



## IN THE RIGHT

(40-50 minutes of class time)

### OBJECTIVE

Students become familiar with suffrage and how it has evolved over the years.

### MATERIALS

Research material for student assignments

### GET READY

- ✓ Since your students will be conducting research, it is important for them to have different avenues of research available: library access, Internet access, etc.
- ✓ Before doing the activity, provide background information on suffrage to your class. Inform your students that suffrage is the civil right to vote. Explain to them that modern democracies, including the United States, extend that right to almost all adult citizens (at least 18 years of age) and this is a condition known as universal suffrage.
- ✓ Have your students break up into five groups; each group will tackle a different question.

### INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Ask your students to list the current criteria needed to vote within the United States. Have your students brainstorm who was not allowed to vote when the Constitution was created but can today.
- ✓ Listen to student responses and make sure they understand that many United States citizens, including African-Americans, Native Americans, and women, were long excluded from the voting process. When the Constitution was written, not only was suffrage restricted to white males, but it was further limited by religious, property, and taxpaying qualifications.
- ✓ Students should also know that the U.S. Constitution did not regard or mention the

right to vote, which meant the regulation of voting lay in the hands of the states.

- ✓ Divide your students into five groups that will individually tackle questions relating to suffrage. Each group will have to conduct research to answer their question and then present their findings to the class.
- ✓ The five questions are:
  - ✓ Why did our founding fathers not define voting rights in the Constitution?
  - ✓ Trace the history of African-Americans and the fight for suffrage from the 15th Amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
  - ✓ Trace the history of women's struggle for suffrage in the United States.
  - ✓ What are the present-day requirements for suffrage in the United States? What purpose do these restrictions serve?
  - ✓ Suffrage may be considered a right, a privilege, or a responsibility. How do these interpretations differ and with what implications?
- ✓ Give the groups two or three days to research their question and provide class time for them to work on their presentations.
- ✓ Have the groups present their research, allowing time for questions and discussion.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *What challenges did you face while researching your questions?*
- ★ *Why is learning about suffrage and its history important for young citizens of the United States?*
- ★ *Did anything surprise you while researching your questions?*
- ★ *What conclusions can you draw about suffrage in the United States?*