

The History of Voting: Who can Vote?

SWBAT

- Explain general constitutional voting requirements
- Understand requirements for voting established by the U.S. Constitution
- Explain how the suffrage amendments advanced voting rights in the United States
- What is missing from current voting rights.

Part 1: What Do You Know about Voting in the United States?

- Allow 10–15 minutes for group work and then ask for responses.
- Begin the lesson with a brainstorming activity
- Groups of three to five students will answer the questions on the handout.
- Set aside enough time to hear all responses.
- You or a student can write all the answers on the board.
- Record all answers even if they are wrong.

2. Voting in the Early United States

- Explain to the students that the Constitution did not mention voting qualifications at the time of its adoption.
- Because it was not mentioned voting rights were determined by individual states.

3. Compare and Contrast: What Voting Rights Have Been Added to the Constitution?

- Students will learn how voting rights have been extended by selected suffrage amendments to the Constitution
- Have students stay in their groups
- The Suffrage Amendment handout should be distributed to the students.
- The students will read the handout.
- Call on students to read each amendment aloud to the class. A different student should read each amendment.
- Then as a groups they read the amendments and compare and contrast the amendments with what they had answered on the handout they filled out at the beginning of class.
- As a class ask the class what additions or changes were made to the Constitution when it came to voting rights.
- Discussion Points
 - Before getting into the discussion, ask the students if there were any words or concepts that they did not understand, e.g. what poll tax is.
 - Fourteenth Amendment—Citizenship
 - Ask students whether this amendment includes voting rights.
 - Fifteenth Amendment—Racial equality in voting

- Why was this amendment necessary after the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified?
- Were there other ways states denied certain people the right to vote?
 - grandfather clause, literacy tests, poll taxes How do you think these restrictions were overcome?
- How were these obstacles overcome?
- Suggestion: Introduce students to the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Nineteenth Amendment— Suffrage for women
- Why do you think it took so many years for women to attain the right to vote?
- Twenty-fourth Amendment— Poll tax abolished
- What is a poll tax?
- Which Americans were most affected by the poll tax?
- Which Americans benefited the most from this amendment?
- Twenty-sixth Amendment— The right of eighteen-year-olds to vote
- Note the date for this amendment (1971)
- What was happening in the United States at this time?
- The Vietnam War and antiwar protests
- Why do you think the Twenty-sixth Amendment was passed at this particular time in America's history?

4. Current standing of the Voting Rights Act

- After the students have finished their discussion about what voting rights have been added to the Constitution tell the students that they will now examine the current state of voting rights.
- Pass out copies of the following 2 articles
 - http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/26/us/supreme-court-ruling.html?_r=0
 - <http://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/voting-rights-act-resource-page>
- Have the students read then discuss the articles in their groups
- Then have the students discuss the following
 - Ask the students to identify what the major issues with the new ruling and how it affects voting rights.
 - The ask the students to reflect and think about how this ruling interacts with what they had just learned about voting rights.
 - Do they think it undermines everything they learned?
 - Do they think it's fine?
 - Do they think that this new ruling affects all or just some? If so, who does it affect and why?

5. Concluding the Lesson

Ask students the following questions:

- How would your new knowledge of suffrage amendments change your group's Student Handout 1 responses?

- After nearly 150 years of voting rights being added to the Constitution, can you think of any other group that has not been considered?
- Should there or are there any other qualifications necessary to vote?
- In light of the recent changes to the voting act what can you do to combat issues that you've spotted?