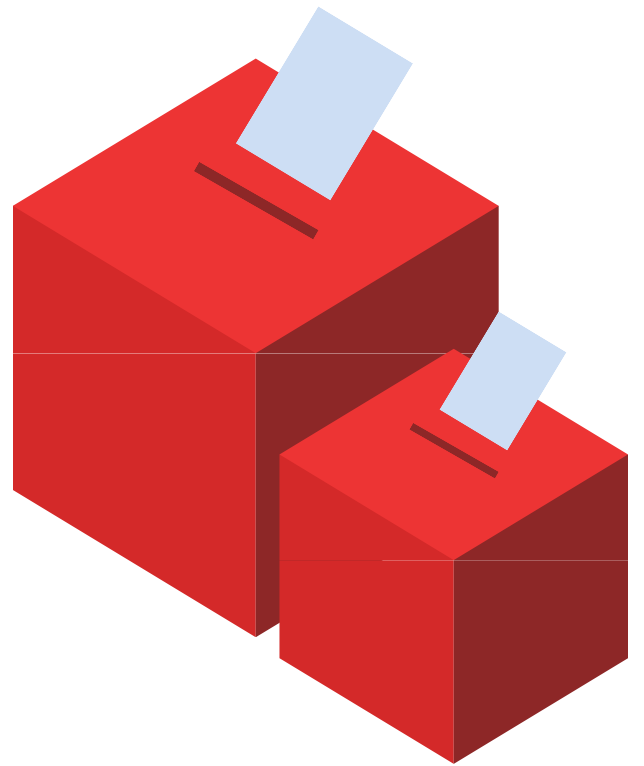


★ 2024 ★

RHODE ISLAND LAW DAY

VOICES OF DEMOCRACY



FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2024

HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM GUIDE



2024 RI LAW DAY VOICES OF DEMOCRACY



The 2024 Law Day theme **Voices of Democracy** recognizes that in democracies, the people rule. For nearly 250 years, Americans have expressed their political views and wishes by speaking their minds and voting in elections. This year's theme encourages Americans to participate in the 2024 elections by deepening their understanding of the electoral process, discussing all issues in honest and civil ways, and fulfilling their civic duty to vote so that government remains responsive to the wishes "of the people, by the people". Let's Celebrate this year's Law Day by lifting our voices to strengthen our democracy.



LESSON ONE - WHY VOTING MATTERS

As citizens of a democratic society, we hold within our hands a powerful tool for shaping our collective future. But what makes voting so important? Why does it matter?

Voting isn't a requirement, but it is our responsibility and our right. It's the most direct way that every citizen can influence government, but many citizens just don't do it. In this lesson, we will delve into the significance of voting, understanding its historical context, exploring its impact on society, and examining the barriers that can hinder participation. We hope that during our discussion today, you will learn the vital role that each of us plays in the democratic process and the power that lies in our ability to cast a ballot.

INTRODUCTION

To start the lesson, ask the students the following questions. Before providing a response, allow the class a chance to answer.

Why is the right to vote important?

Possible responses: Voting gives you the power to create positive change for your community and determine a better quality of life for you and your family.

Why did women fight for and win the right to vote?

Possible responses: Many suffragists argued that the right to vote should be universal, for everyone, and that it was unjust to keep American women from the polls. They also argued that women's inability to vote resulted in tangible economic, political, and social harm to them, their families, and their communities. Many argued that the vote would enable women to be better wives and mothers. The argument was made that voting would allow them to bring their morals and domestic experience to issues of public concern.

What happened when they did?

Possible responses: Beginning in the mid 19th century, several generations of supporters of women's right to vote lectured, wrote, marched, lobbied, and practiced civil disobedience to achieve what many Americans considered a radical change of the Constitution. Passed by Congress June 4, 1919, and ratified on August 18, 1920, the 19th amendment granted women the right to vote. Although this amendment was granted, opposition to suffrage remained popular. Artists created political cartoons that made fun of women, religious leaders spoke out against women's political activism and articles attacked women who took part in public life. Most men opposed the idea of allowing women to vote. Ultimately, women now have greater access to education, more equitable pay with men, the right to initiate and make decisions regarding their own bodies and legal affairs.

