



PART OF THE FRANCHISE

(45 minutes)

OBJECTIVE

Students personalize the history of the right to vote.

MATERIALS

Lined paper

GET READY

- ✓ Prepare your students for this activity by reviewing the events that comprise the voting rights timeline.
- ✓ Tell your students that for this activity they should be especially respectful of each other's sensitivities.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Inform your students that the right to vote, also known as "suffrage," is not quite the same as the right to free speech, to a fair trial, or to any of the other civil rights. Explain that the right to vote is not a right belonging to all persons; rather, it is a political right, one belonging to all those who can meet certain requirements set by law.
- ✓ Explain to your students that these requirements for suffrage have changed a great deal over time. Say, *To demonstrate my point, I am going to ask all students to stand on one side of the room.*
- ✓ Say, *In 1788, only white men who paid taxes and owned land could vote. If you were an adult man then, could you have voted? If yes, then step over to the other side of the room.*
- ✓ Continue through the voting rights timeline, saying:
 - ✓ *In 1913, women living in California, Arizona, Wyoming, Kansas, Washington, Oregon, and Illinois could vote. As an adult woman, could you have voted*

then? If yes, then move over to the other side of the room.

- ✓ *In 1920, the 19th Amendment made it possible for all women to vote. As an adult woman, could you have voted? If yes, then move over to the other side of the room.*
- ✓ *In 1965, the Voting Rights Act made it possible for African-Americans to vote without fear of being penalized, hurt or killed. As an adult, could you have voted safely then? If yes, then move over to the other side of the room.*
- ✓ *In 1975, the Voting Rights Act also included protections for Hispanic, Asian, and Native American citizens. As an adult, could you have voted safely now? If yes, then move over to the other side of the room.*
- ✓ Assign each of your students to write a paragraph about how this activity impacted their classroom. They should consider not only what crossed through their minds, but also what may have crossed through the minds of their peers. Have students share their responses, if they wish.
- ✓ Discuss equal voting rights with your students using the questions below.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *What did it feel like to be one of the first people to walk to the other side of the room?*
- ★ *What did it feel like to be one of the last people to walk over to the other side of the room?*
- ★ *What did this activity teach you about the history of voting rights in America?*
- ★ *What else, if anything, did you take away from this activity?*