

MAY I VOTE?

Learning Objectives: Students will:

1. learn about the history of voting rights in America
2. apply that learning to specific situations
3. write an editorial stating their opinion

TEKS: SS 3.10 (C), 4.18 (A), 5.19 (B), 5.20 (A), LA 3.14 (C), 4.15 (B), 5.15 (B)

Materials Needed: Voting Rights Timeline, attached, butcher paper on which to make timeline, "May I Vote?" overhead, attached, index cards

Vocabulary: editorial, poll tax, citizenship, suffrage, property, qualification, immigrants, naturalization, servitude, ratified

Teaching Strategy:

1. In preparation for this lesson, make individual cards or strips on which the events of the Voting Rights Timeline are copied. There should be one for each student. Also prepare a butcher paper timeline with only the dates on it.
2. Introduce lesson by suggesting that the class vote on a class name, mascot, or slogan. Engage students in suggestions, creating interest in the outcome of the "election."
3. When it comes time to vote, inform students that your school has some "qualifications" for voting. Only white boys who own backpacks (or some other "property") will be allowed to vote. Then allow the voting to proceed.
4. Debrief by asking how the others in the class felt about being prohibited from voting. Explain that when our country began, only white men who owned property could vote in elections of any kind.
5. Explain to the class that they are going to form a human timeline, showing how voting rights have changed. Distribute to each child a card on which is written one of the dates/events on the Voting Rights Timeline, attached. Ask them to line up chronologically and read their card. Provide explanation, if necessary.
6. Students will attach their cards to a timeline, made of butcher paper, showing the dates.

7. When all have read their cards and placed them on the timeline, ask students to analyze each of the situations on the “May I Vote?” overhead (attached). They may want to refer back to the timeline to see if each of these individuals would have been allowed to vote. (Answers: no, yes, only if passes test, may vote, no, no. yes)
8. Ask students to analyze the current voting laws using the following questions:
 - What are the current voter requirements? (18 yrs. old, a citizen of the U.S, meet residency requirements of the state)
 - Are these requirements fair?
 - Should children be allowed to vote?
 - Should there be an upper age limit for voting?
 - Should there be a test to see if voters understand the process?
 - Should candidates be allowed to campaign in voting places?
 - Should there be a limit on campaigning, such as how long the campaign may last, how many TV commercials can be run, how much money could be spent?
9. Divide students into pairs. Assign each pair of students a voting issue, such as those discussed. They are to write two editorials, one for each side of the issue, expressing their view on the topic. Students should clearly state their opinion, backed up by several reasons.
10. At the end of the assigned writing time, ask students to read their editorials. Students should be required to respect each others’ opinions.
11. A nice follow-up is the picture book, *The Day Gogo Went to Vote* by Elinor Sisulu, about an elderly black South African’s first time to vote in 1994. (ISBN 0-316-70267-6)

Extension for Gifted/Talented:

Students could create voter registration and requirements for school elections. Issues to be decided include:

- Should all students be allowed to vote, no matter what age?
- Should there be a residency requirement or should all students, not matter how long they’ve been there, be allowed to vote?
- Should teachers be allowed to influence the vote in some way?

Voting Rights Timeline

- 1787 U. S. Constitution ratified, giving states the right to decide who is eligible to vote. In most states only white men who owned property could vote.
- 1790 Naturalization Law passed stating only white immigrants may become citizens and vote
- 1836 Texas became an independent country. Only Anglo citizens could vote, not Hispanics.
- 1848 Wisconsin became a state. Any resident of Wisc. for one year could vote.
- 1850 Literacy Tests – Voters must be able to read and write English to vote.
- 1856 N. C. became the last state to remove the requirement to own property.
- 1866 14th Amendment passed. All males, age 21 and older, could vote.
- 1866 Elizabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony start the American Equal Rights Assn.
- 1869 15th Amendment passed. All men, regardless of race, color, or previous servitude, could vote.
- 1870 Naturalization Act – whites and African Americans could become citizens and vote, not Asians, Hispanics, or Indians
- 1872 Sojourner Truth tried to vote, was turned away.
- 1878 A bill was introduced to Congress to allow women to vote.
- 1888 Voting restrictions in many states, such as payment of a poll tax, or voting only if your grandfather had voted.
- 1890 Wyoming – 1st state to allow women to vote.
- 1920 19th Amendment passed, allowing all women to vote.
- 1924 Native Americans could become citizens and vote.
- 1942 Asians could become citizens and vote.
- 1961 23rd Amendment passed allowing the residents of Washington, D.C. to vote in national elections.
- 1962 New Mexico was the last state to allow Native Americans to vote.
- 1964 24th Amendment passed. No poll taxes allowed
- 1965 Voting Rights Act – No literacy tests, don't have to speak English, no complicated voting procedures.
- 1971 26th Amendment – changed voting age to 18

May I Vote?

(1920) I am a Native American woman living in North Dakota. Many generations of my family have lived here. This year the 19th Amendment was passed. Does that mean I can vote?

(1972) I'm excited because even though I'm only an 18 year old senior in high school, I'm working in this year's presidential campaign, passing out flyers and putting posters in yards. But do I get to vote?

(1932) I am an African American man living in Mississippi. I thought the 15th Amendment gave me the right to vote. Now they tell me I have to take a really hard test before I can vote. May I vote?

(1892) I am a woman living in Wyoming, where there's lots of freedom and wide open spaces. I'm going to be the first one in line to vote this year. Will anyone stop me?

(1836) I'm the son of Martin de Leon, the only Mexican to start a settlement in Texas. My family owns a large ranch in south Texas. After defeating Mexico in the Texas Revolution, we've now become the Republic of Texas, and I'm looking forward to voting for our first President. May I vote?

(1796) I'm Abigail Adams and my husband is running for President. I can't wait to get all my friends together and go vote for him. Women can make a big difference in an election. May I vote for my husband?

(1968) My name is Sofia. I immigrated to this country 8 years ago. Even though I'm now an American citizen, I can't read or write English very well. But I know who I want to vote for in the Presidential election. May I vote?