



# The Story of Voting Continues Today

The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to the importance of voting and to consider other ways that people can participate in government and their communities. Students will also examine the rights of women today and their current challenges in the United States and throughout the world.

## MATERIALS

### When Women Lost the Vote Sources

**BIG IDEA 5:** The Story of Voting Continues Today

**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>

### Primary Sources

**ART PRINT:** *The Awakening* by Henry Mayer, 1915, New York: Puck Publishing Corporation (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)  
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b49106/>

**LITHOGRAPH:** "The Age of Brass: Or the Triumphs of Woman's Rights," 1869, New York: Currier & Ives (Library of Virginia)  
<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/pages/women-s-suffrage-and-satire>

### Other Resources

**WORKSHEET:** Civic Tic Tac Toe

**WORKSHEET:** Organizing the Suffrage Charge

## AIMS and OBJECTIVES

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

- Explore the efforts to expand the vote and make it safe and accessible for all voters by organizations and women leaders during the 19th and 20th centuries.
- Analyze political cartoons and how they influenced public ideas of women's suffrage.
- Consider the importance of voting and political participation in the United States today.
- Examine the issues that women are dealing with today in the United States and around the world.
- Explore the laws and history around voting in the United States and around the world.

## PROCEDURES

### Engagement Activities

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

### THE AWAKENING

**Objective:** Analyze political cartoons and how they influenced public ideas of women's suffrage.

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Prepare to project or display the art print of Henry Mayer's illustration *The Awakening* and read through the Summary and Notes sections under About This Item on the object page from the Library of Congress.

Share the illustration *The Awakening* with students. Give them some time to examine the piece. Then, engage students in conversation around the following questions:

- What do you think is happening in the scene?  
*A woman, Liberty, is lighting the way for "Votes for Women" towards the eastern states after women's suffrage was won in the western states.*
- Who are the women?  
*Those living in the eastern states where women are not yet allowed to vote.*
- What do you think the artist is trying to convey to his audience? What do you see that makes you say that?  
*Mayer is promoting women's suffrage in this image. Students*

may point out the use of light in the image, Liberty holding the torch and wearing a tunic that says “Votes for Women,” the states that already have women’s suffrage being in the light, etc.

- How might those who supported women voting have viewed this image? Those against?  
Student answers may include reasons that show advocates for women’s suffrage supporting and using this image, and may also include reasons that show opponents of women’s suffrage as disapproving of this image or turning it into a negative image.
- Why do you think he named the piece The Awakening?  
Student answers may vary, but conclude discussion by noting that the torch-bearing woman is supposed to symbolize “the awakening of the nation’s women to desire for suffrage.”

You may choose to share the description from the Library of Congress with your students to wrap up the discussion.

### IMPACT BEYOND VOTING

**Objective:** Consider the importance of voting and political participation in the United States today.

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Gather some Post-it notes.

Start by asking students if they think they can make changes in their community, country, or the world, even if they may be too young to vote or unable to vote at every level. What are some challenges facing their community, country, or the world? Ask students to write one of the challenges on a Post-it note. Then ask them how they can address that challenge without voting and write that on a second Post-it. Have the students stack two Post-its together, both facing upwards. This will allow viewers to see the challenge and lift the Post-it up to see how it is possible to address it. Display the Post-its around the room. After students had a chance to view their classmate’s ideas, discuss ways that citizens can enact positive change without voting.

**EXTEND:** Have students complete the Civic Tic Tac Toe worksheet to encourage them to get involved with their communities and practice civic responsibility.

## Development Activities

These activities can be used for an entire class period.

### ORGANIZING THE SUFFRAGE CHARGE

**Objective:** Explore the efforts to expand the vote and make it safe and accessible for all voters by organizations and women leaders during the 19th and 20th centuries.

**Time:** 40-50 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Review Big Idea 5 and assign students to read it for homework.

Explain to the students that there were many organizations that came from or allied with the women’s suffrage movement. Tell the students they will choose three organizations to briefly research and complete the worksheet Organizing the Suffrage Charge.

When the students have finished their worksheet, discuss their findings. The following questions can help guide the discussion:

- What were some differences and similarities between your chosen organizations?
- What caused some organizations to dissolve?
- Which organizations are still around? How have they adapted to the 21st century?

### LOWERING THE POLLING AGE

**Objective:** Consider the importance of voting and political participation in the United States today. Explore the laws and history around voting in the United States and around the world.

**Time:** Multiple day research and debate activity.

**Teacher Preparation:** Review Big Idea 5 and the 26th Amendment.

Explain to students that the voting age was originally 21 in all states. However, during the 20th century, some states began to lower the voting age until finally the 26th Amendment (1971) granted the vote to people 18 years or older, provided they met all other requirements. Divide students into small groups. In their groups have them consider the following questions:

- Why are 18 year olds (and older) eligible to vote?  
This was primarily because they were eligible to be drafted into the military. 18 year olds could be (and were) forced to fight for the country, but could not vote during the wars of the 20th century. Other reasons included higher engagement in political and social activism after graduating high school.
- Why is age a consideration at all?  
Student answers may vary. Possible answers may be maturity level, brain development, life experiences, etc.

