

Lesson Plan: Voting Rights History (Interactive Timeline)

By Rachel Roberson

Lesson opener

Discussion/Quick-write prompt: Do you think voting is important? Why or why not? Are you looking forward to voting at 18? What does that right mean to you?



(Theresa Thompson/Flickr)

Objectives

- Students will analyze the history of voting rights in the United States using [this interactive timeline](#) on The Lowdown.
- Students will reflect on how voting rights were valued historically and what the right to vote means to them today.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What factors have caused voting rights to expand or shrink throughout American history?

The United States prides itself as a beacon of democracy on the world stage. But universal suffrage has been elusive throughout American history. Only within the last 50 year has the U.S. electorate included every demographic of citizen (except those in U.S. territories). And even today, voting rights struggles still continue to [make headlines](#).

For more on a recent history of voting rights, including the 2013 Supreme Court case that removed a key provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, see this Lowdown post (a comic history of voting rights).

Activity:

- Assign or ask students to choose a group of Americans who have been excluded from voting at some point in U.S. history but can now vote. Individually or in pairs, students read the interactive voting rights timeline. [Examples of excluded groups: women, African-Americans, Asians Americans, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans, young people (18 to 20 years old)]
- Although they should read the entire timeline, students make notes on when/how their group was excluded from voting and when/how they were included, referencing specific dates when possible.

Discussion questions/Students cite evidence to support their claims

- Name the factors that excluded women, minorities and other groups from voting? How were these factors overcome? Are these factors relevant today?
- Both the women’s suffrage and civil rights movements spanned decades and involved thousands. Why do you think so many Americans joined these movements? What do you think the right to vote meant to them?
- Do you think the right to vote still needs to be protected and guarded? Why/why not?
- What does the right to vote mean to you?

Extension activities

- **Timelines continued:** Using an interactive timeline tool, such as [this one from Read, Write, Think](#), students continue researching the same group they focused on during this lesson. Individuals or groups create a voting rights timeline centered on their specific group. (Ex: The voting rights history of Asian Americans)
- **A national platform for your students’ voices:** Students make their voices heard on issues they care about, including voting rights and voter access, by participating in [Letters to the Next President 2.0](#). This national initiative gives youth a platform to express their opinion about election issues that matter most to them. Teachers must sign up and get a group code that students can use to upload letters.

Common Core reading/writing standards and C3 history standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.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.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
D2.Civ.12	Assess specific rules and laws (both actual and proposed) as means of addressing public problems.
D2.His.2	Classify and analyze change and continuity in historical eras