



WHO HAS THE POWER?

(30-40 minutes)

OBJECTIVE

Students evaluate the history of the right to vote in America.

MATERIALS

Petition: I Want to Vote! handout; *Petitioner Descriptions* handout; *Outcome Cards* handout

GET READY

- ✓ Make copies of *Petition: I Want to Vote* handout for your class. (You will be dividing your students into groups of three or four, so make sure each group has only one copy of the *Petition: I Want to Vote* handout.)
- ✓ Fill in the top two lines of each *Petition: I Want to Vote!* handout with a different petitioner description from the *Petitioner Descriptions* handout.
- ✓ Make one copy of the *Outcome Cards* handout, which aligns with the petitioner descriptions. Cut the cards apart.
- ✓ See “Chronology of Suffrage” and “Qualifications for Voting” in the Appendix.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Organize your students into groups of three or four, depending on the size of your class. Give each group one of the eight *Petition: I Want To Vote* handouts, each with its own petitioner description. Provide 10 minutes for each team to brainstorm at least three arguments in favor of giving the petitioner, who they represent, the right to vote.
- ✓ Take turns addressing each group as a petitioner. Have the class come up with three arguments against the petitioner, that the

group must record on their handout. Note: Students should consider the time period the petitioner is living in when divising arguments.

- ✓ Have the class reach a consensus on giving or denying the vote to the petitioner.
- ✓ Once the class has decided one way or the other, give the appropriate *Outcome Card* to the group to read aloud to the class.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *What groups have gained the right to vote since our country’s inception?*
- ★ *How might our country be different if the power to vote was still limited to those who had it at the time of the Constitution?*
- ★ *Why have different groups fought so hard for suffrage?*
- ★ *What is the state of suffrage today? Do you foresee additional groups gaining the right to vote? If so, who?*

MORE!

Research the voter qualifications in your state. Make a visual representation (chart, poster, etc.) of the qualifications. Write a letter supporting the extension or restriction of these qualifications. Mail it to a legislator.

VOTE QUOTE

“There is no future for a people who deny their past.” - Adam Clayton Powell



Petition: I Want to Vote!

I am _____

Reasons why I should be able to vote:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Arguments against giving this person the vote:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Group consensus:

This person _____ should have the right to vote.

_____ should not have the right to vote.



Petitioner Descriptions

1. A 16-year-old citizen of the United States who is a full-time high school student
2. An adult migrant farm worker who is a tax-paying U.S. citizen but who has no permanent address
3. An 18-year-old U.S. soldier fighting in Vietnam in 1966
4. A 30-year-old pioneer woman living in the Wyoming Territory in 1850
5. A 21-year-old Virginia slave in the 1850s
6. A 21-year-old North Carolina factory worker who did not own a private home or property in 1845
7. A Japanese citizen who lives and works in California and pays U.S. taxes
8. An adult who can neither read nor write English



OUTCOME CARDS

1.	The 26th Amendment set the voting age at 18, where it remains today, for all federal, state, and local elections. <i>The petitioner cannot vote.</i>
2.	There is a uniform 30-day residency requirement for voting in presidential elections, established by the Voting Rights Act of 1970 and upheld in the Supreme Court by an 8-1 majority. <i>Petitioner cannot vote unless he/she establishes residency 30 days before the presidential election.</i>
3.	The Voting Rights Act of 1970, followed by the 26th Amendment in 1971, set the voting age at 18. Public feeling to lower the voting age was strongly influenced by the number of American soldiers in Vietnam below the age of 21, who could fight for their country but who could not vote in its elections. <i>In 1966, the petitioner could not vote.</i>
4.	In 1920, the efforts of women's suffragists over almost a century were rewarded with the passage of the 19th Amendment, which guaranteed women the right to vote in all states. Several states had already given women the vote; the first of these was indeed Wyoming, which had done so in 1869, when it was still a territory. <i>However, in 1850, the petitioner could not vote.</i>
5.	No citizenship rights were given to slaves by the original Constitution. Even former slaves had no citizenship rights in the United States until the passage of the 14th Amendment in 1868; voting rights were guaranteed to them by the 15th Amendment in 1870. Virtual exclusion from the polls in Southern states, through threats, poll taxes, literacy tests, and other tactics, was common until the Voting Rights Act of the 1965, which outlawed such activities. <i>In Virginia in the 1850s, the petitioner could not vote.</i>
6.	By 1845, property restrictions on voters had been abolished in all but two states, Virginia and North Carolina. However, some states had property and even religious restrictions on their electorates before that. <i>In 1845 in North Carolina, the petitioner could not vote.</i>
7.	No matter how long a resident alien has lived, worked, and paid taxes in the United States, only citizens by birth or naturalization possess voting rights. <i>The petitioner cannot vote.</i>
8.	According to the Voting Rights Act of 1970, there is no literacy qualification whatsoever for voters. If the voter cannot read the ballot because of language or literacy barriers, he/she may bring a translator or reader to the polls. <i>The petitioner can vote.</i>