

Teacher's Discussion Guide

Women's Suffrage Centennial

Interesting Facts about Women's Suffrage

1. The women's suffrage movement was a result of the abolition movement (the movement to free slaves).
2. Many men joined the women's suffrage movement, and some women opposed the women's suffrage movement. Women who opposed the movement said that it would cause competition between men and women rather than cooperation.
3. Black women were active in the suffrage movement but were often excluded from groups and activities organized by white suffragists. They were barred from attending suffrage conventions and were forced to march separately from white women in suffrage parades. Organizations that welcomed the participation of Black women tended to ignore the unique challenges those women faced due to both their sex and race. As a result, many Black women formed organizations that enabled them to fight for suffrage as well as equal access to jobs, housing, and education.
4. Women have been voting in Wyoming Territory since 1869, before Wyoming became a state. Wyoming only agreed to join the U.S. if women's right to vote was maintained. They said, "We will remain out of the Union a hundred years rather than come in without the women." They were the first state to allow women to vote.
5. Even though Susan B. Anthony was arrested for voting in 1872 along with a group of other women, only Anthony was tried. She was not allowed to speak for her own defense because the judge said that Anthony wasn't mentally competent because she was a woman.
6. Some suffragists started a new fashion craze – a knee-length skirt with full length pantaloons.
7. While the women's suffrage movement was happening in the U.S., a similar movement was happening in Britain – except the women "suffragettes" in Britain were more militant. They chained themselves to buildings, planted explosive devices, and engaged in destructive activities to pressure Britain's government to allow women to vote.
8. The 19th Amendment was first proposed to Congress and rejected in 1878. It was reintroduced every year until it was passed by the Senate in 1919. The wording of the 19th Amendment is exactly the same as what was proposed in 1878.
9. When the 19th Amendment passed, Woodrow Wilson was in his second term as President. During the first term, Wilson did very little to support the women's suffrage movement. This



changed in his second term after World War I, in which women played a role in supporting the war efforts. Wilson stated: “We have made partners of the women in this war...Shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right?”

10. During the ratification process, many of the northern and western states quickly ratified the 19th Amendment, but the southern states opposed it. Thirty-six states had to ratify the amendment for it to be fully ratified. The deciding vote in Tennessee came down to the youngest Representative – Harry T. Burn, who was only 23 years old. He opposed the amendment, but a note from his mother convinced him to approve it. The note said: “Don’t forget to be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the ‘rat’ in ratification.”
11. The last state to ratify the 19th Amendment was Mississippi – in 1984.
12. With the passage of the 19th Amendment, federal law granted Black women the right to vote. Unfortunately, many discriminatory laws still existed at the state level that limited the voting rights of Black women and men. These included poll taxes, or payments that had to be made before a person could vote, and literacy tests that required people to answer obscure questions about government or the constitution. In addition to legal barriers, Black people were subject to harassment, intimidation, and violence when they sought to exercise their right to vote. These practices kept Black people from registering to vote, which in turn blocked them from the civic privileges granted to registered voters. Among these was the ability to serve on a jury, and the lack of Black jurors made it hard for Black people to secure legal justice. For all these reasons, Black people of both sexes continued fighting for their right to vote. Forty-five years after the 19th Amendment was passed, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 banned racial discrimination in the voting process and made discriminatory voting laws illegal.
13. People of other racial backgrounds also faced discrimination that kept them from voting. Among those were Native Americans and Chinese Americans, who had not been granted citizenship by the government at the time the 19th Amendment was passed. As a result, neither women nor men from these groups were able to vote. Native Americans were granted citizenship in 1924 and Chinese Americans in 1943, but they were still subject to discriminatory practices that often kept them from the polls.

Discussion Questions

1. How did the Civil War (1861–1865) and World War I (1914–1918) contribute to the advancement of women in society?

Because men were fighting in the wars, women were forced to run the family farm or business, work in factories, or do other jobs that were typically done by men. This helped change the perception of what women were capable of doing. Men started to see the contribution that women could make to society.

2. Why did women focus on their right to vote instead of their right to own property, get an education, or any of the other restrictions women faced in that time?

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Declaration of Sentiments listed all the ways that women were not equal to men in society. Many of these were legal issues, such as not being able to own property or to gain custody of their children in a divorce. Women felt that they were forced to obey laws that they were not allowed to vote on. Therefore, if they wanted to change these laws, they needed first and foremost the right to vote.

3. How did the issues facing Black women in the fight for suffrage differ from those facing white women?

Black women and white women both faced myths about women's unsuitability to participate in the political process, but Black women also faced racist attitudes that limited their ability to find jobs, secure housing, and educate themselves. They had to overcome harassment and stereotypes associated with both their sex and their race. This meant they were fighting for both civil rights and suffrage at the same time.

4. If you were told by the government that you could not vote, how would you convince the government to allow you to vote?

Answers will vary. Answers may include writing or emailing local, state, and national leaders or meeting with them in person; doing research and giving speeches to local, regional, or national groups about why you should be able to vote to help increase support; or holding events that promote the right to vote.