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WHO GETS TO VOTE?

Projects for Understanding Civil Rights and Voting Laws in the United States

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Books to Inspire Learning

Who gets to vote?

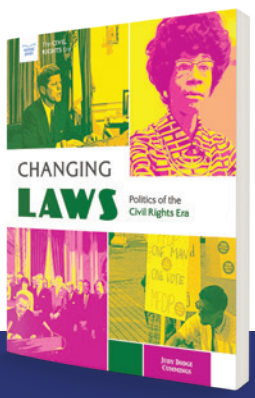
What seems like a simple question is the subject of much debate in the United States and around the world! You might think it's a new political divide, but in fact, the question of who has the right to vote in elections has been around for as long as this country has had elections.

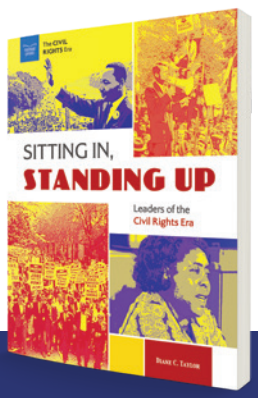
To understand today's political debates, we need to look back at the Civil Rights Era in America. What laws were passed that improved voting rights for all people? Who were some of the leaders who worked at making voting fair? Why is it still difficult for some people to vote?

The right to vote has long been upheld as a critical part of democracy. With the activities in this ebook, kids can practice their critical thinking skills as they discover why!

Check out our Resource Library for more activity ebooks!

nomadpress.net/the-learning-center/resource-library





The projects in this ebook are adapted from books in **The Civil Rights Era** series.

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Civil Rights Act 1964

FAST FACTS

WHAT?

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin.

WHY?

Without a federal law preventing it, rampant discrimination would continue at all levels of society.

WHEN?

July 2, 1964

HOW?

Because of work done by the Freedom Riders and those who took part in the Children's March, among other protests, the federal government created a new law that would protect the rights of Black Americans.

A 2014 commemorative coin honoring the Civil Rights Act of 1964

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How a Bill Becomes a Law

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin, setting the stage for improved voting rights for all. Investigate the complicated process by which the 1964 Civil Rights Bill became the law by reading this case history for the bill from the Dirksen Congressional Center.

senate civil rights 1964

Kids house 17

- **A helpful resource for the legislative process can be found at *The Kids in the House* website.** Use this information to create a step-by-step flow chart to illustrate how the 1964 Civil Rights Bill became a law.

- **Correctly use some of the following political terms on your flowchart:**
  - cloture
  - filibuster
  - petition
  - committee
  - mark-up
  - quorum
  - draft
  - constituent

- **Use the flow chart to teach other students.** How did the proposal President Kennedy made in the summer of 1963 become the law of the land by the summer of 1964?

FILIBUSTER AND CLOTURE

Legislation works its way through Congress on a time schedule. A filibuster is a tactic to run down the clock on a bill by debating nonstop until the time for voting has expired. The only way to stop a filibuster is if two-thirds of senators vote for cloture. Cloture means to end debate and hold a vote on the bill. Do some research on filibusters in history. Why do you think this method was developed? What benefits and drawbacks does it have?

CONNECT

Watch an excerpt of President Kennedy's speech about civil rights at this link. How does he frame civil rights as a moral issue? How were presidential speeches different then from now?

JFK televised civil rights

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Voting Rights Act of 1965

FAST FACTS

WHAT?

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

WHY?

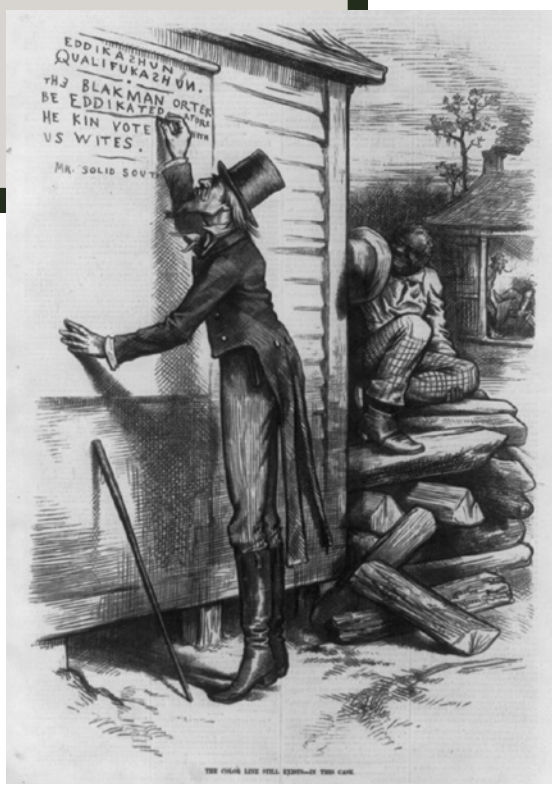
This law outlawed many discriminatory voting practices so African Americans would have a fair shot at voting for whomever they wanted to.

