

Expanding Voting Rights

Lesson Overview

Compelling Question

- Is everyone's right to vote protected?

Suggested Grade(s)

Grades 6–8

Time Required

One-day lesson, plus
one summative assessment

Lesson Objectives

- Explain the ways in which various constitutional amendments and acts expanded voting rights in the United States.
- Identify historical and contemporary obstacles to voting and assess the current level of access to voting in the United States.

Lesson Assessments

- Students demonstrate their understanding of how voting rights were expanded by participating in an investigation jigsaw activity and completing the Is Everyone's Right to Vote Protected? evaluation tool.
- Teachers may assess by using the [Assessment Rubric](#).
- Students will participate in self-reflection by completing the [Inquiry Reflection Tool](#).

Civic Skills & Dispositions

- Active learning
- Active listening
- Analyzing patterns
- Attentiveness to political matters
- Civic mindedness
- Collaboration
- Close reading
- Critical thinking
- Equity and fairness
- Incorporating evidence
- Informed citizen
- Persuasive writing
- Problem solving
- Self-reflection

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Focus

Students will develop their social awareness and positive communication by

- practicing empathy by examining the experiences and perspectives of diverse groups who fought for the right to vote, and explain how these struggles shaped U.S. democracy.
- demonstrating active listening by engaging respectfully in discussions with teammates, asking clarifying questions, and building on others' ideas.

Lesson Overview

Alignments

Center for Civic Education

We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution
(Level 2)

- [Lesson 25](#): How Has the Right to Vote Expanded Since the Constitution Was Adopted?

Educating for American Democracy Roadmap

Theme 1: Civic Participation

- Analyze strategies and examples of civic participation, including instances of participation by those without full political rights

Theme 4: A New Government & Constitution

- Explore past and present efforts to adapt and redesign the U.S. Constitution and political institutions over time

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

- **D2.Civ.8.6-8.** Analyze ideas and principles contained in the founding documents of the United States, and explain how they influence the social and political system.
- **D2.His.1.6-8.** Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

Common Core Standards for Literacy in Social Studies

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.1](#): Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.4](#): Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

Pre-Lesson Preparation

Supporting Questions

- What strategies, challenges, and actions did different groups use to secure the right to vote?
- In what ways do social, political, or logistical factors continue to limit access to voting?

Texts & Materials

- *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution* Level 2 textbook
- [Voting Brainstorm Map](#)
- [Voting Vocabulary](#) graphic organizer (optional)
- [Consider It Anticipation Guide](#)
- [Voting and Citizenship](#) video
- [Voting Rights Jigsaw](#) notetaker
- [Voting Rights Jigsaw Key](#)
- [Voting, Registration, and Participation](#) video
- [Voting Rights Scenarios](#) slide deck
- [Is Everyone's Right to Vote Protected?](#) evaluation tool
- [Inquiry Reflection Tool](#)
- [Assessment Rubric](#)

Vocabulary

- **grandfather clause:** a law that stated that a citizen could vote only if his grandfather had been allowed to vote. The law made it impossible for African Americans to vote because their grandfathers were not allowed to vote.
- **literacy test:** a test to prove individuals can read and write. Until 1964, these tests were used in various states nationwide to keep minorities from voting.
- **poll tax:** a tax that required voters in many states to pay to exercise their right to vote. These barriers were used until 1964 to prevent African Americans from voting
- **register:** to enroll one's name officially as a requirement for voting
- **suffrage:** the right to vote
- **voter turnout:** percentage of voters who have participated in an election

Pre-Lesson Preparation

Educator Background

Nowhere in the original text of the U.S. Constitution is the right to vote explicitly guaranteed; it is only implied in sections that mention elections, such as Article I, Section 2, which describes how the House of Representatives will be chosen. Because of this, states have historically determined most voting qualifications and requirements. Over time, constitutional amendments have been added to protect and expand voting rights, reflecting the struggles of various groups who fought to secure this fundamental right.

In this lesson, students will practice empathy by exploring the experiences of those who were denied suffrage and considering the obstacles they faced. They will engage in active listening and collaborative discussion with teammates, sharing perspectives and building on each other's ideas. Through close-reading and a jigsaw activity, students will connect historical struggles to contemporary issues and the ongoing challenges some communities face in exercising their right to vote.

The in-class voting activities in this lesson help normalize the experience for students by showing that sharing opinions and participating in decisions is a regular and valued part of our classroom. By voting, students learn that everyone's opinions matter and that each voice is important in shaping our classroom community. We want all students to feel empowered to participate and be heard. Additionally, this act of voting models a key civic responsibility, helping students understand the importance of engagement and decision-making that they will carry with them beyond the classroom.

Educators can enhance this lesson by reflecting on their own perspectives and being mindful of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their students. Incorporating students' communities and experiences, involving families, and encouraging research on local voting history can enrich discussions. Fostering thoughtful, empathetic dialogue helps students understand the history of voting rights and recognize the importance of civic engagement today.

