

**CAN I VOTE?**

45 minutes

**OBJECTIVE:**

Students examine how voting rights have changed throughout American history, and create a multiple-tier timeline to show the relationship of events to the changes in voting rights in the United States.

**MATERIALS:**

U.S. Voting Rights Events Handout

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

- ✓ Divide class into small groups of two to three students.
- ✓ Give each group a copy of U.S. Voting Rights Events and a copy of the Voting Rights Events Questions.
- ✓ Write the definition of SUFFRAGE on the board and discuss it with the class. Explain that the class is going to investigate the history of voting in America.
- ✓ Read over the U.S. Voting Rights Events with the class.
- ✓ Ask the class to answer the questions on the Voting Rights Events Questions sheet using the U.S. Voting Rights Events handout.
- ✓ Once the groups have finished with the questions discuss the answers

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- ✓ Were there questions that have no "right" answer? Which questions & why? Were there any dates on the list that surprised you? How so?
- ✓ Research if there are any groups that are denied the right to vote today.
- ✓ Why is learning about suffrage so important for young citizens of the United States?

**SUGGESTED ASSESSMENTS:**

- ★ Students complete the Voting Rights Question handout.
- ★ Create a multiple-tier timeline to illustrate the history of the right to vote using the U.S. Voting Rights Events handout.



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### *U.S. Voting Rights Events*

- 1776 The Declaration of Independence is signed. The right to vote is based on property ownership. Suffrage is primarily for white male Protestants over the age of 21. Catholics, Jews, Quakers and others are barred from voting.
- 1787 The Constitution is drafted. States are given the power to regulate their own suffrage laws which favor white male landowners.
- 1790 The Naturalization Act bars Asian Americans from becoming citizens.
- 1791 Vermont becomes the first state to eliminate property ownership as a requirement to vote.
- 1810 Last religious requirement for voting eliminated.
- 1848 Because African Americans and women will suffer discrimination at the polls, Elizabeth Cady Stanton sets forth resolutions for women's suffrage at the first convention of women's rights advocates.
- 1856 Vote expanded to all white men.
- 1866 The first Civil Rights Act was passed granting full citizenship and equal rights to African Americans. Congress passed the bill, overriding the veto of President Andrew Jackson.
- 1868 With the Civil War over, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, granting citizenship to African Americans and permitting them to vote. But some former slave state officials still attempt to deny them the right to vote.
- 1870 The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment is ratified, providing the legal rights of African Americans to vote and prohibiting state and local governments from denying that right.
- 1882 Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act denying citizenship and voting rights to Chinese Americans.
- 1890 Wyoming becomes a state and is the first to provide suffrage for women in its Constitution.
- 1896 Several southern states use "grandfather clauses" and "disfranchising conventions" to undermine voting rights of blacks.
- 1915 The U.S. Supreme Court rules voting rights "grandfather clauses" unconstitutional.
- 1920 The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment is ratified, giving women the right to vote.
- 1922 The U.S. Supreme Court rules that people of Japanese heritage are ineligible to become naturalized citizens.
- 1937 The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of Georgia poll taxes.



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### *U.S. Voting Rights Events*

- 1943 The Chinese Exclusion Act is repealed giving Chinese immigrants the right to citizenship and voting.
- 1947 Miguel Trujillo, a Native American and former Marine, wins a suit against New Mexico for not allowing him to vote. New Mexico and Arizona are required to give the vote to all Native Americans.
- 1952 Congress gives first-generation Japanese Americans the right to become citizens.
- 1957 The Civil Rights Act of 1957 passes, allowing punishment for interference with, or disruption of, protection for African American voters.
- 1959 The U.S. Supreme Court rules that NC literacy tests for voting do not violate the constitution.
- 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his "I have a dream" speech on behalf of civil rights.
- 1964 Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1964, making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, religion, and gender in voting, public places, the workplace and schools.
- The 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment passes, outlawing the poll tax.
- 1965 Martin Luther King, Jr. leads 25,000 people on a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama to dramatize the need for more voting rights.
- Five months later, the Voting Rights Act is signed into law. One of its provisions was a ban on literacy tests for voters.
- 1970 The Voting Rights Act ban on the use of literacy tests was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.
- 1971 The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment is ratified, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18.
- 1992 The Voting Rights Language Assistance Act passed, requiring bilingual voting materials.
- 2006 Congress votes 390-33 to renew expiring provisions of the Voting Rights Act.



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### *U.S. Voting Rights Events*

#### *Timeline Questions*

Use the *U.S. Voting Rights Events* handout to answer the following questions. If you can't give a definite answer to a question, state what additional information you would need to know.

1. You are a Native American living in Arizona in the 1920s. Can you vote?
2. You are a woman living in Wyoming in 1894. Can you vote? When were you granted the right to vote?
3. You are a Japanese American living in the U.S. in 1925. Can you vote?
4. What U.S. Constitutional Amendment gave women the right to vote?
5. You are an African American male living in Alabama in 1864. Can you vote?
6. You are an African American male living in Alabama in the 1940s. Can you vote? What might be keeping you from voting?
7. You are required to pay a poll tax before you can vote. What year was this practice abolished?
8. You are a white male in the 1790s and you do not own property. Can you vote?
9. What did the 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution accomplish?
10. What was the last U.S. population to earn the right to vote?