

LESSON PLAN – What does Disenfranchisement Look Like?

Subject: What does Disenfranchisement Look Like?

Grade Level: 6-8

Standards:

USG.1.7 Define and provide examples of constitutionalism, rule of law, limited government, and popular sovereignty in the United States Constitution and explain the relationship of these constitutional principles to the protection of the rights of individuals.

USG.1.9 Evaluate how the United States Constitution established majority rule while protecting minority rights and balances the common good with individual liberties.

USG.2.3 Analyze and interpret central ideas on government, individual rights, and the common good in founding documents of the United States

USG.2.8 Explain the history and provide historical and contemporary examples of fundamental principles and values of American political and civic life, including liberty, security, the common good, justice, equality, law and order, rights of individuals, diversity, popular sovereignty, and representative democracy.

USG.5.7 Explain how citizens in the United States participate in public elections as voters and supporters of candidates for public office.

Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

Computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone

May need paper and pen/pencil

Learning Objectives:

- Be able to define disenfranchisement.
- Be able to describe at least two tactics that were used to disenfranchise voters.
- Be able to describe what is meant by “Jim Crow” laws.
- Be able to describe the purpose of the Voting Rights Law.

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

Disenfranchisement – it is an important sounding word. It is important. The disenfranchisement of citizens of the United States has occurred since the end of the Civil War. Laws have been passed to prevent this. Laws have also been passed that promote it. In this lesson you will learn about some of the history surrounding the right

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to vote and some of the methods used to prevent voting by African Americans and poor Whites.

Body of Lesson:

Watch the video *What Does Disenfranchisement Look Like?* By Dr. Terri Jett (2:14 minutes)

<https://www.wfyi.org/programs/simple-civics/television/what-does-disenfranchisement-look-like>

What is Disenfranchisement?

It is the restriction of a legal right. It is most often linked to depriving people of the right to vote in elections.

Let us look at the history of voting rights.

1776 – Only white men who owned property and were over the age of twenty-one could vote.

1870 – The 15th Amendment was passed. This law said that the right of citizens to vote should not be denied based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. It was supposed to protect the rights of African American men after the Civil War. In reality, discriminatory practices and local laws prevented them from voting. African American women were not included in this amendment.

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fifteenth-amendment>

1920 – The 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote. The same types of discriminatory practices and local laws limited voting to only white women.

1924 – The Indian Citizenship Act was passed which granted citizenship to all Native Americans born in the United States. Before this, citizenship was limited to those with one-half or less Indian blood, or Indian women married to white men, or Native Americans who fought in World War I. State laws often limited the right to vote, even when citizenship was granted.

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-indian-citizenship-act>

1960's – Congress passed laws that guaranteed men and women of color the right to vote in all states.

What is Jim Crow?

Beginning in the 1890's, racial discrimination was accomplished by passing local and state laws. These laws were known as Jim Crow and promoted segregation and

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disenfranchisement. Jim Crow laws were especially dominant in the southern part of the United States.

Laws were passed that mandated the segregation of schools, parks, libraries, drinking fountains, restaurants, restroom, buses, and trains. In legal terms, there was supposed to be “separate but equal” treatment of Black people. Signs identified “Whites Only” or “Colored” (a term used to designate African Americans at the time).

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/freedom-riders-jim-crow-laws/>

Techniques used for disenfranchisement

These techniques were used to discourage Black men and poor white men from voting.

Violence – men were beaten and even murdered to prevent them from voting

Fraud – ballot boxes were stuffed (more common in Southern states)

Poll taxes – men were required to pay all back taxes before they could vote. This was extremely difficult for poor Black and white sharecroppers.

Literacy tests – different ballots were used for different races in one election. The voter then had to put the correct ballot in a labeled box. If a ballot was put in the wrong box, it was not counted. In this system, the voters had to be literate to get the ballot in the right box. Many poor people were not literate.

Restrictive registration practices – voter registration processes were made particularly difficult.

<http://websites.umich.edu/~lawrace/disenfranchise1.htm>

Student Activity

This activity may be best in small groups with a written submission or verbal class discussion.

Students should think about things they have seen or heard in the news about voting rights. Have them discuss examples of disenfranchisement that have occurred in the recent past.

A timeline of disenfranchisement

1868 – The Opelousas Massacre occurred. In Opelousas, Louisiana, over a two-week period, white men killed about 250 people (mostly African Americans). They wanted to suppress voter turnout.

1873 – In Colfax, Louisiana, a group of approximately 150 white men killed African Americans who had taken over the courthouse and were defending it from seizure by the Democratic party after a controversial election for governor. It is not known how many men died. It is estimated between 60 and 150 African Americans died in this struggle.

1890 – Mississippi rewrote the state constitution to establish poll taxes and literacy tests for voters. Other states in the South enacted similar laws over the next few decades.

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1898 – A biracial government was properly elected in Wilmington, North Carolina. A White mob removed them and installed White supremacists.

1944 – The Supreme Court determined that the Texas Democratic Party could not prevent African Americans from voting in the Democratic party.

1964 – President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. This law prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. It was expanded later to add discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

1965 – Bloody Sunday: On March 7, activists scheduled a march to protest for Black voting rights. The march was to go from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, Alabama. Along the way, the marchers were met by a group of White state policemen who attacked them with clubs and tear gas.

1965 – On August 6, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Law. This law prohibits racial discrimination in voting.

2006 – President George W. Bush signed an extension of the Voting Rights Law. The law states “the right of ordinary men and women to determine their own political future lies at the heart of the American experiment”.

<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/05/politics/black-voting-rights-suppression-timeline/>

Student Activity

Hold a class discussion on the right to vote. Students should consider and discuss how they feel about the right to vote.

Is it important to them?

Do they plan to vote when they are old enough?

Do they feel it is worth risking injury in order to vote?

Closure

Political parties (all of them) have used techniques to suppress voting by African Americans over the years. Sometimes even violence was used to achieve the objectives. The right to vote is protected by the Constitution, by Amendments to the Constitution, and by the Voting Rights Act. Yet today we are still fighting to protect and preserve the right to vote for all citizens of the country.

The Extension Activities below provide additional information on the Civil Rights Movement.

Extension Activities

The Freedom Riders were people (both Black and White) who worked for the civil rights and voting rights of Black citizens. They risked their lives for this cause, and some died defending the rights of others. These articles and videos are a tribute to this brave group of people.

Freedom Riders: Threatened. Attacked. Jailed. Could you get on the bus? (video 1:52:28 minutes)

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/freedomriders/>

Meet the Players: Freedom Riders (article)

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/meet-players-freedom-riders/>

Meet the Players: Movement Leaders (article)

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/meet-players-movement-leaders/>

Meet the Players: US Federal Government (article)

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/meet-players-us-federal-government/>

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