Then, after a brief class discussion around the previous two questions, have the groups consider the following:

- Is it fair that young people under 18 are not able to vote?

Have them come up with two lists: one with reasons why people under the age of 18 should be able to vote, and one with reasons why they should not. Encourage them to explore the debate over lowering the voting age before the passage of the 26th Amendment and the current debate over lowering the voting age to 16 today. Place the students in two groups - one for lowering the voting age and one against lowering the voting age. Then have them debate the issue in class.

After the debate, explain to the students that there are places in the United States where people as young as 16 are allowed to vote in local elections, especially school board elections. Why would local governments make the decision to allow younger voters in their elections?

**Teacher Note:** The towns of Greenbelt, Hyattsville, Riverdale Park, and Takoma Park in Maryland, and Brattleboro, Vermont 16 year olds are able to vote in all local elections. In Oakland and Berkley, California, 16 year olds are able to vote in school board elections.

**EXTEND:** In forty states, local Election Boards hire students 16 years of age and older to work as poll workers on Election Day. Make students aware of this opportunity to see democracy in action by inviting students to call their local Board of Elections for information.

**EXTEND:** Some campaigns love to have student volunteers and there is no better way to get an inside view of how politics works. Explain to students that they can contact their local political party headquarters and inquire about volunteering.

### GET OUT THE VOTE!

**Objective:** Consider the importance of voting and political participation in the United States today.

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

**Teacher Preparation:** Review Big Idea 5 and ensure students have access to computers, tablets, or other devices with working internet connections to read Big Idea 5 or print out enough copies for each student.

Have the students read Big Idea 5 at the start of the lesson or for homework the night before. After reading, make a list of the reasons provided by the Big Idea that explain why Americans do not take the opportunity to vote, and then ask students to brainstorm any other reasons that they believe explain low voter turnout. Then using their answers and the data from the Big Idea, create a class list of the reasons. Place students in small groups and assign the following group project.

Students will create a commercial or poster that encourages citizens to vote in the next election of the students' choice. Students will come up with a solution to address the problem of low voter turnout while explaining the effects of low voter turnout in a democracy.

## Culmination Activities, Research Projects, and Group Projects

### GETTING INVOLVED TODAY

**Objective:** Consider the importance of voting and political participation in the United States today.

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

**Teacher Preparation:** Review local and state concerns for your school's area and prepare a list of local politicians students can write to.

Explain to students that even though they may not be able to vote, they can still get involved in local politics. Have students brainstorm issues of local concern and write them on the board.

Ask students to imagine that they are writing letters to local politicians to voice their concerns. Ask students if they think the class should pick the same issue or pick their own issue. Once

this is decided, ask students to choose a tactic. What would have more of an impact, a single letter about an issue, or a coordinated letter campaign about the same issue? Why? You may also mention a petition being another tactic. Then, have students write their letter(s) to a local politician on the issue they chose either individually or as a class. You may also choose to extend the exercise by actually sending the letter(s).

### MEASURING GENDER EQUALITY Group Project

**Objective:** Examine the issues that women are dealing with today in the United States and around the world.

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

Discuss with students the following question: What are some measures or areas of life you would look at to see if women are treated as equal to men in American society? Create a class list from their responses.

Place students in groups, then have them choose one of the measures or areas on the class list. Have them research current statistics on the topic and present a report that analyzes what those statistics say about gender equality in American society.

Set aside time for the students to present their work.

### WOMEN VOTING AROUND THE WORLD Research Activity

**Objective:** Examine the issues that women are dealing with today in the United States and around the world.

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

**Teacher Preparation:** Prepare Post-it notes, a world map, and a list of countries that allow women the right to vote.

Women were granted the right to vote in 1920 in the United States, but around the world, many women gained the right to vote earlier or later than they did in the United States. Assign students a country and ask them to research when women received the vote. Then, have students write the country and the date on a small Post-it note on the world map. After students have had a chance to examine the map, engage them in conversation around the following questions:

- What countries granted women the right to vote earlier than the United States?
- What countries granted women the right to vote later than the United States?
- Why do you think that is?

**Teacher Note:** These last two questions can become complicated due to some countries not having any voting until the 20th & 21st century, some countries not existing until the 20th century, or women having gained and lost suffrage several times in some countries. Also take into consideration the wide variety of religious and cultural norms that are represented on the map and in your classroom.

Then have the students research the history of women voting in their assigned country. Have them create a 2-3 minute presentation and share it with the class. Set aside time for students to share their presentations.