Additional resources for teacher background include the following:

- [Creating Community Agreements](#) (CEAS Pedagogy Video 4)
- [Voting and Elections](#) (curated resources from the Center for Civic Education)

Teachers should preview all student materials and resources prior to the lesson.

Lesson Plan

Engage: Activate Prior Knowledge

1. Greet students upon entry into the classroom and welcome them to social studies.
2. Distribute the [Voting Brainstorm Map](#) and review to ensure students understand expectations.
3. Students will complete the map by adding in words, phrases, or images that come to mind when they hear the word *voting*. Prompt students to consider addressing the five W's (who, what, when, where and why) of voting.
4. Using your routine strategy, divide the class into collaborative trio teams, and instruct students to share their [Voting Brainstorm Map](#) to identify and discuss the similarities and differences they observe.
5. Return to a full-class format and ask for volunteers to share a few responses from the map.
6. Tell students that a synonym for voting is *suffrage*, which means the right to vote. Display and discuss the word to support concept attainment.
7. Debrief this civic learning by facilitating a discussion asking:
 - Do you think everyone is entitled to the right to vote?
 - Why is it important to collect people's opinions and views through the voting process?
 - Can you identify a time when you voted?
8. Play the Center's 60-second video [Voting and Citizenship](#).
9. As students listen, they should draft a list of which Americans have been denied the right to vote.
10. Play the video a second time to ensure comprehension, if needed.
11. Allow time for a brief discussion or an opportunity for students' questions.

Culturally Responsive Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Display discussion questions for class to guide thinking and support multiple styles of learning.
- Allow sufficient wait time for students to formulate answers.
- Provide images to assist students in identifying vocabulary terms such as a *ballot*, *voting booth*, or *election signage*.
- Utilize the [Voting Vocabulary](#) graphic organizer to support concept attainment of academic language in the lesson.
- Prompt students to draw sketches to illustrate their [Voting Brainstorm Map](#) as an alternative response method.
- Pause video as needed to pose think-aloud comprehension questions.

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Modify the [Voting Vocabulary](#) graphic organizer to include opportunities to define terms in native language to support concept attainment of academic language throughout the lesson.
- Explore subtitle options to change language when viewing videos through YouTube.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Social awareness
- Reflection
- Relationship building

Civic Dispositions & Skills

- Active learning
- Active listening
- Attentiveness to political matters

Extending Learning

- Students might create an infographic to represent the responses to the [Voting Brainstorm Map](#).

Lesson Plan

Explore: Guided/Open Inquiry

1. Display our compelling inquiry question: Is everyone's right to vote protected?
2. Conduct a class vote on the compelling inquiry question now and revisit the question at the end of the inquiry. Voting could be done by thumbs up/thumbs down, digital app, or secret ballot. Encourage students to make a note of their vote at this time.
 - Make a point to emphasize this act of voting. Explain that everyone's opinions matter and we want everyone to have a voice in our classroom decisions. Furthermore, voting is a civic responsibility we are modeling now.
3. As a class, read p. 204 from the *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution* Level 2 textbook.
4. Using your routine, divide students into five collaborative teams.
5. Explain that the class will now work in teams to become experts on voting rights for specific groups via a notetaking and Jigsaw activity.
 - Jigsaw is an instructional routine that supports students with processing and organizing large amounts of information because it helps them develop expertise on a bite-sized amount of a specific topic.
6. As a class, establish discussion and active listening to guide respectful dialogue and consensus building.
7. **Jigsaw Part 1:** Distribute the [Voting Rights Jigsaw](#) notetaker and review to ensure students understand expectations.

Culturally Responsive Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Allow sufficient wait time for students to formulate answers.
- Pause during full-class reading to pose think-alouds to support comprehension.
- Remind students of close reading strategies such as previewing the text, observing images and captions, reviewing headings, and understanding the purpose for reading.
- Utilize assistive technology to change readability on text for emerging readers as needed.
- Craft your community class agreement prior to beginning collaborative teamwork.
- Consider providing visual cues on group norms to encourage collaboration and expected behaviors.
- Providing video access on assigned groups may also support evidence gathering for students:
 - [Votes for All Men](#)
 - [Votes for Women](#)
 - [Votes for Young People](#)
 - [Votes for Native Americans](#)

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Provide compelling questions translated into students' native languages in advance of discussion.
- Allow access to translation technology to support reading segments of activity.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Demonstrating empathy
- Relationship skills
- Self-management



Lesson Plan

8. Using your routine, divide students into five collaborative teams, assigning each team one of the following reading sections from the *We the People* Level 2 textbook:
 - How did African American men gain the right to vote? (pp. 205–207)
 - How did women gain the right to vote? (p. 208)
 - How did Native Americans gain the right to vote? (p. 208)
 - How did 18-year-olds gain the right to vote? (p. 209)
 - What are voting requirements today? (pp. 209–210)
9. Circulate around the classroom to encourage teamwork, monitor student progress, provide clarification, or answer questions.
10. A [Voting Rights Jigsaw Key](#) has been provided to support educators.

Civic Dispositions & Skills

- Collaboration
- Close reading
- Incorporating evidence

Extending Learning

- Students might identify an individual from their assigned voting group to research who made a significant impact on securing and protecting suffrage.

