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GRADES 9–12 | 45 minutes

Women's Suffrage, Racism and Intersectionality

LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the women's suffrage movement, reflect on how Black women were excluded from it and explore a central question about the centennial anniversary by writing an essay.

In August 2020, we commemorate the centennial anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment. The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution granted women the right to vote and was ratified on August 18, 1920. While there were Black women who were suffragettes and were very involved in fighting for the right to vote, when suffragists gathered in Seneca Falls, N.Y. in 1848, they advocated for the

right of *white* women to vote. When the Nineteenth Amendment passed, women of color were still unable to vote. As this significant anniversary is marked and celebrated, it is also important to understand how racism played a role in how certain women won the right to vote and other women did not.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the history and context of the suffrage movement.
- Students will reflect on the role of Black women and racism in the suffrage movement by reading opinion and narrative essays.
- Students will explore central questions about the suffrage movement and contemporary parallel examples by writing an original essay.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- [Background Information on Women’s Right to Vote](#)
- [What You Need to Know About Women’s Suffrage](#) YouTube video (2020, 7 mins., Now This)
- [“Celebrate Women’s Suffrage, but Don’t Whitewash the Movement’s Racism”](#) (ACLU, August 24, 2018)
- [“How the Suffrage Movement Betrayed Black Women”](#) (*The New York Times*, July 28, 2018)
- [Suffrage Events Timeline](#)
- WiFi, internet, computer, screen or projector

KEY WORDS

affiliation	magnitude
abolitionist	melodramatic
activists	obstacles
compounding	obstructing
constitutional	offenses
disenfranchisement	oppression
elitism	pernicious
Emancipation	politically expedient
fallacy	racism
hypocrisy	ratified
incipient	suffragists
inclusion	systemic
intersectionality	touchstone
intimidation	white supremacy

Web Related Connections

Lessons

- [The Gender Wage Gap](#)
- [The Selma to Montgomery March for Voting Rights](#)
- [Sexism and the Presidential Election](#)
- [Shirley Chisholm: Unbought, Unbossed and Unforgotten](#)
- [Voting Rights Then and Now](#)

Other Resources

- [Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism](#)
- [What the Women’s March Teaches Us about Intersectionality](#)
- [Women’s History Month Resources](#)

Information Sharing

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *What do you know about women's suffrage and the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution?* Explain that August 18, 1920 marks the centennial (one hundred years) anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which grants women the right to vote.
2. Ask students: *What do you know about women's right to vote? What women were included and what women were excluded?*
3. Share some/all the [background information on women's right to vote](#).
4. If time permits, show this 7-minute video: [What You Need to Know About Women's Suffrage](#). You may also want to review the [Suffrage Events Timeline](#).
5. After sharing this information and the video, engage students in a brief discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What was new information for you?
 - What was surprising about what you heard?
 - What is positive and inspiring about what you learned?
 - What is concerning about what you learned?
 - What can we learn from the suffrage movement that applies to social justice issues today?

Reading Activity

1. Divide students into two groups and have each group read one of the following two articles about the suffrage movement and the role of Black women and racism. Explain that one article provides background information and shares parts of a personal narrative. The other is an opinion article that presents the writer's point of view.

Group #1: [Celebrate Women's Suffrage, but Don't Whitewash the Movement's Racism](#)

Group #2: [How the Suffrage Movement Betrayed Black Women](#)

Provide 10–15 minutes for students to read their article silently. Instruct students to underline 2–4 facts, quotes or stories/anecdotes that stand out to them.
2. After reading, have students pair up by including one person from Group #1 and one from Group #2 in each pair. Have students discuss each of their articles for five minutes each. Each student should briefly share a summary of their article, the article's point of view and some of the facts, quotes or stories/anecdotes they highlighted.
3. Reconvene the class and ask students to share information about what they read, making sure to have students from each of the two groups share. Engage students in a class discussion by asking some or all the following questions. As students respond to the questions and share their thoughts and ideas, note important points on the board or smart board.
 - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
 - What surprised you about what you read?
 - What are some of the facts, quotes and stories/anecdotes that you highlighted? Why did they stand out to you?
 - What role did racism play in the Suffrage movement?

- In your opinion, to what extent is it “acceptable” to exclude one group of people’s rights in order to attain those rights for another group of people?
- Can you think of examples in life today where one group of people is fighting for specific rights but leaving out another group of people? Please explain.
- Each article addresses the concept of intersectionality, one directly and one indirectly. How would you describe “intersectionality” in your own words? Why is it an important concept to use in understanding the women’s suffrage movement?

