

# Humor and Activism: Using Political Cartoons to Explore the Women's Suffrage Movement

ac-tiv-ism

the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.

suf-frage

the right to vote in an election

universal suffrage [=the right of all adult citizens to vote in an election]

**Purpose:** To use political cartoons as a device to analyze and discuss the women's suffrage movement

## Lesson Objectives:

- Students will define "activism" and relate it to the women's suffrage movement
- Students will analyze how and why opposition to women's suffrage was revealed through the use of historical political cartoons.
- Students will explore how humor and satire can be used to express a point of view and discuss how effective the technique is as a persuasive argument.
- Students will present a contemporary political cartoon and analyze the point of view of the artist; is it a statement of support or opposition and why.

**Time Frame:** One to two class sessions

## Standards:

C3: D1.5.9-12. Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources

C3 D2.Civ.2.6-8. Explain specific roles played by citizens (such as voters, jurors, taxpayers, members of the armed forces, petitioners, protesters, and office-holders).

C3 D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present

C3 D2.Civ.14.6-8. Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.

C3 D2.Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

NL-ENG.K-12.5COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

NL-ENG.K-U .7 EVALUATING DATA

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

### **Getting Started:**

- Ask your students what they believe “activism means”.
- Discuss recent examples of activism for change. Ask students to identify and discuss at least two issues that have generated activism in some way. How are messages of protest or activism shared? Is there universal agreement?
- Ask them to consider the fact that although the Constitution was ratified in 1787, women, by law, were not given the right to vote until the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

### **Analyzing Sources:**

Discuss with your students the fact that cartoons and other satirical drawings have been used throughout American history to make political statements and express points of view. Due to the expense of wood block engraving necessary to reproduce such drawings in the 18th century, political cartoons were not commonly found in newspapers of the time. However, engravings highlighting issues and events of the period were popularly sold. The rise of political and satirical cartoons in the United States took place in the mid- late 19th century. Today, political cartoons and satire not only document issues and events, but also serve as important indicators of public opinion and editorial viewpoints.

### **Gathering Information:**

Ask students to read the brief historical overview of the women’s suffrage movement included with the lesson plan and review the suffrage timeline:

<http://www.womenshistory.org/resources/timeline/womans-suffrage-timeline1>.

If time allows, direct your students to the on-line exhibits on the suffrage movement to learn more about the movement and key historical figures:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/pathways-to-equality/gRII8VFM>

<https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/dQLitXeJg0YgLw>

## Procedures:

Working in pairs or small groups; give each pair or group a blank, uncaptioned version one of the political cartoons provided with the lesson plan materials.

After reading and discussing the background information, students will complete the Captioning History Worksheet asking them to identify at least three significant facts about the suffrage movement gleaned from the background reading.

After completing the worksheet and discussing suffrage with their partner(s), students will collaborate to brainstorm a caption for their cartoon based on their understanding of the the suffrage movement. Remind students that political cartoons should ideally use humor or **satire** to express a viewpoint.

Next, tell students that their cartoon will be part of an 2020 exhibit for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment granting women the right to vote. Ask students to work together to write a brief exhibit label (75-100 words) providing context for their cartoon and caption.

Have student groups present their cartoons, captions, and exhibit labels to the rest of the class. As a class, compare student cartoons: How do the captions differ? How are they similar?

## Conclusion

Conclude with a class discussion:

- In what ways do the cartoons reflect individuality on the part of the cartoonists?
- How effective do students think political cartoons are in expressing viewpoints and conveying historical events and situations?
- Do they think that the creators of the cartoons are activists? Why or why not.

Display the students' cartoons and captions in the classroom.

## Optional Extension Activities

1. Students will be assigned the task of sharing a current political cartoon with the class. Over the course of a month, each student brings in a current political cartoon from a newspaper or on a news website on his or her assigned day. The student should be prepared to explain both the current event the cartoon addresses and the editorial viewpoint of the cartoon's creator. After each presentation, have students analyze and discuss if they think the cartoon clearly addresses the issue at hand. In what ways is the cartoon effective and ineffective, and why? Last, have the student presenter and other class volunteers talk about whether or not they share the artist's opinion, and why.
2. Working with an art teacher, students will create a political cartoon that addresses either an historical or current political event or issue. Each student must provide a 50-100 word caption that concisely defines the issue selected.

