

Women's Suffrage in the United States

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BRIEF OVERVIEW

This teaching module considers the history and legacies of the U.S. Women's Suffrage movement. The campaign for women's voting rights lasted almost eight decades. Considered the largest reform movement in United States history, its participants believed that securing the vote was essential to achieving women's economic, social, and political equality. In this session students will use a range of textual and visual primary sources to understand the perspectives of activists, politicians, and others for and against suffrage through a critical analysis of primary sources.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Identify and analyze** a variety of primary sources, such as letters, pamphlets, maps, photographs, and ephemera.
- **Explore** ways that people advocated for and against women's right to vote.
- **Learn** more about the history of women's suffrage and other voting rights struggles in the United States.

BEFORE CLASS

- Watch [The Rubenstein Library's Collections](#).
- Review the Rubenstein Library's [online women's suffrage movement exhibition](#) that explores the history of the women's suffrage movement as well as other voting rights movements in the United States.
- Learn about [copyright and citations](#) for special collections materials.

SESSION OUTLINE

This lesson can be taught synchronously in a 75-minute class session, or adapted for asynchronous learning.

Activity

Students will work in small groups to explore primary sources. They can do this work either in class, in Zoom breakout rooms, or using discussion forums such as Sakai, depending on the format of the class. Students will examine and analyze items in the Rubenstein Library's [online women's suffrage exhibit](#). Instructors may assign one or more of the ten [theme pages](#) from this online exhibit to each group, or you may want to allow students to choose their own and coordinate with the other groups in your class to make sure that every theme page is assigned to a group.

1. Within their groups, students will divide up the items in their theme page and will each answer the individual analysis questions about one of the items.
2. After they've had a chance to read and analyze their items on their own, students work with their group to share their items and respond to the group analysis questions.
3. Finally, each group will share their discoveries with the whole class.

Group Discussion Questions

INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS QUESTIONS:

- What is the item you are looking at? It could be a book, photograph, letter, or some other kind of object or document. List one textual, physical, and visual characteristic of your source. For example, is it published or written by hand? Can you tell what it's made out of (paper, metal, cloth)? How are colors used? Is there anything you can learn about this object based on its physical characteristics?
- Who created the source you're looking at and why do you think it was created? Is there a specific point the creator was trying to make or message the creator was trying to send?
- What sort of information can your source provide about the U.S. women's suffrage movement or about the United States during or after the movement? If you have chosen an image or visual item (e.g. photograph, poster, pin, map, book cover, etc.) consider what it shows about how woman suffragists, anti-suffragists, or other activists used imagery as a movement tool. Do political movements and social causes use these kinds of communication tools today? Can you give some examples?

GROUP ANALYSIS QUESTIONS:

- You encountered different and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the U.S. women's suffrage movement. How do your sources differ in how they describe or represent the movement?
- Do different items tell the same story but in different ways? Are some items more powerful in sharing information, if so, why?
- Based on these sources, what would you tell a friend about the history of the U.S. women's suffrage movement?
- A single primary source sometimes raises more questions than it answers. What questions do you still have about the source you reviewed? Spend some time brainstorming with your group mates about how to find answers.

Suggested Readings

Students should have a basic familiarity with the American women's suffrage movement to give them the context they need to begin to analyze their primary sources. One or more of these can be assigned ahead of time:

ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS:

- Jennifer Harlan. [**"Suffrage at 100: A Visual History,"**](#) *New York Times*, August 20, 2020. Text by Jennifer Harlan; Introduction by Veronica Chambers, Jennifer Harlan, and Jennifer Schuessler.
- Martha S. Jones, [**"How Black Suffragists Fought for the Right to Vote and a Modicum of Respect,"**](#) *Humanities: The Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, 40, no. 3 (Summer 2019)
- Allison K. Lange, [**"Portraits as Politics,"**](#) *Picturing Political Power: Images in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 53–87.
- Manisha Sinha, [**"The Other Frances Ellen Watkins Harper,"**](#) *Common Place*, 16, no. 2 (Winter 2016).

WEBSITES:

- Library of Congress. [**Marching for the Vote: Remembering the Woman Suffrage Parade of 1913**](#)
- National Archives. [**The Nineteenth Amendment**](#)
- National Park Service. [**US Women's Suffrage Timeline 1648 to 2016**](#)
- National Women's History Museum. [**History of the Women's Suffrage Movement**](#); [**National Association of Colored Women**](#)

QUESTIONS?

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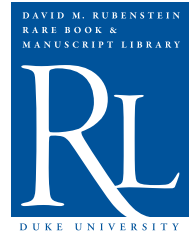
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