

Show Me Your Credentials: Voting in America

Post-Reconstruction America

Chelsee Wilson, Kevin Burlison
Published by *K20 Center*

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 License

Grade Level	11th – 12th Grade	**Time Frame**	100 minutes
Subject	Social Studies	**Duration**	2 class periods
Course	U.S. Government, U.S. History		

Essential Question

What is power? What forms does it take?

Summary

This lesson explores the use of literacy tests during elections following Reconstruction. Students must understand the First, Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments prior to this activity. This lesson will allow students to investigate the purpose of literacy tests while also allowing students to discuss the disenfranchisement of large groups of people as a result of literacy tests. This lesson would work well once a classroom community has been established and the teacher has developed a rapport with the students.

Snapshot

Engage

Upon entering the classroom, students are given a ballot to vote on classroom issues.

Explore

Students receive copies of the 1965 Alabama Literacy Test and attempt to answer a portion of the questions.

Explain

In small groups, students discuss the purpose of the test, why it was developed, and how it relates to amendments.

Extend

Working on their own, students research current voting registration laws and their relationship to voting rights guaranteed under the amendments.

Evaluate

Students write a brief Exit Ticket connecting the literacy tests to current voting issues.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: United States Government (9th through 12th grade))

USG.5: The student will be able to evaluate the significance of civic participation in order to ensure the preservation of our constitutional government.
USG.5.1: Define civic virtue and explain the individual's duty and responsibility to participate in civic life by voting, serving on juries, volunteering within the community, running for office, serving on a political campaign, paying state and federal taxes prior to the April 15thannual deadline,and respecting legitimate authority.

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: United States Government (9th through 12th grade))

USH.1.2B: Examine the purposes and effects of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.

Attachments

- Show Me Your Credentials - Ballot - Spanish.docx
- Show Me Your Credentials - Ballot - Spanish.pdf
- Show Me Your Credentials - Ballot.docx
- Show Me Your Credentials - Ballot.pdf
- Show Me Your Credentials Amendments Handout - Spanish.docx
- Show Me Your Credentials Amendments Handout - Spanish.pdf
- Show Me Your Credentials Amendments Handout.docx
- Show Me Your Credentials Amendments Handout.pdf
- Show Me Your Credentials Teacher Slides.pptx

Materials

- Classroom ballots
- Copies of the 1965 Alabama Literacy Test (available for download using the link below)
- Access to technology and Internet
- Copies of the Amendments Handout
- New York Times article "A Dream Undone" (linked below)
- Pencil/pen and paper

Engage

Upon entering the classroom, hand each student a ballot (like the one attached) with new proposals for classroom rules.

Once students have finished voting, tally up the votes and show the new classroom rules.

First, ask students how they feel about the new rules and their ability to have a say in the voting process. Were they happy to be able to influence the rules of the classroom?

Then, ask the students how they would feel about the new rules and their ability to have a say in the voting process if you had denied some of them the right to cast their vote. Would they feel excluded? Would they be upset if the rules directly affected them yet their voice was not heard?

To follow-up the activity, ask students: "Did you know that many African Americans were denied the right to vote? Some were denied the right due to grandfather clauses or poll taxes, but others were denied the right because they couldn't pass an exam. Even though the Fifteenth Amendment guaranteed all men the right to vote, many local and state governments found ways to prevent voting by many people."

Teacher's Note

Some suggestions for ballot measures include classroom cell phone bans, classroom uniform/dress code, or hall pass bans. You want the students to have an opinion, but you do not want the students to engage in any arguments. See ballot handout as an example. The handout is available in both Word and PDF formats, so if you wish to use the ballot example (located under Attachments) as a template, feel free to do so. The Word file can be easily edited for this reason.

Explore

Gather students into small groups, and hand them copies of the 1965 Alabama Literacy Test. As a group, students should attempt to answer the questions without using any resources, such as textbooks or cell phones. While they are taking the exam, ask students . . .

- How much of this information do you know?
- What would you have to do in order to know everything on the exam?
- What are the consequences of not passing this exam?
- What change(s) to this exam would you recommend?

Ask groups to share their thoughts with the test with the class.