WHEN?

August 6, 1965

HOW?

Protesters peacefully marched to demand voting rights, even as they were subject to a brutal backlash from white Southerners.



The *Harper's Weekly* cartoon shows criticism of the literacy tests given to African Americans before they could vote. What point is the cartoonist trying to make?

Credit: *Harper's Weekly*, 1879

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Packing and Cracking

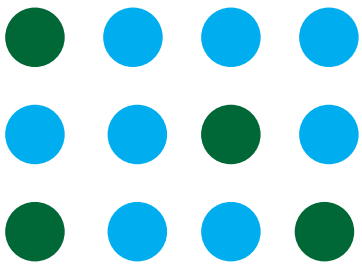
In a democracy, everyone's vote is supposed to count. However, in most states, the political party in control of the state government redraws congressional and state legislative district boundaries every 10 years. These boundaries determine who votes in each district. Politicians usually draw boundary lines to give their party an advantage. This is called political gerrymandering and it is usually legal.
Racial gerrymandering, when politicians redraw legislative district lines to reduce the political power of racial minorities, is illegal under the 1965 Voting Rights Act. However, political gerrymandering has a racial impact.

Watch the video *Gerrymandering: Is Geometry Silencing Your Vote?* and define the terms "cracking" and "packing."

above the noise gerrymandering

- **Prepare to redraw legislative districts in the fictitious state of Gerryland.** This will help you to evaluate the impact of political gerrymandering.

- **Below is Gerryland.** Based on its population, the state should get three congressional districts. Because two-thirds of voters support the Blue Party, political leaders from this party get to draw congressional district lines.



= The Blue Party

= The Green Party

- **Imagine you belong to the Blue Party.** Draw lines to create three districts. Each district must have the same number of voters. Draw the lines in order to give the Blue Party total control of the state.

CONNECT

Read an article about the first Black man to vote in the United States, Thomas Mundy Peterson.

first Black voter

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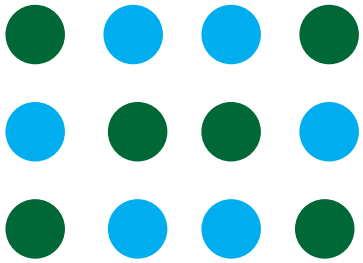
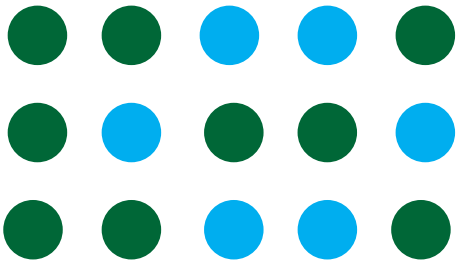
Packing and Cracking (continued)

- **As years pass, some Blue Party supporters move out of Gerryland and more Green Party supporters move in.** Although the population size remains the same, voters are split evenly between the Green Party and the Blue Party. Redraw district lines to "crack" up Green Party supporters into different districts to weaken their power.



- **Ten years later, the population of Gerryland has grown.** Add three new voters to indicate this. Now, three-fifths of Gerryland voters support the Green Party. But as a Blue Party politician, you want to maintain your control over the government. Redraw district lines to pack as many Green Party supporters as possible into one district.



- **Consider the consequences.** How would you feel if you were a voter who belonged to the Green Party? How might political gerrymandering have a negative impact on nonwhite voters, even though racial gerrymandering is illegal? How can you redraw district lines to create a fair division based on population and political party support? What are some possible solutions to the problems caused by political gerrymandering?

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Civil Rights Protests

FAST FACTS

WHAT?

The Civil Rights Movement was a time when Black Americans demanded their full rights as citizens of the United States.

WHY?