Lesson Plan

Explain: Discuss and Share

1. Return to a full-class format to remind students of discussion and behavior norms as they now explain their new learning to their new teammates.
2. **Jigsaw Part 2:** Redistribute students into new teams so that each voting group is represented.
3. Students will explain their findings on their original assigned voting group to their new teammates.
4. As one teammate shares voting details about their assigned group, the other teammates should capture information in their [Voting Rights Jigsaw](#) notetaker.
5. Display possible probing questions to help facilitate sharing of information and team discussions, such as
 - Why do you think that is?
 - How do you know that?
 - Can you explain that in a different way?
 - What makes you say that?
 - What evidence supports that idea?
6. Circulate around the classroom to encourage teamwork, monitor student progress, provide clarification, or answer questions.
7. Return to a full-class format and ask for volunteers to share responses as you review the notetaker.
8. Debrief this civic learning by facilitating a discussion asking students:
 - What trends or patterns do you notice?
 - What stood out from the trends or patterns?
 - Was the right to vote extended to all groups in the same way?
 - What do you notice about who gained full voting rights first and who gained them last?
 - How do these patterns connect to what we see today?
 - How do constitutional amendments show the nation's efforts to protect voting rights?

Culturally Responsive Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- The teacher may share a copy of the [Voting Rights Jigsaw Key](#) with students who may need to clarify their findings.
- A visual timer may help make teamwork time more efficient.
- Allow sufficient wait time for students to formulate answers.
- Display discussion questions for class to guide thinking and support multiple styles of learning.
- Model how to use probing questions to enrich team discussions.

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Discussion questions could be translated or provided as an audio file and given to ML student(s) prior to class discussion.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Demonstrating empathy
- Self-awareness
- Social awareness

Civic Dispositions & Skills

- Active learning
- Attentiveness to political matters
- Critical thinking

Extending Learning

- Students might create an illustrated or interactive digital timeline highlighting when the right to vote was extended to each group.

Lesson Plan

Elaborate: Apply New Learning

1. Tell students that from our research we learned that throughout our history, many groups of people faced obstacles to voting. While there are protections in place today, many people face obstacles to voting, such as long lines, confusing rules, or limited access to polling places. These challenges can make it harder for everyone to participate equally in elections.
2. Play the Center's 60-second video [Voting, Registration, and Participation](#).
3. As students watch, they should listen for the importance of responsible voting.
4. Play the video a second time to ensure comprehension, if needed.
5. Allow time for a brief discussion or an opportunity for students' questions.
6. Utilize the [Voting Rights Scenarios](#) slide deck to facilitate a class discussion about challenges people still face today when trying to vote and what can be done to remove obstacles.

Culturally Responsive Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Pause video as needed to pose think-aloud comprehension questions.
- Alternatively, students may work in collaborative trio teams to discuss each scenario before a full class discussion.

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Scenarios could be translated or provided as an audio file and given to ML student(s) prior to class activity.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Demonstrating empathy
- Responsible decision-making
- Social awareness

Civic Dispositions & Skills

- Analyzing patterns
- Attentiveness to political matters
- Critical thinking
- Equity and fairness
- Informed citizen

Extending Learning

- Students can further explore voting obstacles by watching the [Voter Turnout](#) video and analyze factors that impact higher and lower voter turnout rates and brainstorm solutions.

Lesson Plan

Evaluate: Assess and Authentically Engage

1. Thank the young scholars for their investigation into today's inquiry about expanding voting rights.
2. Return to our compelling inquiry question: Is everyone's right to vote protected? and conduct a class vote. Voting could be done by thumbs up/thumbs down, digital app, or secret ballot.
3. Thank students for participating, and explain that this was a democratic experience voting simulation.
4. Encourage students to revisit their vote on this question from the beginning of the lesson and to reflect if their vote has changed.
5. Allow for students to share responses or offer additional questions.
6. Distribute the [Is Everyone's Right to Vote Protected?](#) evaluation tool and review to ensure students understand expectations.
7. Students will complete the [Is Everyone's Right to Vote Protected?](#) evaluation tool to answer our lesson inquiry question: Is everyone's right to vote protected?
8. If time allows, encourage volunteers to share their responses to the inquiry question.
9. Consider utilizing the [Inquiry Reflection Tool](#).

Culturally Responsive Supports

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Alternatively, students could submit an audio/video recording in lieu of written response to the [Is Everyone's Right to Vote Protected?](#) evaluation tool

Multilingual Learners (ML)

- Allow students to utilize talk-to-text assistive technology to translate their response to the [Is Everyone's Right to Vote Protected?](#) evaluation tool

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Demonstrating empathy
- Self-awareness
- Sense of purpose
- Social awareness

Civic Dispositions & Skills

- Civic mindedness
- Critical thinking
- Incorporating evidence
- Persuasive writing
- Problem solving
- Self-reflection

Extending Learning

- Students may take a position on the compelling inquiry question and craft a brief written response or participate in a point/counterpoint deliberation with a classmate.