

The Power of Words and Activism: Susan B. Anthony

ac-tiv-ism

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

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It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union. And we formed it, not to give the blessings of liberty, but to secure them; not to the half of ourselves and the half of our posterity, but to the whole people - women as well as men.

Susan B. Anthony after her arrest for casting an illegal vote in the 1872 presidential election.

Grade Level: 7-11

Description:

In the United States, peaceful protest has, for the large part, been the foundation of activism. And, one primary focus of protest for almost 200 years was the secondary status placed on women who were denied the vote until 1920. Coverture was legal in most states into the 20th century. This legal status meant that women could not vote, they could not own property and, by law, her assets were controlled by her husband. There was no recourse because women were **disenfranchised citizens** who did not have the legal right to vote. Although women began advocating for rights as early as the 1770s, it was not until 1848 that the Women's Suffrage Movement officially began in Seneca Falls, NY. For the next 72 years, until the ratification of the 19th Amendment in August 1920, women actively, and peacefully, protested for suffrage.

Short Description:

Considering the Query: "**How do words have the power to act as a momentum for change?**" Students will read the assigned biography and quotes to explore connections between activism and the power of words and ideas. As a class, you will discuss how legacy, words, and ideas can influence change; and compare and contrast the work of Susan B. Anthony, sometimes called the mother of the 19th Amendment, with a 21st century activist. Students will explore the legacy of activism and develop a construct for modern activism using qualities for leadership and successful activism.

Objectives:

Students will consider the Query: ***How do words and ideas have the power to act as a momentum for change?***

- After reading the biography of Susan B. Anthony on the National Women’s History Museum website, reading quotes from Anthony’s writings, and reviewing another source of their choice, students will demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text and discuss how Susan B. Anthony’s actions and ideas are reflected in her words.
- Working either individually or as a group, students will present a logical and cohesive statement connecting historic and modern activists and/or causes.
- Students will compare and contrast 21st activism and messaging with the Suffrage movement and to assess how the significance of actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context. Students will discuss what factors explain both similarities and differences in outcomes or success of the protest.

Pre-requisites

- Students should have basic knowledge of the Suffrage and Civil Rights movements as well as the concept of peaceful activism through protest.
- Read the Susan B. Anthony biography on the National Women’s History Museum website <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/susan-b-anthony>
- Students read Anthony quotes ([link](#)) provided for the lesson.
- Students will identify and read one additional article of their choice on Susan B. Anthony

Procedures

Activity I: Analyzing Words, Ideas and Actions

Getting Started:

What makes protest successful?

- Working collaboratively or individually, students will use logical reasoning, evidence, and analysis of the significant information taken from the assigned biography, quotes and other source materials to support the statement that Susan B. Anthony’s words and ideas are reflected in her actions.
 - **Consider:** from reading her words, what idea do you find the most powerful or persuasive? Students will write a brief statement explaining their view on how Susan B. Anthony’s actions and ideas are reflected in her words and provide one example.
- Working collaboratively or individually, students will present a cohesive supposition statement defining three ways in which the activism of Anthony and the Suffrage Movement as a whole may have influenced modern activists or causes. Students must incorporate and interpret at least two of Anthony’s quotes.
 - **Discuss: What is the most powerful example she leaves?**
- Ask students to compare and contrast Anthony with a 21st century activist of their choice. What do they admire most about the modern activist, her (or his) cause and message? Why? How does the 21st century protest/activism messaging compare with the Suffrage movement under Anthony? Students will present similarities and differences between Suffrage protests and more

modern activism and analyze outcomes. Students must identify at least one statement from Anthony that they believe is timeless and state why.

Activity II: Activism for Change

As a class, review essential characteristics of a good leader created by Forbes; as well as “*Qualities of a good activist/activism*’ ([link](#)). How do these qualities/traits apply when you consider leading or supporting a protest movement or a protest march? What would students add or change?

Tell the students that they are becoming **Activists for Change**.

1. Class activity:
 - a. The class will identify a social issue or cause at the school, community, or state level.
 - b. As a class, they will define the key reason for change. What is the goal of their protest? It can be as simple as bringing their concerns to the attention of leaders or finding a way to enact actionable change.
 - c. Students will formulate a plan. The plan should identify key characteristics of strong leadership and activism.
 - d. Divide students into groups. Each group will be assigned as a team with specific organizational tasks
 - e. Brainstorm necessary tasks to make the protest successful. This can include:
 - What are their key messages and how will they do messaging?
 - Speeches?
 - How will they emotionally and intellectually impact; how do they convince people to join the protest?
 - What about logistics? Where, when, permits? Speakers, getting the word out, keeping it peaceful....