## Historical Overview:

*I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And, by the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors.* Abigail Adams to John Adams, June 1776

**Did you know:** Prior to the Constitutional Convention, women in three colonies: Massachusetts, New York, and New Hampshire had the right to vote. In 1807, women in New Jersey lost the right to vote which was granted to them in 1797.

While women had discussed equality and the right to vote since the founding of the nation, the Suffrage Movement began in 1848 at the Seneca Falls convention held July 19-20, in Seneca Falls, New York. The meeting was not the first in support of women's rights, but suffragists viewed it as the meeting that launched a national movement and cause. For the next 70 years, suffrage supporters worked to educate the public and lawmakers about the legitimate right of women to vote. Under the leadership of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and other women's rights pioneers; suffragists circulated petitions and lobbied Congress to pass a constitutional amendment to enfranchise women.

One powerful motivation for the growth of the movement was social reform, led in large part by women. Since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century women were involved in reform movements such as Jane Addams settlement house; the temperance movement, Margaret Sanger's push for birth control, Dorothea Dix and the reform of treatment of the mentally ill, and African American leaders like Ida B. Wells, who helped found National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). They quickly discovered that politicians were unwilling to listen to a group who had no legal voice through voting. Understanding that in order to achieve reform, women needed the right to vote sparked a national movement for change and voting rights

In the 20th century leadership of the suffrage movement passed to two organizations:

**National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)**, under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt, was a moderate organization. The NAWSA undertook campaigns to enfranchise women in individual states, and simultaneously lobbied President Wilson and Congress to pass a woman suffrage Constitutional Amendment. In the 1910s, NAWSA's membership numbered in the millions.

**National Woman's Party (NWP)**, under the leadership of Alice Paul, was a more militant organization. The NWP undertook radical actions, including picketing the White House, in order to convince Wilson and Congress to pass a woman suffrage amendment.

In 1920, 72 years after the Seneca Falls Convention, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment giving women the right to vote was ratified by Congress. The victory is considered the most significant achievement of women in the Progressive Era. It was the single largest extension of democratic voting rights in our nation's history, and it was achieved peacefully, through democratic processes.

## **Opposing Views**

Opposing votes for women may seem surprising today, but anti-suffrage views dominated among men and women through the early twentieth century.

Artists created political cartoons that mocked suffragists. Religious leaders spoke out against women's political activism from the pulpit. Newspaper articles attacked women who took part in public life.

In the 1860s, opponents of woman suffrage began to organize locally. Massachusetts was home to leading suffrage advocates, and it was also one of the first states with an organized anti-suffrage group, which led to the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women.

Anti-suffragists argued that most women did not want the vote. Because they took care of the home and children, they said women did not have time to vote or stay updated on politics. Some argued women lacked the expertise or mental capacity to offer a useful opinion about political issues. Others asserted that women's votes would simply double the electorate; voting would cost more without adding any new value. (excerpted from <http://www.crusadeforthethevote.org/naows-opposition>)

## Humor and Activism: Using Political Cartoons to Explore Women's Suffrage Captioning History Worksheet

You have been given a political cartoon focusing on the women's suffrage movement.

1. Does your cartoon address a specific issue or event? If so what?

What evidence did you use to come to this conclusion?

2. Based on the background information you read, list at least three significant facts about the suffrage movement or a specific issue the cartoon reveals.

A. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. List people, objects, and any actions or situations you see happening in the cartoon:

People

Objects

Actions/Situations

4. From analyzing the cartoon, do you think the artist supported the suffrage movement? Why or why not?

5. Based on your discussion of the cartoon; write a caption that captures the artist's point of view. Remember that political cartoons use humor or satire to make a point.

6. Your cartoon has been selected to be part of an exhibition celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 2020.

You are the curator writing exhibit labels. Write a label for this cartoon that captures the interest of museum visitors and tells them the significance of how this cartoon reveals support or opposition to the suffrage movement. You have 100 words or less to teach!

**More about Suffrage:**

<http://www.womenshistory.org/>

<http://www.womenshistory.org/resources/timeline/womans-suffrage-timeline>

<https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/pathways-to-equality/gRII8VFM>

<https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/dQLitXeig0YgLw>