	"His or her"
Full age	Full age	Deliver own ballot
Resident for past year	Resident for past year	Name written down and confirmed aloud
50£ Proclamation money	50£ Proclamation money	
	Isn't convicted of treason	
	"He or she"	

- What changed in the qualifications for who could vote in New Jersey between 1776, 1790, and 1797? How do you know?  
Possible answers could include: adding clarifier "he or she," eliminating persons convicted of treason and enslaved people, require voters to deliver their own ballot rather than have others drop it off
- What are some possible reasons the creators of these laws use the word "she"?  
Various answers may be given, but student may connect back to Big Idea 2 [regarding Federalists & Quakers]

Next, show the "[Revolutionary She](#)" video.

Afterward, engage students in conversation around the following question: Why did curators at the Museum of the American Revolution call the word "she" revolutionary in this video?

**EXPAND:** Assign students to create an opinion piece, bumper sticker, poster, or social media post to explain why the word "she" was so revolutionary. Have them focus on why "she" is important in understanding the story of women voting in New Jersey from 1776-1807.

## Culmination Activities, Research Projects, and Group Projects

### AMERICA'S FIRST WOMEN VOTERS

**Objective:** Discover how the New Jersey Constitution of 1776 and voting laws of 1790 and 1797 expanded the right to vote to women and people of African descent.

**Objective:** Explore voting during different time periods and today.

**Time:** 1-2 days (50 minute classes)

**Teacher Preparation:** Ensure students can access computers, tablets, or other devices with working internet connections to access the [When Women Lost the Vote Timeline](#) and read Big Idea 2: Expansion of Rights and the New Jersey Constitution. You can also print out copies of Big Idea 2 for each student.

Assign students to read Big Idea 2 and to highlight the answers to the following questions:

- What groups of people were given the right to vote in British North America before the Revolutionary War?  
See Voting Beliefs in British North America section.
- Once the war began, how was the New Jersey Constitution different from others?  
See Voting and The New Jersey Exception section.

Then, using the Exploring New Jersey Voters, 1800-1807 Voter Biographies page, assign students to complete the Women Voter Scavenger Hunt worksheet. Afterward, engage students in conversation around the following questions:

- What did some of the women have in common?  
Possible answers: widows or single women, often voted in groups (typically family), several were members of churches or religious groups (Quakers), most single women were in their 20s, most of their property was not in land. Other answers may be accepted.
- What evidence did you find that suggests these women met the requirements to vote?  
Possible answers: most of the women did not fall under coverture laws, widows had clearly defined property while single women's property was more ambiguous at the time they voted. Other answers may be accepted.
- How are these women different from the women voters of today?  
Possible answers: Today women can still vote when they are married. Voters do not need to own property. The voting age is younger (18 vs 21). Other answers may be accepted.

Assign students to pick one of the voters from the scavenger hunt and create a Venn diagram of how her experience on Election Day may have been similar and/or different from a woman who votes today.

**EXTEND:** Have students interview a woman who is a current voter.

### VOTING REQUIREMENTS TODAY Research Project

**Objective:** Explore voting during different time periods and today.

**Time:** Multiple day research and presentation or writing project

Ask students what they think are the requirements for voting in the United States today. Explain to students that not all people who live in the United States and the territories are given this right.

Assign students to one of the following groups or let them choose one.

- Non-citizens, including permanent legal residents
- Some people with felony convictions (Note: Laws vary by state)
- Some people with psychiatric disabilities (Note: Laws vary by state)
- United States citizens living in the U.S. territories
- Citizens under the age of 18

In a written report or media presentation, have students present their research on the following questions:

- What voting rights does your group have? Is there variation across states?
- What arguments have been made to explain why your group should not be able to vote?



- What factors should legislators and the public consider when deciding whether to extend or remove access to voting? Who should get to make these decisions, and why them?

If they choose a media presentation, students can present the information via a presentation media of their choice (PowerPoint, Canva, Prezi, tri-fold poster, song).

## Extension Activities

### NEW JERSEY CONSTITUTION — OVERSIGHT OR REVOLUTIONARY? Research Project

**Objective:** Discover how the New Jersey Constitution of 1776 and voting laws of 1790 and 1797 expanded the right to vote to women and people of African descent.

**Time:** Multiple day research and writing project

**Teacher Preparation:** Review the Big Idea 2: Expansion of Rights and the New Jersey Constitution. Prepare copies of the worksheet The New Jersey Exception.

Write the following statement up on the board or display it somewhere the students can see it:

Some historians have argued that the wording of the New Jersey Constitution was an oversight rather than a deliberate step to enfranchise women.

Tell the students to keep that statement in mind as you continue.

Have the students read the Big Idea 2. Then, together as a class review the three excerpts on the worksheet The New Jersey Exception. Remind the students of the initial statement. Have the students then review the When Women Lost the Vote Timeline, paying particular attention to events connected to voting rights and constitutions.

Finally, using the excerpts from the worksheet The New Jersey Exception, the Big Idea, the When Women Lost the Vote Timeline and any extra research, have students write a response or discuss the following question: was granting the vote to women and free people of African descent in 1776 an oversight or a Revolutionary act? Instruct them to cite evidence from their learning when constructing their argument.

### VOTING TOGETHER

**Objective:** Explore voting during different time periods and today.

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Review the exhibit article "[Strength in Numbers](#)" about women voting in groups. Project the poll list interactive, section [Women Voted Together](#). Teachers note that the first group of women appears on page 2 of the interactive.

Project the poll list for students, showing them that many women went to the polling locations together. Engage them in conversation around the following questions:

- How might different groups of people in the years 1776-1807 have viewed women voters?

Some people viewed women voting as democratic, while others believed women did not have the knowledge to vote or becoming involved in politics took women out of their traditional roles of wife and mother.

- Is there anywhere you go with family or friends together? Why do you travel to these places together?
- What would have been some benefits of voting together for women voters during this period?  
Historians do not know this for a fact but women could have voted together as a social activity or out of concern for their safety.
- What do you think is the main reason that women would have traveled to the polling locations together?  
Student answers may vary.  
Historians do not actually know. It could be that there was safety in numbers, polling places were normally in male dominated spaces like taverns and as time went on women voting became a contentious issue. Or perhaps it became a social outing for friends and family.

### MEET ELIZABETH FREEMAN

**Objective:** Analyze various ways that people of African descent challenged the existence of chattel slavery in Revolutionary America.

**Time:** 1-2 days (50 minute classes)

**Teacher Preparation:** Prepare to project the video "[Meet Elizabeth Freeman](#)."

Show students the video on Elizabeth Freeman. Discuss how Freeman applied the words "Equal, free, and independent" to her life. Have them create a newspaper article, performance piece, or artwork explaining why she changed her name to Elizabeth Freeman.

### HOW YOUNG IS TOO YOUNG?

**Objective:** Explore voting during different time periods and today.

**Time:** 35-45 minutes

Some countries, like Argentina, Austria, and Brazil, allow 16 year olds to vote. Ask students if they agree or disagree with this. Why? Extend further by asking students to research how and why this happened in one of these three countries, and having them share their research and discuss with one another.

**EXTEND:** Compare these examples with towns in the United States who have lowered their voting age to 16 for local elections.