Each group will create a 2-3 power point slides outlining what their team has added enhance the message of peaceful activism/ protest. Combine all slides into a class power point presentation which will persuade others to join the cause. **Open your presentation with the words of Susan B. Anthony.**

- ✓ Using leadership techniques.
- ✓ Cause
- ✓ Purpose
- ✓ Key Messages
- ✓ Images
- ✓ Banners
- ✓ Social media

Assessment/Homework

Use the Activity to assess how well students comprehend the key nature of messaging a cause; creating emotional and intellectual connection and having a clear purpose.

Standards

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1

Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.B

Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.C

Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1.B

Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1.C

Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.E

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.B

Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context

Historical Overview

Subjugation, inequality, revolution and protest have marked world history for thousands of years. And for thousands of years, human beings have fought oppression and subjugation – both violently and peacefully. History gives us examples of campaigns that both changed the geopolitical landscape to those that although unsuccessful, highlighted oppression. Spartacus' uprising, the Protestant Reformation, the Boston Tea Party, the Haitian Revolution, the Storming of the Bastille, Nat Turner's Rebellion, the Hungarian Revolution, Gandhi's Salt March, the Stonewall Riots, Vietnam war protests, Tiananmen Square, the anti- Apartheid movement are just a few examples of struggles throughout history that represent the human need to make their own choices, to be free from oppression in all forms as well as to be given a voice.

In the United States, peaceful activism has, for the large part, been the foundation of protest. And the primary focus of protest for almost 200 years was the oppression of rights for millions of people of color held in slavery and later denied equal rights; and the secondary status allowed to women. Coverture was legal in most states. This legal status meant that women could not vote, they could not own property and, by law, her assets were controlled by her husband. If divorced, the husband automatically was given custody of her children. While many women were teachers, other professions were closed to them until well into the 19th century. In most states, for example, women could not practice law. There was no recourse because women were disenfranchised citizens who did not have the legal right to vote. Although women began agitating as early as the 1770s, it was not until 1848, the Women's Suffrage Movement began in Seneca Falls, NY. For the next 72 years, until the ratification of the 19th Amendment in August 1920, women actively protested for suffrage.

Many of the early suffragists were also ardent abolitionists. Despite the ratification of the 14th, 15th, and 19th Amendments, African American men and women were often denied the rights guaranteed to them by law. In the late 1950s into the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement characterized by peaceful protest and activism addressed the long overdue enforcement of laws.

In the 1960s women activists not only marched in support of Civil Rights, they once again fought for women's rights as they loudly advocated for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Across the nation farm workers protested under the guidance of Dolores Huerta and the UFWA. Protests against the Vietnam War were supported by both young women and men across the nation and became another defining mark of the 1960s—a decade of activism, protest, and change.

Today we see the echo of protest for change in such groups as Black Lives Matter, #Metoo, and the struggle for LGBTQ rights. Like activists for the last two centuries in America they seek respect through protest.

What legacy did the example of over 70 years of peaceful protest and activism did the Suffrage Movement leave? Are the goals of Suffrage Movement echoed in 21st century society?

In her Own Words: Susan B. Anthony

Men, their rights, and nothing more; women, their rights, and nothing less.

Trust me that as I ignore all law to help the slave, so will I ignore it all to protect an enslaved woman

I declare to you that woman must not depend upon the protection of man, but must be taught to protect herself, and there I take my stand.

Independence is happiness.

Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputations... can never effect a reform.

Gratitude never radicalized anybody.

There never will be complete equality until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers.

Forget conventionalisms; forget what the world thinks of you stepping out of your place; think your best thoughts, speak your best words, work your best works, looking to your own conscience for approval.

Organize, agitate, educate, must be our war cry.

Join the union, girls, and together say Equal Pay for Equal Work

The older I get, the greater power I seem to have to help the world; I am like a snowball - the further I am rolled the more I gain.

No man is good enough to govern any woman without her consent.

Oh, if I could but live another century and see the fruition of all the work for women! There is so much yet to be done.

It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union. And we formed it, not to give the blessings of liberty, but to secure them; not to the half of ourselves and the half of our posterity, but to the whole people - women as well as men.

- <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/anthony.htm>
- This speech was given by Susan B. Anthony after her arrest for casting an illegal vote in the presidential election of 1872. She was tried and then fined \$100 but refused to pay.

Essential Qualities for Leadership

In 2018, Forbes Magazine listed the essential qualities of a good leader:

- Sincere enthusiasm
- Integrity
- Great communication skills
- Loyalty
- Decisiveness
- Managerial competence
- Empowerment
- Charisma

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimberlyfries/2018/02/08/8-essential-qualities-that-define-great-leadership/#7abf53d13b63>

Qualities of Strong Activist/Activism

- Believe
- Dreamer
- Perserverence
- Heightened situational awareness
- Emotional intelligence
- Empathy
- Media savvy
- Selflessness
- Responsible
- Listen to other perspectives