Spend a few moments with students talking about what voting means to them.

Consider the following points in your discussion:

What do we vote for?

Possible responses: We vote to help decide who will lead us. We vote to make our voices heard on important issues that affect the future of our state and our country and for changes that we want to see happen. These changes could include building bigger schools or adding new roads. What are some other things that you can think of?

Who can vote in the United States today?

- Review/Discuss the requirements to vote in Rhode Island, See below:
 - In Rhode Island, you must register to vote 30 days before an election to participate. To register (or pre-register) to vote, you must be a citizen of the United States, a resident of the Rhode Island city or town where you wish to vote, and at least 16 years of age (but you must be at least 18 years of age to vote.)
 - You can register to vote online at vote.ri.gov. You will need Your Rhode Island DMV issued driver's license or State ID number, your name as it appears on your Rhode Island driver's license or State ID card, and your date of birth.
- You may **NOT** register to vote if:
 - There is a written court order stating that you cannot vote. (If you have a legal guardian, you can vote unless the guardianship order specifically suspends your right to vote.)
 - You are incarcerated in a correctional facility upon a felony conviction. Once out of prison, your voting rights will automatically be restored if you were registered to vote when you entered the correctional facility. If you were not registered, you can exercise your right to vote when you entered the correctional facility. If you were not registered, you can exercise your right to vote by either notifying your local board of canvassers in writing or by submitting a new voter registration form.

Why would you want to vote?

Alternately, you might wish to ask students why they think people do not vote.

HISTORY

What is suffrage?

"Suffrage" means the right to vote. When citizens have the right to vote for or against laws and leaders, that government is called a "democracy." Voting is one of the most important principles of government in a democracy.

Many Americans think voting is an automatic right, something that all citizens over the age of 18 are guaranteed, but this has not always been the case. When the United States was founded, only white male property owners could vote. It has taken centuries for citizens to achieve the rights that they enjoy today. The 26th Amendment brought down the voting age to 18 from 21. The amendment prohibited states and the federal government from using age as a reason to deny the vote to anyone 18 years of age and over.

Who has been able to vote in United States history? How have voting rights changed over time?

Let's review a brief history of voting rights in the United States.

1789 - Religious Freedom: When the nation was first founded, several of the 13 colonies did not allow members of certain religions to vote or run for political office. Article VI of the Constitution was written and adopted in 1789, granting religious freedom. This allowed white male property owners of all religions to vote and run for political office.

1870 - Men of All Races Get the Right to Vote: The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified. The amendment prohibits states, including those in the north, from denying the right to vote on account of race, color, or prior enslavement. Black men over the age of 21 can now vote as well.

1920 - Women Get the Right to Vote: The 1848 Seneca Falls Convention marked a pivotal moment in the women's suffrage movement, where 300 men and women gathered to advocate for equal rights. Tensions arose over including African American women due to fears of racist backlash. While some states granted women voting rights, the 19th Amendment in 1920 ensured suffrage for all white and black women, yet barriers persisted for African American women in Southern states and for other marginalized groups like Native Americans and immigrants due to these women not being considered citizens.

1924 - Native Americans Become Citizens: It wasn't until 1924 that all Native Americans who had been born in the United States got citizenship. But even after 1924, many Native Americans could not vote because of state laws that restricted them. Finally, in 1948, all Native Americans got the right to vote in local and federal elections.

1964 - Poll Tax Removed: The 24th Amendment prevented poll taxes, which had required people to pay to vote. This removed a major barrier to voting for many people.

1965 - The Voting Rights Act: African American voters received protection from the harsh Black Codes when the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965. This act guaranteed the voting rights that people had been officially given in 1870. It also prevented states from discriminating against minority voters. This helped many minorities -- not only African Americans but Latinx Americans, Asian Americans, and others.