Teacher's Note - Historical Background

The Alabama Literacy Test is important to both American history and American government because it was legal way to prevent specific groups from voting. In other words, it was yet another way to disenfranchise large groups of citizens in addition to Jim Crow laws. Because citizens could still vote as long as they passed the test, it was not viewed as inherently illegal, despite the "passing score" being left to the discretion of the predominantly White examiners. If a registered voter took the test and failed, they were not allowed to vote.

Teacher's Note

It would be prescient to remind students that while everyone is entitled to their own beliefs and opinions, they do not have the right to insult a peer.

Explain

After groups have explored the literacy test, pass out copies of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments (attached or versions with additional information can be found at the links provided) and a copy of the New York Times article, "A Dream Undone" (linked here or URL in the Resources section), to each group and allow them time to read through both.

While reading, groups will be using a CUS and Discuss instructional strategy to help them identify key pieces of information. Students will first circle new words in the text, then underline details/evidence, and finally place a star next to the text's main ideas. This should allow students the time to deconstruct the text and determine the key rights provided in each amendment.

Teacher's Note - Vocabulary

Because some of the language used in the amendments is legal terminology and/or rarely used, having dictionaries available for use might be helpful for students with limited vocabulary skills.

Teacher's Note - Article

The New York Times article is lengthy. To best serve your class, the first portion of the article that discusses Henry Frye could be used alone. The URL of the article is posted in the Resources section.

After groups are finished, have a class discussion over what they have read so far in class. Some questions could include . . .

- What rights appear to be guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment?
- What rights appear to be guaranteed under the Fifteenth Amendment?
- How does the literacy test you took correspond to both amendments?
- Do you think the literacy test was designed to circumvent the amendments? Justify your response.
- How did the literacy test affect citizens?

Extend

As an extension of the lesson, students will research how some states continue to limit voting rights via laws that are currently being reviewed by the Supreme Court. Students will need access to technology in order to conduct the research.

Using the U.S. Vote Foundation's website, students will look up their state's voting requirements and compare them to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. While researching, students will write down brief notes over their findings.

After students have completed their research, have a brief class discussion.

- How do our state voting requirements relate to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments?
- Did anything strike you as a difficult burden to acquire voter registration?
- What documentation is required to become a registered voter in our state?

Teacher's Note - Current Events Extension

If students do not think that voting rights are still denied today, direct them to this New York Times article over the Supreme Court ruling on North Carolina Voter ID laws.

Evaluate

As a brief evaluation of the lesson, students will complete an Exit Ticket over the lesson. Students will summarize and analyze what was learned and apply what was this to current events.

Possible exit tickets include . . .

- What do the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments guarantee?
- How did literacy tests operate within the bounds of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments?
- Literacy tests are no longer used to prevent voting. In what other ways are voters denied that right today?

Resources

- Bellringers & Exit Tickets Instructional Strategy: K20 Center. (n.d.). Bellringers & exit tickets. Instructional Strategies. Copyright 2015, Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma. Retrieved from https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f505d6f2
- CUS and Discuss Instuctional Strategy: K20 Center. (n.d.). CUS and discuss. Instructional Strategies. Copyright 2015, Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma. Retrieved from https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f5073969
- Fourteenth Amendment: Library of Congress. (2015, November 25). 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Primary Documents in American History. Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/14thamendment.html
- Fifteenth Amendment: Library of Congress. (2016, May 17). 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Primary Documents in American History. Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/15thamendment.html
- A Dream Undone Article: Rutenberg, J. (2015, July 29). A dream undone. The New York Times. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/magazine/voting-rights-act-dream-undone.html
- Alabama Literacy Test: State of Alabama. (1965). 1965 Alabama Literacy Test. Retrieved from http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/news/jimcrow/origins/images/al_literacy.pdf
- State Voting Requirements: U.S. Vote Foundation. (2016). State Voting Requirements & Information. Retrieved from https://www.usvotefoundation.org/vote/sviddomestic.htm
- North Carolina Voter ID Requirement Article: Wines, M., & Blinder, A. (2016, July 29). Federal appeals court strikes down North Carolina voter ID requirement. The New York Times. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/30/us/federal-appeals-court-strikes-down-north-carolina-voter-id-provision.html?_r=1