



WHY WE HAVE ELECTIONS

GOAL: Explain the history behind voting rights and the importance of voting and full representation to democracy in the United States.

- I. Objective: Students will be able to explain how voting rights have evolved over time and why it's important that all people be represented by participating in a class voting activity that reflects historic changes in voting rights.
- II. Procedures
 - a. Start of class: each student will receive a voting slip with a small colored dot and color name on it, and will be instructed not to write on the paper yet.
 - b. The teacher will pose a "Yes" or "No" question to the students that will catch their interest (e.g. more time at recess, longer lunch, more or less time on a certain subject, etc.) and students will vote on the question using their slips of paper.
 - c. Once all votes have been cast, the slips of paper will be collected. The teacher will only count certain votes (to start) depending on the color of the dot on the slip, which corresponds to a specific voting right in history. See *The History of Voting in Connecticut and the United States* resource for color code and recommended progression of revealing vote counts. Votes should be recorded in progression on the board so students can see how a vote might have changed over time with the addition/subtraction of each voting right.
 - d. After each group of votes is counted, students will learn the history behind why only a certain color is picked and how voting rights have changed.
 - e. Once all student votes have been counted, discuss with the class why the act of voting is important for American citizens. The following discussion questions can help guide the conversation and can also be used as writing prompts:
 - i. How did you feel when your vote wasn't counted?
 - ii. Why do we have elections in the United States?
 - iii. Who participates in elections in the United States?

- iv. Why is it important that all Americans have the right to vote and participate in elections?
- v. How would you persuade someone that it is important to vote?

III. Materials

- a. *The History of Voting in Connecticut and the United States* resource.
- b. *Voting Slips for Students* (print pg. 5).

IV. Evaluations

- a. Completion of voting slip.
- b. Active participation in mock voting exercise and lesson.

Additional Resources

- For a timeline of voting history, we recommend The City University of New York's *Milestones in Voting History* timeline:
http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/voting_cal/milestones.html
- To learn about voting in the 1600's and 1700's, check out Colonial Williamsburg's article *Voting in Early America*:
<http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/spring07/elections.cfm>
- The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, which some argue is one of the earliest Constitutions, granted free men who owned property the right to vote. You can read the Fundamental Orders at: <http://lonang.com/library/organic/1639-foc2/>
- For a brief and easy-to-understand explanation of the Fifteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, check out:
<http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/content/15th-amend-doc.html>
- For a brief and easy-to-understand explanation of the Nineteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, check out:
<http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/content/19th-amend-doc.html>
- To learn more about the women's suffrage movement, particularly in Connecticut, we recommend ConnecticutHistory.org's *Women Win the Right to Vote*:
<http://connecticuthistory.org/women-win-the-right-to-vote/>
- For more information on the Voting Rights Act of 1965, we suggest reading:
<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=100>
- *It's Your Right – Why Voting Matters* offers voting and civics education resources for teachers, courtesy of Secretary of the State Denise Merrill's office. Resources are geared towards high schoolers but can be adapted for your students:
<http://www.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?q=550962>.



THE HISTORY OF VOTING IN CONNECTICUT AND THE UNITED STATES

*Use this information sheet to explain to your students the history of voting
and why certain ballots were counted.*

Pre-1814 Voting in the State of Connecticut:

Voting in Connecticut prior to 1814 required eligible voters to own a certain amount of property. Voting was not restricted based on skin color (free African-American men were allowed to vote) but women, men under 21, enslaved people, indentured servants, those who owned no property, and those whose property was valued at less than 50 shillings could not vote. (NOTE: Connecticut did not abolish slavery until 1848.)

Post-1814 Voting in the State of Connecticut:

In 1814, the Connecticut General Assembly passed a law that took the right to vote away from free African-American men. All other pre-1814 rights and restrictions stayed in place. This meant that ALL African-American men (free or enslaved), men under 21, indentured servants, women and men whose property was valued at less than 50 shillings could not vote. In 1818, Connecticut created a new Constitution which added the word "white" to voter qualifications.

Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, Ratified in 1870:

In 1870, the United States Congress passed an amendment to the U.S. Constitution allowing African-American men the right to vote throughout the United States, regardless of property ownership. Despite that fact, many African-American men were unfairly turned away from polling stations through various means. Women and men under 21 still could not vote.

Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, Ratified in 1920:

In 1920, the United States Congress passed an amendment to the Constitution allowing women the right to vote throughout the United States. While women were allowed the right to vote, often only white women had the privilege and women of color (including African-Americans and Asians) were unfairly turned away from polling stations.

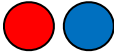





Voting Rights Act of 1965:

In 1965, the Voting Rights Act was passed and signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. It prohibits people from being unfairly turned away from polling places for any election.

Twenty-sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution, Ratified in 1971:

In 1971, the United States Congress passed an amendment to the Constitution changing the minimum voting age for eligible voters to 18 years of age. Previous to this amendment, the voting age in the United States was 21 years of age.

Key to Voting Slips:


| | | |
|---|---|---|
|  | Red and Blue | Pre-1814: only free male property owners (regardless of race) could vote* |
|  | Blue | 1814: law passed that limits voting to only white male property owners* |
|  | Yellow, Blue and Red | 1870: Fifteenth Amendment passed |
|  | Green, Yellow, Blue, and Red | 1920: Nineteenth Amendment passed |
|  | Purple, Green, Yellow, Blue, and Red | 1965: Voting Rights Act passed |
|  | Black, Purple, Green, Yellow, Blue, and Red | 1971: Twenty-Sixth Amendment passed |


** in the State of Connecticut*


Recommended progression for vote counting during activity:


1. Slips with **red** and **blue** dots *only*, to reflect pre-1814 voting rights in Connecticut.
2. Slips with **blue** dots *only*, to reflect 1814 Connecticut law which took away voting rights for some, specifically African-American property owners (represented by the **red** dot).
3. Slips with **yellow** dots, **blue** dots, and **red** dots *only*, to reflect the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment and African-American men earning the right to vote.
4. Slips with **green** dots, **yellow** dots, **blue** dots, and **red** dots *only*, to reflect women earning the right to vote.
5. Slips with **purple** dots, **green** dots, **yellow** dots, **blue** dots, and **red** dots *only*, to reflect the ending – by law – of discrimination at the polls.
6. Slips with **black** dots, **purple** dots, **green** dots, **yellow** dots, **blue** dots, and **red** dots, to reflect the lowering of the voting age to 18.


VOTING SLIPS FOR STUDENTS


 **RED**





 **BLUE**





 **YELLOW**




 **GREEN**



 **PURPLE**



 **BLACK**

