



VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965

(60 minutes over two days)

OBJECTIVE

Students consider the impact of the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*.

MATERIALS

Voting Rights Act of 1965 handout

GET READY

- ✓ Copy the *Voting Rights Act of 1965* handout for each of your students.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Engage your students in a discussion of voting rights. Start the discussion by asking, *Can anyone tell me restrictions there used to be on people trying to vote?* Listen to student responses.
- ✓ Students will likely mention race and/or ethnicity as factors in people being prohibited from exercising their right to vote. Explain that the *Voting Rights Act of 1965* was passed to make sure that no one would be denied their right to vote due to their race or ethnicity.
- ✓ Pass out the *Voting Rights Act of 1965* handout and have your students read it individually.
- ✓ Have your students break up into small groups and discuss the contents of the *Voting Rights Act* excerpt. Make sure the students understand its components as they are stated on the handout.
- ✓ Discuss the right of a voter to not have to take any tests or pass any requirements before he or she votes (besides proof of age, citizenship, etc.) Further discuss how the taking of tests and the passing of certain requirements was representative of racial prejudices in our country.

- ✓ Tell the groups they are going to make a presentation in respect to the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*. They need to devise an unjust voting scenario that would have occurred prior to the Act, and explain how the *Voting Rights Act* corrected that injustice; students can write a narrative, write a script and act it out, create a PowerPoint or video, etc.
- ✓ The groups should focus their scenarios around one of the “tests or devices,” as stated on the handout, whereas no one shall be denied the right to vote due to requirements to:
 - ✓ Demonstrate the ability to read, write, understand, or interpret any matter
 - ✓ Demonstrate any educational achievement or his knowledge of any particular subject
 - ✓ Possess good moral character
 - ✓ Prove his qualifications by the voucher of registered voters or members of any other class
- ✓ Your students should do research on actual instances of voter discrimination in order to lend their scenarios legitimacy. Tell each group that they will need to reference and describe at least one true account of voter injustice.
- ✓ Have the groups share their scenarios with the class and explain how the *Voting Rights Act of 1965* corrected the injustice- taking place in their scenario. The groups should also cite and describe the true account of voter discrimination they researched.



VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965 (continued)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *Why was the Voting Rights Act Of 1965 passed?*
- ★ *Who benefited from the Voting Rights Act Of 1965? What challenges to voting had this population experienced prior to the passing and implementation of the Voting Rights Act?*
- ★ *What surprised you in your research of an actual case of voter discrimination?*
- ★ *What other changes to voting rights have there been since 1965? (Lowering the voting age to 18, etc.)*



Voting Rights Act Of 1965

To assure that the right of citizens of the United States to vote is not denied or abridged on account of race or color, no citizen shall be denied the right to vote in any Federal, State, or local election because of his failure to comply with any test or device in any State...

The phrase “test or device” shall mean any requirement that a person as a prerequisite for voting or registration for voting (1) demonstrate the ability to read, write, understand, or interpret any matter, (2) demonstrate any educational achievement or his knowledge of any particular subject, (3) possess good moral character, or (4) prove his qualifications by the voucher of registered voters or members of any other class...