

How to Talk to Kids About...

THE CENTENNIAL OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

A Quick Reference Guide for Conversations and Activities with Kids

A Brief History

- * In 1920, the states ratified the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guaranteed women the right to vote everywhere in the country. The Amendment states: "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 sex."
- * Prior to the ratification of the 19th Amendment, some states had already recognized women's suffrage. In 1869, the Wyoming Territory granted women the right to vote. The states of Utah, Colorado, and Idaho quickly followed. Illinois was next, granting women the partial right to vote in 1913, and in 1917, the citizens of New York State amended the state constitution by referendum to confer equal suffrage upon women.
- * Yet, not all states recognized women's right to vote. In 1869, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton founded the first women's suffrage organization to demand the vote for women and to fight for an Amendment to the Constitution to guarantee that right throughout the country.
- * Thankfully, due to overwhelming Republican support, Congress passed the Amendment by the required $\frac{2}{3}$ margin and sent it to the states for ratification.

- * A decade later, Senator Aaron Augustus Sargent, a Republican from California, proposed the “Susan B. Anthony Amendment” to the Constitution to give all American women the vote. It failed to pass repeatedly.
- * Yet the Suffragists continued to fight, enduring great challenges and sacrifices along the way.
- * In 1919, Congress considered the Amendment again. It was a close vote.
- * In order for a proposed amendment to become part of our Constitution, it must receive the support of $\frac{2}{3}$ of the Congress and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the states.
- * In Congress, Southern Democrats, who did not want African-American women to vote, opposed the Amendment.
- * In 1920, decades after the Suffragists began the fight for women’s suffrage, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the Amendment. With Tennessee’s ratification, the Amendment had the support of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the states and became part of the U.S. Constitution.
- * Following the ratification of the 19th Amendment, federal and state governments adopted more laws to protect women’s rights. Under today’s law, American women are protected from all types of discrimination and harassment. We can celebrate that women and men in the U.S. have full equality under law.

One Hundred Years Later...

- * American women are thriving!
- * Today, women are not only voting, but also leading—in politics, academia, business, politics and every other sphere of life.
- * Today, 126 women serve in the U.S. Congress, 91 women hold statewide elective executive offices, and 2,132 women are state legislators. In fact, since 1971, the number of women serving in state legislatures has more than quintupled.
- * Today, women are earning the majority of undergraduate, graduate, law, and medical degrees.
- * Women are receiving a growing number of patents and trademarks.
- * Women own more than 40 percent of small businesses, and the numbers of female-owned businesses of any size are growing at twice the rate of those owned by men.
- * And thanks to innovation in technology, women have more choices than ever when it comes to working and caring for their children.
- * At every level of the economic ladder, women earn 50 percent more than women a generation ago.

Questions and Answers...

Why is it called “women’s suffrage”?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word “suffrage” as “the right of voting and the exercise of such right.” The word comes from Latin “suffragium,” which means a voting-tablet, a ballot, for a vote. In the 17th century, English women adopted the word to represent their fight for the women’s vote. American women soon adopted the word as well. In America, “suffragist” was used to describe members of the women’s suffrage movement.

Why was there opposition to women voting?

In the 19th century, many men *and women* believed that women should stay home, care for children, and not get involved in political or policy matters. Surprisingly, anti women’s suffrage activists (known as “Antis”) were made up primarily of wealthy women who were afraid of the social and economic upheaval that might occur if women won the right to vote. As the decades rolled on, public opinion began to change. Sadly, the original suffragists never saw their dream realized. Before she died, Susan B. Anthony was asked if women would ever be able to vote. She said, “It will come, but I shall not see it. It is inevitable.”

When did the United States recognize universal suffrage?

Even after women’s suffrage was secured, there were still plenty of people who were not able to freely exercise their right to vote. Prior to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, many jurisdictions utilized poll taxes (where you had to pay to vote), literacy and/or citizenship tests, application fees, and other requirements to make it difficult for black Americans to vote.

Fun Activities to Learn about Women’s Suffrage

- * [Download the Susan B. Anthony Scavenger Hunt](#) list from the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum. Help your little kids complete the list. Older kids will also enjoy it!
- * [Download the coloring pages](#), the word search, and the Anti’s alphabet list from the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum for young children to complete.
- * Ask your child to research and then write a short biography of one of the Suffragists, such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Ida Bell Wells-Barnett, Alice Paul, or Lucy Burns.
- * Encourage your child to talk to an elderly relative or family friend who might be able to tell them stories about what it was like for their mothers or grandmothers to vote for the first time and what it meant to them.
- * Remind your child that many women around the world *still* do not have the right to vote. Have your child research this issue and identify places in the world where women are still fighting for suffrage.
- * Watch the School House Rock video “[Sufferin’ Till Suffrage](#).” Warning: It’s a very catchy tune and may get stuck in your head!

* Have your children read or memorize the “Declaration of Sentiments,” written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott to recall the aspirations of the Declaration of Independence. Frederick Douglass said the document was the “grand movement for attaining the civil, social, political, and religious rights of women.”

* Plan to take your child with you this November (or any future election) when you vote!

Further Reading For Kids

* *Camilla Can Vote* by Mary Morgan Ketchel and Senator Marsha Blackburn. Camilla’s class trip to the history museum proves educational and exciting when she’s transported back to 1920, when women’s natural right to vote was recognized by the United States government. (Young readers)

* *Lillian’s Right To Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965* by Jonah Winter tells the story of an elderly black woman on her way to vote who remembers her family’s fight for suffrage. (Young readers)

* *Enabling the People* is a textbook for all ages that contains an informational page for each Amendment, containing the Amendment text, summaries, and a full-color illustration to aid the reader in memorization. (Elementary to middle school aged kids)

* *Who Was Susan B. Anthony?* By Pam Pollack. This book from the Who HQ children’s book series is an easy to read biography of one of America’s most prominent suffrage leaders. While the book glosses over Anthony’s more conservative and Christian values, it’s a good primer on the battle she led for suffrage. (Young and tween readers)

* *Your Vote Counts* by Marytherese Grabowski tells the story of one young girl’s dreams of running for student council, voting, and her patriotic duties as an American. (Elementary aged kids)

For more

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