Note to Teacher: The definition of **intersectionality** is the examination of overlapping and connected social systems that compound oppression for individuals who belong to multiple marginalized social groups based on their race, gender, class, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.*

Intersectionality means that in order to understand and address inequities, we need to understand how different aspects of identity for marginalized groups compound and create a unique form of oppression.

**This definition of “intersectionality” was derived from Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989(1), Article 8, <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.*

A useful example of intersectionality is the gender wage gap. In examining the gender wage gap overall, women are paid 82% of what men earn. However, if we analyze the wage gap through an intersectional lens and differentiate women of color, we can see that for women of color, that disparity is even greater: 54% for Latinx and 62% for Black women, who earn less than their white (79%) and Asian (90%) counterparts. This information is important in fully understanding the gender wage gap, reflecting on how bias and discrimination manifests differently and addressing the specific solutions. For more information, see [The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap](#).

Intersectionality is a complicated and advanced term. Share with students the definition if you feel it is appropriate and have enough time to help students understand its meaning.

Writing Activity

1. In response to the reading, video and discussion, have students write a short essay responding to one of the following prompts:
 - Given what we know about racism and exclusion in the Suffrage movement, should we celebrate or critique the Nineteenth Amendment? Explain why.
 - What is intersectionality and how does it relate to your life or an issue currently in the news?
 - What is a current day example of how one group excludes another group in its efforts to attain equitable rights?
 - Who were the Black women fighting for suffrage and how were their goals different than the white women?
2. Provide class time and assign the completion of their essay as a homework assignment. When the essays are completed, have students share their essays with the class by reading aloud or making a video of them reading their essay aloud.

Closing

Have students share one new realization they had during the lesson.

Additional Reading and Resources

- [19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Primary Documents in American History](#) (Library of Congress)
- [African American Women and the Nineteenth Amendment](#) (National Park Service)
- [African American Women Leaders in the Suffrage Movement](#) (Turning Point Suffragist Memorial)
- [“Brilliant and politically savvy:’ The roles of African American women in the fight to vote 100 years ago”](#) (USA Today, August 8, 2020)
- [Teaching Women's Suffrage](#) (PBS Learning Media)
- [“The Suffragettes Were Not Allies to Black Women, They Were Racist”](#) (Education Post, August 24, 2019)
- [“The US suffragette movement tried to leave out Black women. They showed up anyway”](#) (*The Guardian*, July 7, 2020)
- [These are the pioneers of Black women's suffrage](#) (Now This video)
- [Untold Stories of Black Women in the Suffrage Movement](#) (Seattle Channel)
- [What You Need to Know About Women’s Suffrage](#) (Now This video)
- [Between Two Worlds: Black Women and the Fight for Voting Rights](#) (National Park Service)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
R.9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
W6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
Speaking and Listening
SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Language

L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

Background Information on Women's Right to Vote

- Unlike white men, men of color and all women were not granted the right to vote right away; the government had to pass amendments to the Constitution in order to vote.
- Between 1848 and 1919-1920, suffragists (those advocating for women's right to vote) campaigned, lobbied, protested, marched and demanded rights for women at the expense of their lives. Some participated in actions led by the National Woman Suffrage Association, a moderate organization, while others joined the National Woman's Party, a more "radical" group.
- The two groups' combined efforts eventually led to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. As history has shown, however, amending the Constitution may grant new rights on paper, but that does not mean that those rights are able to be exercised.
- During the 19th and 20th centuries, Black women played an active role in the struggle for suffrage. They participated in political meetings and organized political societies. Black women attended political conventions at their local churches where they planned strategies to gain the right to vote.
- In 1896, the National Association of Colored Women was formed, bringing together over one hundred Black women's clubs. Leaders such as Ida B. Wells, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper were now working together to ensure fair votes for black women and men.
- Despite their hard work and dedication, Black women were often excluded from the larger suffrage efforts. For example, the National American Woman Suffrage Association prevented Black women from attending their conventions. Black women often had to march separately from white women in suffrage parades. In addition, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony wrote the *History of Woman Suffrage* in the 1880s, they featured white suffragists while largely ignoring the contributions of Black suffragists.
- While the Nineteenth Amendment provided white women the right to vote, women of color were still unable to vote despite fighting alongside white women during the Suffrage Movement. It was not until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed, outlawing the discriminatory voting practices that many Southern states adopted to restrict Black people from voting, that Black women (and Black men) fully gained the right to vote.

