Right to Vote: African-American Suffrage

LESSON PLAN FOR SUPPORTING QUESTION

How did African Americans obtain the right to vote?
Up until the Civil War, in most places, the right to vote in the United States was restricted to white males 21 years and older. At that time, each state, not the federal government, set rules about who could vote.

African-American Suffrage

In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that enslaved people were property of their owners, not citizens, and had no legal rights at all. Ten years and a Civil War later, African Americans were not only free, but they were free citizens. In Iowa, the path had been set to grant them the right to vote.

The first two Iowa constitutions adopted in 1846 and 1857 limited suffrage (the right to vote) to white males 21 years and older. While enslavement might have been illegal in Iowa, many state laws still discriminated against African Americans. The “Black Codes” that required African Americans to post financial bonds to live here and denied them the right to serve on juries were designed to discourage African Americans from moving to Iowa. A strong majority in the state opposed interracial marriage and dehumanized and discriminated against African Americans.

The Civil War began to reshape white attitudes toward African Americans. Iowa soldiers fighting in the South saw the evils of enslavement firsthand. After the southern surrender, the Republican Party was eager to grant African Americans the right to vote because they anticipated their votes would be strongly Republican, the political party of Abraham Lincoln and the opponents of their former masters.

In 1868, white male lowans (the only lowans who could vote) approved a constitutional amendment striking the word “white” from voting requirements - partly due to the organizing work of notable civil rights activist Alexander Clark. As a result, a man of any race could vote in Iowa if he was 21 years old and a resident. At the same time, the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlawed denying the right to vote to anyone on the basis of race, color or previous enslavement status.

Women’s Suffrage

While African-American males were winning the right to vote, advocates for women’s suffrage saw an opportunity to advance their cause. Carrie Lane Chapman Catt, who was raised in Iowa, rose to the head of a national association promoting women’s suffrage. Early victories in several western states led women’s advocates to believe that they could soon gain the right to vote across the nation, but it remained a tough battle.

Around the turn of the century, women were allowed to vote on referendums like bond issues, but not in “elections” where there are candidates. This was known as the partial suffrage.

In 1916, Iowa votes (still all male) narrowly defeated a women’s suffrage amendment that would have struck the word “male” from the state’s voting requirements. Nevertheless, when Congress submitted the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution to the states for ratification, the Iowa legislature approved it. In the 1920 elections, women across the United States went to the polls. Later in the decade, Iowa women won the right to serve on juries and be elected to public office.

American-Indian Suffrage

American Indians had a long and complex legal status within the United States. The tribes were considered separate nations, and the U.S. government signed treaties with them just as if they were other countries. In most cases, American Indians could not vote unless they left their tribes. Partly in recognition of their military service in WWI, Congress passed the Snyder Act in 1924 granting full citizenship to Native Americans whether they remained on tribal lands or moved into mainstream society. This included the right to vote. The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1971. It expanded the right to vote in federal elections to citizens 18 years and older, lowering the legal voting age from 21. Each state had to approve it.

Over time, laws in the United States have both restricted and extended the right to vote. The number of legal voters has expanded widely since the U.S. Constitution was adopted. Voting is the most basic right of each citizen, and who gets the right to cast a ballot for elected leaders has been a widely debated issue. Today, there is a debate over whether those who have committed a felony should have the vote, even after they have served their time. Other issues may still surface.
Introduction

- **1st Reading**: Teacher reads aloud.
- **2nd Reading**: Students read aloud and mark text. During the reading, underline vocabulary words and put a question mark (?) next to parts that need clarification. After reading, circle parts that help answer the lesson supporting question.
- **3rd Reading**: Students re-read as needed in order to find answers these questions that help answer the lesson supporting question.

1. Authors often signal readers that important ideas are coming up by starting sentences with transition words and introductory phrases. **Look for the underlined transition words and introductory phrases** in the “African American Suffrage” section. In your own words, list the main ideas that come after them.

2. Write a two or three sentence summary of the “African American Suffrage” section.

   __________________________________________

   __________________________________________

   __________________________________________

3. Add events from the article to the timeline.

   ![Timeline](Timeline.png)

Ask Questions

At the end of this lesson, answer the question: How have suffrage laws changed over time for African Americans?

4. What questions will you need to know the answers to in order to address the question above?

   5. What patterns do you notice in the topics of the questions?
This portrait is of William M. Stone, who would serve as Iowa’s Republican governor during the end of the Civil War. Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1868
Alexander Clark, an African-American barber turned lawyer from Muscatine, gave this address to the “Colored Convention” in Des Moines, Iowa. In it, Clark calls for the Iowa Legislature to approve and then place before the voters the removal of the word “white” from voting laws within the Iowa Constitution. 

*Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Clark, Alexander, pp. 1, 10-12, 1868*
Alexander Clark’s Speech at the “Colored Convention” in Des Moines, Iowa, 1868

ADDRESS

OF THE COLORED STATE CONVENTION TO THE PEOPLE OF IOWA IN BEHALF OF THEIR ENFRANCHISEMENT.

PREPARED AND DELIVERED TO THE CONVENTION BY A. CLARK, CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON ADDRESS, FEB. 15TH, 1868.

To the People of Iowa: To every true, honest and liberty-loving citizen of Iowa do the colored men of your proud commonwealth appeal for sympathy and aid in securing those rights and privileges which belong to us as freemen. Having established our claim to the proud title of American soldiers and shared in the glories won by the deeds of the true men of our own color, will you not heed and hear our appeal? We appeal to the sense of justice of the Legislature and of the people of our own State, for those rights of citizenship without which our well-earned freedom is but a shadow. We ask no privilege; we simply ask you to recognize our claim to manhood by giving to us that right without which we have no power to defend ourselves from unjust legislation, and no voice in the government we have endeavored to preserve. Being men, we claim to be of that number comprehended in the Declaration of Independence, and who are entitled not only to life, but to equal rights in the pursuit and securing of happiness and in the choice of those who are to rule over us. Deprived of this, we are forced to pay taxes without representation; to submit, without appeal, to laws however offensive, without a single voice in framing them; to bear arms without the right to say whether against friend or foe—against loyalty or disloyalty. Without suffrage, we are forced into strict subjection to a government whose counsels are to us foreign, and are called by our own countrymen to witness a violence upon the primary principles of a republican government as gross and outrageous as that which justly stirred patriot Americans to throw overboard the tea from English bottoms in a Boston harbor and to wage war for Independence. Let a

Alexander Clark, an African-American barber turned lawyer from Muscatine, gave this address to the “Colored Convention” in Des Moines. In it, Clark calls for the Iowa Legislature to approve and then place before the voters the removal of the word “white” from voting laws within the Iowa Constitution. Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Clark, Alexander, pp. 1, 10-12, 1868
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Portrait of Governor William M. Stone, 1868

This portrait is of William M. Stone, who would serve as Iowa's Republican governor during the end of the Civil War. Before being elected, he was a decorated officer in the Union Army, and at one point, had been a prisoner of war during the Civil War. Stone also was a lawyer and held several governmental offices during his lifetime. During the Republican convention of 1865, a prominent issue was African-American suffrage. The Republican Party largely supported political equality for African Americans, though most believed that social equality was not to be obtained. In 1866, the Iowa legislature began amending the state's constitution to remove the word “white” from the suffrage article. In 1868, the men of Iowa 21 years of age or older — who were the only ones with the right to vote at that time — voted for African-American suffrage with 56.5 percent of the vote.

1. William Stone served in the Union Army during the Civil War, and at one point, was a prisoner of war. How could Stone's past have shaped his views on African-American suffrage?

Alexander Clark's Speech to Iowa State Colored Convention, 1868

Alexander Clark, an African-American barber turned lawyer from Muscatine, became a hero of African-American rights in the state of Iowa. In this address to the “Colored Convention” in Des Moines, Clark calls for the Iowa legislature to approve and then place before the voters the removal of the word “white” from voting laws within the Iowa Constitution. The vote passed, and Iowa became the first state in the nation to have a successful grassroots movement for African-American suffrage.

Excerpt 1

"Being men, we claim to be of that number comprehended in the Declaration of Independence, and who are entitled not only to life, but to equal rights in the pursuit and securing of happiness and in the choice of those who are to rule over us. Deprived of this, we are forced to pay taxes without representation; to submit, without appeal, to laws however offensive, without a single voice in framing them; to bear arms without the right to say whether against friend or foe -- against loyalty or disloyalty."

2. What founding document does Alexander Clark refer to in his speech? How does he say this document supports the cause of African-American suffrage?
Excerpt 2
“Our demands are not excessive; we ask not for social equality with the white man, as is often claimed by the shallow demagogue; for a law higher than human must forever govern social relations. We ask only that privilege which is no given to every white, native-born or adopted, male citizen of our State - the privilege of the ballot-box.”

3. Alexander Clark asks for suffrage equality, but what equality does he say he is not asking for? What impact might that have on the daily lives of Iowans? (Think back to the “black codes” mentioned in the “Equality at the Ballot Box” background essay)

Excerpt 3
“...that he who can be trusted with an army musket, which makes victory and protects the nation, shall also be intrusted with that boon of American liberty, the ballot, to express a preference for his rulers and his laws.”

4. According to this third excerpt, what injustice would be happening if African-American suffrage was denied to Iowa citizens?