Suffrage - Only a Beginning? Getting the right to vote doesn't guarantee equality for all. What suffrage does is give **citizens a voice**. It allows citizens to make laws and elect people to represent them in government. For groups that have fought for suffrage, getting the vote has not been the end of struggle. Instead, it was just the first stage in getting political and social equality, a struggle that continues today.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES:

How has the right to vote changed over time in the United States?

Ask students to make a timeline of who could vote in the United States at different times. Break students up into small groups and give each one an event from history. You may want to cut up these events into strips and give one to each small group. Have students present their events and form a physical timeline around the classroom. Then ask them to contribute to their own personal timelines. ([Click here](#) to download the timeline handout.)

Who fought for suffrage?

Break students up into groups of 3 or 4. Give each student a biography of a suffragist, so that each member has a different biography. Ask them to analyze that biography using the supporting graphic organizer. Then present on each suffragist, with students taking notes on other suffragists in the second half of the graphic organizer. ([Click here](#) to download copies of biographies and graphic organizers.)



LESSON TWO - VOTING TODAY & FACTORS INFLUENCING VOTERS

How do demographics, race, ethnicity, and diversity affect how citizens make decisions about whether and how to vote?

INTRODUCTION

The changing demographics in the United States, notably the increasing influence of millennials and younger voters, are reshaping the political landscape and potentially altering the balance of power between the Republican and Democratic parties. As younger generations become a larger proportion of the voting public, their priorities and values are shaping political agendas. Issues such as climate change, student debt, and social justice resonate strongly with millennials and Gen Z, prompting parties to adapt their platforms to appeal to these demographics. Moreover, the digital age has transformed the way political messages are distributed and received, further increasing the influence of younger voters.

Politicians must pay attention to the concerns of younger Americans if they wish to remain relevant. Neglecting to address issues important to millennials and Gen Z could result in the loss of a significant portion of voters, potentially affecting electoral outcomes. Therefore, comprehending the values and priorities of these demographic groups is imperative for politicians aiming to maintain their influence and electoral success.

Note for Presenters: *It is not easy to talk about politics in the classroom, particularly when racial, ethnic and religious identities become central topics in a campaign. Involve students in establishing clear guidelines and norms for discussions. Ask them what they need to feel safe expressing their thoughts and ideas and to talk openly about the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of social inequality and discrimination.*

VOCABULARY/KEY WORDS:

To start the lesson, review key terms associated with voting in the United States today. See below for a brief list.

Demographics: statistics used to describe a group of people. Demographic information might include age, education, gender, sexuality, race, religion or national origin.

Republican Party: One of two major political parties in the United States, the Republican Party is characterized by the principles of free market capitalism and minimal government intervention. The Republican Party is widely considered the more fiscally and socially conservative of the two parties.

Democratic Party: One of two major political parties in the United States, the Democratic Party is characterized by the principles of political and social equality achieved through government intervention. The Democratic Party is widely considered the more fiscally and socially liberal of the two parties.

Generation X: The demographic group of people following the Baby Boomers and preceding Millennials. Researchers and popular media often use the mid-1960s as starting birthyears and the late 197-s as ending birth years, with the generation being generally defined as people born from 1965-1980.

Millennials: People born between 1981 and 1998 who became adults around the start of the new millennium (which began in the year 2000). This designation is significant because social scientists, marketers and other people who study behavior sometimes attribute values and behavior to groups of people depending on when they were born.

Generation Z: People born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, succeeding Millennials. Also known as "Gen Z." They grew up in a world full of technology and social media. They care about social issues and like to express themselves individually.

Primary election: An election in which each party selects its candidate for the general election.

Safe state: A state in which voters consistently choose one party over the other.

Swing state: A state in which presidential election results are frequently close. In the United States, most campaigning takes place in swing states in order to capture the electoral votes needed to win the national election.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

To facilitate a discussion, ask the students the following questions. Before providing a response, allow the class a chance to answer.

