



THE LONG JOURNEY

(30 minutes)

OBJECTIVE

Students explore the history of Native Americans and the right to vote.

MATERIALS

The Long Journey handout

GET READY

- ✓ Make a copy of *The Long Journey* handout for each of your students.
- ✓ If possible, share information with your students about the history of Native Americans and the right to vote in preparation for this activity.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Inform your students what while the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) endowed African American men with the right to vote and the Nineteenth Amendment (1920) granted voting rights for women, Native Americans can not claim one defining historical moment when their right to vote was secured.
- ✓ Tell your class that one important step in granting suffrage to Native Americans was the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. In theory it provided voting rights to Native Americans, though in reality the practice was much different.
- ✓ Have your students read the handout, which pertains to the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, and have them complete the questions about the passage and quotes.
- ✓ Go over the handout as a class.

- ✓ Inform your students that election laws as well as literacy tests, poll taxes, and voter harassment prevented many Native Americans from voting well beyond the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. Tell them that: It was not until Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that all of these practices were declared illegal. In fact, it was not until the act was renewed in 1975 that Congress required states to provide bilingual ballots and voter assistance at the polls for linguistic-minority voters, including some Native American populations.
- ✓ Engage your class in a discussion on Native Americans and suffrage using the questions below.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *How is the history of Native Americans and the right to vote similar to the history of African Americans and the right to vote? To women and the right to vote?*
- ★ *Why do you think some Native Americans may have been reluctant to accept American citizenship and the right to vote?*
- ★ *Why do people want the right to vote?*
- ★ *Why might Native Americans be considered a special group in terms of citizenship and suffrage?*
- ★ *Why do you think it was such a long and complicated journey for Native Americans to be granted suffrage?*



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Read the following passage from the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 and answer the questions below:

"Be it enacted by the Senate and house of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That all non citizen Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States be, and they are hereby, declared to be citizens of the United States: Provided That the granting of such citizenship shall not in any manner impair or otherwise affect the right of any Indian to tribal or other property. (Approved June 2, 1924)"

Many Native Americans continued to face voting barriers up to the middle of the twentieth century. What kind of voting barriers do you think they faced? What other group faced similar barriers?

Doesn't citizenship guarantee voting rights? Provide an example of when it did not.

The citizenship and voting rights guaranteed by the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 was not received well by all Native Americans. Read and interpret the following two quotes:

"United States citizenship was just another way of absorbing us and destroying our customs and our government. How could these Europeans come over and tell us we were citizens in our country? We had our own citizenship. By its [the Citizenship Act of 1924] provisions all Indians were automatically made United States citizens whether they wanted to be so or not. This was a violation of our sovereignty. Our citizenship was in our nations." – Anonymous

How does the quote above demonstrate that not all Native Americans were happy with the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924?



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"The Indians aren't allowed to have a voice in state affairs because they aren't voters. All they [the politicians] have to do out there is to look out for the interests of the Indians. Just why the Indians shouldn't vote is something I can't understand. One of the Indians went over to Old Town once to see some official in the city hall about voting. I don't know just what position that official had over there, but he said to the Indian, 'We don't want you people over here. You have your own elections over on the island, and if you want to vote, go over there.' " - Henry Mitchell, canoe maker

How does the quote above demonstrate the desire some Native Americans had for suffrage?