5. Write one sentence summarizing these two sources. Include the words: Iowa, vote and equality.

__________________________________________________________________________
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This drawing done by A.R. Waud and published in *Harper's Weekly*, shows African-American men dressed in clothing showing their professions (skilled craftsman, sophisticated city dweller and a Union Army veteran), in a line waiting their turn to vote. *Courtesy of Library of Congress, Waud, Alfred R., “The first vote,” Harper’s Weekly, 16 November 1867*
This print shows a parade surrounded by portraits and vignettes of Black life, illustrating rights granted by the 15th Amendment. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Kelly, Thomas, “The Fifteenth Amendment,” 1870
# Be an Image Detective!

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<td><strong>What questions does this image lead you to ask?</strong></td>
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“The First Vote” Illustration, November 16, 1867

This iconic illustration was created by A.R. Waud and published in *Harper’s Weekly*. It shows African-American men, dressed in clothing showing their professions (skilled craftsman, sophisticated city dweller and a Union Army veteran), in a line waiting their turn to vote. An American flag hangs as a ceiling over the mens' heads. A white election official looks on as the first man drops his vote into the container.

1. Each of the men in the line is dressed differently. What does their clothing represent?

2. Define these important events in American history that had recently taken place before this drawing was published in Harper’s Weekly magazine. (Civil War: 1861-1865)

   - Emancipation Proclamation, 1863
   - The Fifteenth Amendment, 1870

“The Fifteenth Amendment,” 1870

This print shows a parade surrounded by portraits and vignettes of African-American life, illustrating the rights granted by the 15th amendment.

- **The Fifteenth Amendment**: Reading Emancipation Proclamation; Life Liberty and Independence; We Unite the Bonds of Fellowship; Our Chart of Rights - the Holy Scriptures; Education will prove the Equality [of] the Races; Liberty Property, the Marriage Alter; Celebration of fifteenth Amendment May 19th, 1870; The Ballot Box is open to us; Our representative sits in the National Legislature; The Holy ordinances of religion are free; Freedom unites the Family Circle; We will protect our Country as it defends our Rights; We till our own Fields; The Right of Citizens of the U.S. to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the U.S. or any State on account of Race Color or Condition of Servitude, 15th Amendment

4. What suffrage rights are guaranteed for all United States citizens by the 15th Amendment?
Distribution of the Colored Population of the United States in 1890, 1898

Statistical atlas of the United States, based upon the results of the 11th U.S. Census in 1890, showing the distribution of the “colored population” of the country. Courtesy of Library of Congress, United States Census Office, 11th Census (1890), and Henry Gannett, Statistical Atlas of the United States, based upon the results of the eleventh census, Washington, 1898
This sample voter registration application, featuring a literacy test, was used by W.C. Patton, head of the NAACP voter registration program, to educate Black voters in Alabama before they went to register to vote. Courtesy of Library of Congress, “Sample Application for Registration, Questionnaire and Oaths,” Alabama Board of Registrars, 1964.
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Part III of this questionnaire shall consist of one of the forms which are: Insert Part III as herein below set out. The insert shall be fastened to the questionnaire. The questions set out on the insert shall be answered according to the instructions therein set out. Each applicant shall demonstrate ability to read and write as required by the Constitution of Alabama, as amended, and no person shall be considered to have completed this application, nor shall the name of any applicant be entered upon the list of registered voters of any county until after such Insert Part III of the questionnaire has been satisfactory completed and signed by the applicant.

Signature of Applicant: _______________
This photograph by Warren Leffler shows African-American demonstrators outside the White House, with signs reading “We demand the right to vote, everywhere” and protesting police brutality against civil rights demonstrators in Selma, Alabama. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Leffler, Warren K., “[African American demonstrators...” 12 March 1965
Charles Siler remembers his early life in Louisiana, including enjoying drawing, quitting the Boy Scouts when his troop made black Scouts walk behind the horses in a local parade, and picketing Louisiana's segregated state library as a senior in high school. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Siler, Charles, E., “Charles Siler oral history interview conducted by David P. Cline in Dallas, Texas, 2013-05-10,” 10 May 2013
### Analyze a Primary Source (Part 3)

#### Distribution of the Colored Population of the United States in 1890, 1898

This is a statistical atlas of the United States that is based on the results of the 11th U.S. Census, completed in 1890, shows the distribution of the “colored population” of the country. As can be seen in the distribution map, members of the targeted population predominantly resided in the southeast.

1. Which states had the highest African-American population in 1890?

2. What impact might the 15th Amendment have had on different regions of the United States? Remember, the 15th Amendment states that “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

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### Voter Registration Literacy Test in Alabama, 1964

After the Civil War, many states enacted literacy tests as a voting requirement. The purpose was to exclude persons with minimal reading skills, in particular poor African Americans in the South, from voting.