How are changing demographics influencing U.S. elections?

Possible responses: Demographics may cause more or less people to vote depending on the underlying growth or lack thereof in the economy, people's living conditions and access to education and health care. As populations increase or decline it affects voter turnout and the result of elections.

What obstacles to voting have been faced by various groups (e.g., women, people living in poverty, minority groups, ex-offenders, immigrants), both legally and in practice?

Possible responses: Barriers to political participation can be many. Most specifically, education plays a key role. Without information and knowledge, meaningful participation in politics can be difficult. Social isolation can also affect voting. This is when there is a limited network to support and encourage political participation. Additionally, personal factors when people may have limited confidence or motivation to participate often times will cause a lack of participation.

What reasons do you think someone may give to endorse a candidate?

Possible responses: They may believe they are the best person to hold political office. They may support their ideals or financial interests and/or affiliated institutions. The candidate expresses similar beliefs, ideals and desires as the endorser.

Why might someone choose not to vote?

Possible responses: They may not be registered. They may be without enough information or education to make an informed decision, they have no support or means to get to the poll and or they may feel that their vote does not matter.

What affects voter turnout? And what are the factors that play a key role in going to the polls?

Studies show that in a good year, about 60 percent of eligible voters will make it to the polls for the presidential election. On a bad year, that number can be less than 50 percent. No matter how sophisticated the candidates' campaigns or how positive the messages, there are factors outside the control of candidates that influence voter turnout and have the potential to shape elections. Demographically, older voters tend to vote more than younger voters. Wealthy and educated voters are more likely to turn out to vote than lower-income voters. More specifically, very low-income voters face more obstacles to voting, such as time away from work and adequate transportation, than those with high incomes.

Another factor that affects voting is voter apathy. This means voters are far less likely to take part in an election if they feel their vote is wasted or their voices are unheard. The registration system can also be complicated for people without support. Additionally, it's probably no surprise that the weather can play a role in deterring citizens from voting. Poor weather can have a negative impact on voter turnout.

Reviewing Voting Data in Millennials and Predicting Future Results.

- What percentage of the population in this state do you think was represented by this group 20 years ago? Now?
- Has this percentage changed over time? If so, what was the pattern of the change (e.g., did it change steadily, quickly and why?)
- What percentage of the people in this group would you guess are registered to vote?
- What candidate or party did this group support in the last general election?
- What are the current political interests of this group? What evidence do you have or why do you think these are on the forefront of interest for this group?

According to the most recent data, millennials were the largest generation group in the U.S. in 2022. Their population number approximately 72.24 million. Born between 1981 and 1996, they recently surpassed Baby Boomers as the biggest group, and they will be a major part of the population for many years. According to recent studies, millennial voters are on their way to becoming most of the voting population. The party most supported by this group is democrat and supported Biden in the last election.

The current political interests of this group include equality, tolerance of diversity, social justice and other liberal cultural views, combined with economic moderation.

What conclusions can you draw about the potential impact of this group in the most recent presidential election?

SAMPLE ACTIVITY:

Break up the students into groups of 3 or 4. Ask them to brainstorm ways that they can encourage voter participation in their community. Provide them with the following prompts to facilitate their small group discussions. Allow them 10 minutes to brainstorm, after the time is up, ask them to present their ideas to the class.

Discussion Prompts:

- What specific aspect of voter participation do you want to address(e.g., access to polls, outreach to a specific group, vote-by-mail)?
- How can you influence participation by focusing on this aspect?
- What outcomes are you seeking?
- What specific actions can you take to bring about the desired outcomes?



The 2024 RI Law Day Program Guide is presented by the Rhode Island Law Day Committee comprised of members of the Rhode Island Judiciary, Rhode Island Bar Association, Rhode Island Police Chief's Association, Rhode Island Department of Education, and the Roger Williams University School of Law.