## MANY SUFFRAGISTS, MANY LEGACIES

**Objective:** Explore the efforts to expand the vote and make it safe and accessible for all voters by organizations and women leaders during the 19th and 20th centuries.

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

**Teacher Preparation:** Assign, or have the students choose, individually or in pairs, one of the following individuals:

### African American

- Mary Church Terrell
- Ida B. Wells
- Frances Ellen Watkins Harper
- Nannie Hellen Burroughs

### Asian American Pacific Islander

- Dr. Mabel Ping-Hua Lee
- Tye Leung Schulze
- Wilhelmine Kekelaokalaninui Widemann Dowsett
- Patsy Mink

### Latina American

- Adelina “Nina” Otero-Warren
- Maria Guadalupe Evangelina de Lopez
- Luisa Capetillo

### Native American

- Zitkala-Sa
- Marie Bottineau Baldwin
- Susette “Bright Eyes” La Flesche Tibbles

Have the students research their historical figure using the following questions as a guide:

- What were the background and life experiences of your historical figure? Think about their jobs or roles in society, the time period in which they lived, their education, their family status, their involvement in other movements, or anything that seems unique to them.
- Why did they get involved with the push for women’s suffrage and/or the rights of other groups?
- Were they a part of any organizations? Which ones?
- How did they get involved? What did they do as a part of the organization?
- How did they push for suffrage or civil rights? What arguments did they make? What actions did they take?
- How are their contributions felt today?

After researching, have the students create a collage (on poster or through a program like Canva) using pictures and words to describe their figure’s life and contributions. Have them place a picture of their figure in the center. Set aside time for the students to present their collages and explain why they chose the images and words that they did.

**EXTEND:** Have the students choose a modern rights activist and compare that person to their historical figure.

## Extension Activities

### WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE AND SATIRE

**Objective:** Analyze political cartoons and how they influenced public ideas of women’s suffrage.

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

Display the image [“The Age of Brass: Or the Triumphs of Woman’s Rights”](#) or have students examine it within the online exhibit.

Have students consider how the image portrays women voters. Do you think this cartoon was used by women suffragists or anti-suffragists? What makes you say that? Why do you think the artist created this image?

Explain to the students that this is an example of satire, which uses humor and exaggeration to criticize a topic. It is typically used as a social or political criticism. In this case, the artist created a satirized image of what might happen if the government passed a women’s suffrage amendment.

Conclude by asking how this image might be viewed today.

### VOTER REGISTRATION

**Objective:** Explore the laws and history around voting in the United States and around the world.

**Time:** 20-30 minutes

**Teacher Preparation:** Review your state’s voter registration process and prepare to discuss it with your students.

Engage students in conversation around the following question:

- Why is it important to register to vote?

Have the students research your state’s voter registration process using the following questions as guides:

- Does your state offer easy ways to register to vote, such as online registration or the ability to register when you renew your driver’s license?
- Does your state offer pre-registration for voting for 17 year olds?
- What are the potential benefits of these policies? Are there any potential downsides?

After the students have spent some time researching, come together as a class and discuss the answers. Then, as a wrap up, ask the students what they think about how voting registration should work, how easy or difficult it should be for an individual to register to vote, and what (if any) programs should support voter registration?

**EXTEND:** Where possible, get forms from your local Board of Elections and invite students to run a Get Out the Vote drive during lunch or after school. Include information on how, where, and when to register. Enlist students to distribute registration forms at school to eligible students or create posters/ advertisements that give them information on how to register.

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## VOTER IDENTIFICATION LAWS

**Objective:** Explore the laws and history around voting in the United States and around the world.

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

Have students examine recent debates around voter ID laws, which require voters to show a government-issued identification card before voting. Remind students to look at sources from all sides of the argument. Instruct students to write an opinion piece on where they fall in the conversation.

## MANDATORY VOTING

**Objective:** Explore the laws and history around voting in the United States and around the world.

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

Explain to students that a few countries, such as Australia, have mandatory voting, wherein citizens who do not vote are fined. What would be the pros and cons of mandatory voting in the United States? Have students debate this issue.

## MOTOR VOTER LAWS

**Objective:** Explore the laws and history around voting in the United States and around the world.

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

Engage the class in a discussion around automatic voter registration using the following questions:

- Are laws that make voter registration automatic for citizens who obtain driver's licenses or state identification cards a good idea? What would be some possible advantages and disadvantages of these laws?
- Do such laws encourage more people to vote? How do we know, or how can we research this question?
- Do you think the United States should enforce this law for all states? Does evidence support this?

## EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT IN YOUR STATE

**Objective:** Examine the issues that women are dealing with today in the United States and around the world.

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

In groups or individually, have students research arguments for and against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the years after it was introduced in 1923. Then, have them create a news report on the progress and setbacks the proposed amendment had in their state from introduction to today.