This was achieved by asking these prospective voters to explain less well known parts of the U.S. Constitution or rejecting their applications for errors. Literacy tests, along with other Jim Crow laws and “black codes,” were put in place to limit the rights of African Americans.

This sample voter registration application, featuring a literacy test, was used by W.C. Patton, head of the NAACP voter registration program, to educate black voters in Alabama before they went to register to vote.

**Excerpt 1**

*Instructions “A”*

The applicant will complete the remainder of this questionnaire before a Board member and at his instructions. The Board member shall have the applicant read any one of more of the following excerpts from the U.S. Constitution using a duplicate form of this Insert Part III. The Board member shall keep in his possession the application with its inserted Part III and shall mark thereon the words missed in reading by applicant.
### Excerpts From the Constitution

- “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, for prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.”
- “The judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by citizens of another state, or by citizens or subjects of any foreign state.”
- “Representative shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers, continue the whole number of persons in each state, excluding Indians not taxed.”
- “The congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes or incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the several states, and without regard to any census or enumeration.”

### Excerpt 2

**Instruction “B”**

The Board member shall then have the applicant write several words, or more if necessary to make a judicial determination of his ability to write. The writing shall be placed below so that it becomes a part of the application. If the writing is illegible, the Board member shall write in parentheses beneath the writing the words the applicant was asked to write.

**HAVE APPLICANT WRITE HERE, DICTATING WORDS FROM THE CONSTITUTION.**

1. What is unfair about these sections of the literacy test? Explain.

2. How did the literacy test keep African Americans from voting?

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### African-American Demonstrators Outside the White House, March 12, 1965

This photograph by Warren Leffler shows African-American demonstrators outside the White House, with signs reading “We demand the right to vote, everywhere” and protesting police brutality against civil rights demonstrators in Selma, Alabama. On August 6, 1965, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law. This law gave the federal government the authority and funding to ensure that all legal-age citizens were allowed to vote in all states, without obstructions such as literacy tests, thus fully enacting the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

1. How many years separated the passage of the 15th Amendment, passed in 1870, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965?

2. Based on that information, infer which one changes faster: laws or public opinion?

**Challenge Question:** Explain how the laws in place in August 1965 influence the interactions between different groups in society, such as protestors & lawmakers; citizens of different races in Selma, Alabama; or African-American citizens in Selma and government officials.

Charles Siler remembers his early life in Louisiana, including enjoying drawing, quitting the Boy Scouts when his troop made black Scouts walk behind the horses in a local parade, and picketing Louisiana’s segregated state library as a senior in high school. He was expelled from Southern University because of his activism. He joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He continued his civil rights advocacy as he took a variety of positions at cultural institutions and began a career as a cartoonist. The interview closes with Siler’s reflections on identity and learning from those whose views on life are different.

Excerpt: Watch this four-minute clip -- from 1:35:07 to 1:38:55

1. According to Charles Siler, how many attempts did it take Mrs. Williams before she was allowed to register to vote? Why it might have taken Williams so many attempts? (Refer to the voter registration literacy test)

2. What significance did registering to vote have for Williams? Why do you think it was important for her to vote before she died?

3. Why does Siler get upset when people tell them they are not going to vote?

4. Use all of the primary sources in Part 4 to make a conclusion about why places like Selma, Alabama, were hotbed locations for African-American suffrage. Include the words: enslavement, suffrage, Jim Crow laws and equality.
Gathering Evidence

How have suffrage laws changed for African Americans over time?

My Thesis Statement

Category: Evidence:

Category: Evidence:

Category: Evidence:

Category: Evidence:
Lesson Summative Assessment

Scenario: Fiona O’Malley, a foreign exchange student from Ireland, has recently joined our class. She was surprised to learn that African Americans didn’t have equal voting rights throughout the United States until 1965. In Ireland, African-American men could vote in 1829. Explain the journey to the ballot box for African Americans in the United States.

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<th>Introduction</th>
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<td>- Start with a hook sentence.</td>
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<td>- Write the context in a sentence or two. (Refer to question 2 in the Pre-Lesson Activity)</td>
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<td>- Write the big question in your own words in a statement.</td>
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<td>- Write your thesis (answer) in one sentence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Start with topic sentence (introduces category)</td>
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<td>- Supporting Evidence</td>
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<td>- Reasoning (how evidence connects to thesis)</td>
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<td>Category 2</td>
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<td>• Start with topic sentence (introduces category)</td>
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<td>• Supporting Evidence</td>
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<td>• Reasoning (how evidence connects to thesis)</td>
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<th>Conclusion</th>
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<td>• Give a clincher - a final, convincing thought to leave with the reader</td>
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