Suffrage Events Timeline

1848 — First Woman's Rights Convention

In Seneca Falls, New York, July 19–20, 1848, hundreds of women and men meet for two days for the first woman's rights convention to "discuss the social, civic and religious condition and rights of woman," including women voting. A Declaration of Sentiments was signed which set the agenda for the women's rights movement. Their 12 resolutions asked for equal laws for both women and men in addition to voting rights for women. Frederick Douglass is the main speaker at this convention. Then in 1850, another convention is held in Worcester, Massachusetts. This was the first ever National Women's Rights Convention. It had over 1,000 attendees.



1868 — 14th Amendment is ratified

This Amendment is the first to define "citizens" as "male." It states, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." This right cannot be "denied to any of the male inhabitants of such State, being twenty-one years of age, and citizens of the United States."

1869 — Woman suffrage groups are established

On May 15, 1869, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) is formed by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Their goal was to achieve voting rights for women through an amendment to the Constitution.

Later, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) is formed by Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell and others. This association focused on gaining voting rights through state constitutions.

The main difference between the two organizations was their focus. The NWSA focused on a range of reforms for women, while the AWSA focused solely on the vote for women.



1870 — 15th Amendment is ratified

This Amendment states, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

1872 — Susan B. Anthony is arrested for voting



Susan B. Anthony is arrested for voting in a presidential election. She voted for Ulysses S. Grant. At the same time, Sojourner Truth, a former slave and African-American abolitionist, appears at a polling booth in Battle Creek, Michigan, demanding a ballot; she is turned away.

1878 — Woman's Suffrage Amendment is first introduced into Congress

Originally written by Susan B. Anthony, the amendment was termed the "Federal Woman Suffrage Amendment." It is introduced to Senate; it fails in 1887.

1890 — Wyoming becomes first state to have women voting rights



In 1869, the same year woman suffrage groups were formed, Wyoming territory passed legislation granting women the right to vote and to hold office. In 1890, Wyoming became the 44th state and the first state to have full voting rights for women. While some women wanted the federal government to recognize their right to vote by passing a constitutional amendment, other women focused on obtaining their voting rights by state or territory. The West became the most progressive region on statewide, full women's suffrage.

National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) is formed

NWSA and AWSA banded together to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). NAWSA used state-by-state campaigns to leverage for voting rights for women.

1896

National Association of Colored Women is formed

This association brought together over 100 black women's clubs. This meant that leaders such as Ida B. Wells, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper were now working together to ensure fair votes for black women and men.

1913



Alice Paul Lucy Burns

Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage is formed

Formed by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, the focus of the Congressional Union is to lobby for a full Constitutional amendment that allows women to vote. The group is renamed the National Women's Party (NWP) in 1916.

Alice Paul organizes a suffrage parade in Washington, D.C.

On May 3, 1913, the day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration, over 5,000 women march on Pennsylvania Avenue to demand their right to vote. Customarily, black participants were only allowed to march in the back so as not to upset the white suffragists from the South. In this parade, Ida B. Wells refused to march in the back with other black women and instead marched with the white women up front.



Ida B. Wells

1916



First American woman elected to Congress

Jeannette Rankin of Montana becomes the first American woman elected to represent her state in the U.S. House of Representatives.

National Woman's Party (NWP) increase demonstrations

NWP begin to use some of the same tactics Britain used in their suffrage movement. This meant demonstrations, parades, huge meetings and picketing the White House and other public areas.



1917

Alice Paul and other picketers are arrested for "obstructing traffic"

In January, women began picketing outside the White House every day. In June, picketers included Alice Paul who was arrested. While Alice was in jail, she began a hunger strike.



1918

President Woodrow Wilson announces his support for suffrage

President Wilson shared that woman's suffrage was needed as a "war measure." This came after there was bad press about the treatment of Alice Paul and others in prison.

1919

Federal Woman's Suffrage Amendment is passed by Congress

The amendment is passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate. It now becomes known as the 19th Amendment and is sent to states for ratification.

1920

Women gain the right to vote

On August 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified by the states. On August 26, 1920, the Amendment is signed into law, granting women the right to vote. However, the amendment did not guarantee that all women, particularly women of color, could vote. There struggle to gain the right to vote continued.