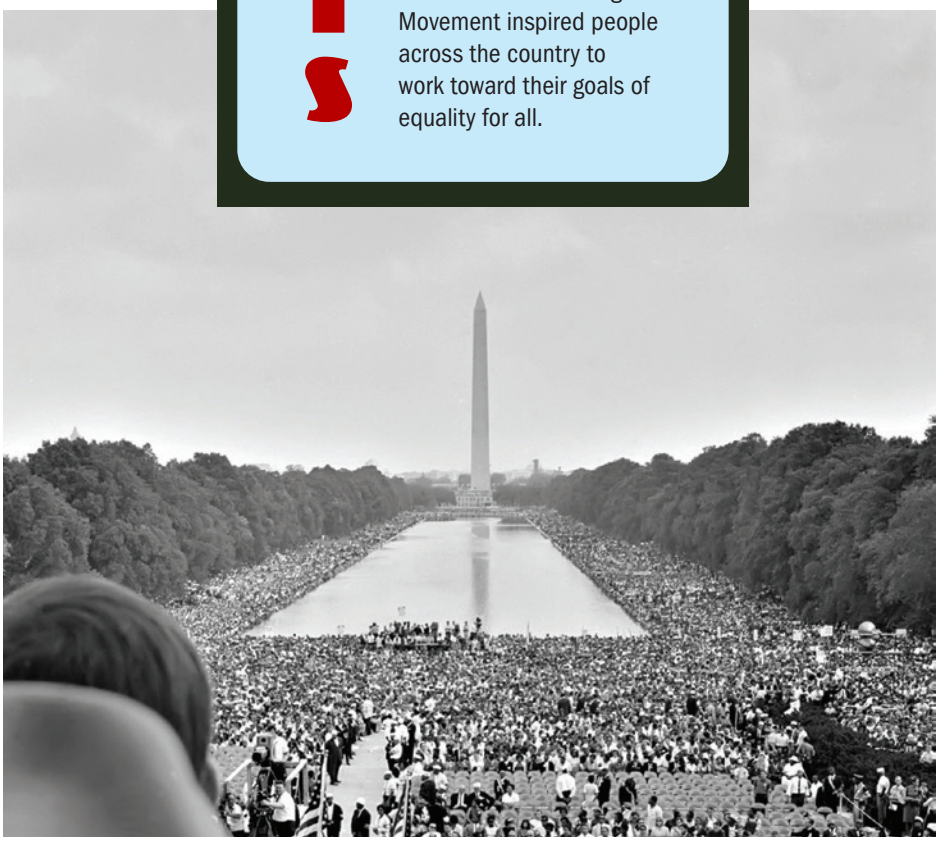
African Americans in the United States had been denied many civil rights, such as the right to vote, to attend college, or to receive a fair trial in a court of law.

WHEN?

From the mid 1950s to early 1970s

HOW?

Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement inspired people across the country to work toward their goals of equality for all.



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Civil Rights Issues Today

For as long as there has been a United States, there have been debates about civil rights. What civil rights issues are people concerned about today? Let's find out!

- **Conduct research on current civil rights issues.** Head to the library or use the internet to find out what people are fighting for or against. Are they the same issues people addressed during the Civil Rights Movement?

- **Use the following questions to guide your research.**

  What three or four civil rights issues seem to be the most urgent today?
  Does race continue to play a part in our concerns about civil rights? Why or why not?
  Does gender discrimination come up as a civil rights issue? If so, how and why?
  What other types of discrimination do people seem to be concerned about?
  Are any laws being proposed to expand civil rights to certain groups of people?
  Are any of these civil rights issues important to you? Why or why not?

- **Choose one issue that you feel is especially important and create a poster or other presentation that expresses your own beliefs about the issue.** Talk to classmates and family members to try to convince them that the issue is important. How does it feel to be a leader?

CONNECT

Environmental justice is becoming known as a civil rights issue. What is the connection between the two? What tool can climate change activists adopt from civil rights activists? Take a look at this video and see if you agree.

Climate One civil environmental

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Fannie Lou Hamer

FAST FACTS

BIRTH DATE:
October 6, 1917

PLACE OF BIRTH:
Montgomery County, Mississippi

AGE AT DEATH:
59

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Cofounder of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
- Organizer of Mississippi's Freedom Summer
- Cofounder of the National Women's Political Caucus

Fannie Lou Hamer at the Democratic National Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey, August 1964

Credit: Warren K. Leffler, *U.S. News & World Report* magazine collection

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Positive Change for Women

The voting rights efforts of the Civil Rights Movement did not mark the first time in American history that citizens demanded access to the ballot. That distinction goes to the women's suffrage movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was a decades-long struggle that ended in 1920 with passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

- **Visit the library or use the internet to research the women's suffrage movement.** The following questions can help you get started.

  Why was the right to vote initially limited to landowners? How did that prevent most women from voting?

  How did the movement to abolish slavery influence women's thinking about voting rights?

  What skills did women learn in their efforts to end slavery?

  When slavery was abolished, why did women believe they might be given the right to vote?

  What were some of the strategies that suffrage activists used to promote their cause?

  Why did it take so long for the Nineteenth Amendment to become law?

- **Compare and contrast women's struggle to gain the right to vote with the Civil Rights Movement.** How might the Civil Rights Movement have been different if women hadn't organized earlier in the century? What would life be like now for women had they never gained the vote?

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Fannie Lou Hamer demanded equal rights for everybody, including women. She was a member of the National Council of Negro Women and cofounder of the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). Both organizations trained women to take leading roles in their communities. Founding members of the NWPC included some of the most important leaders in the women's rights movement of the twentieth century. They included Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005), the first Black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives; Bella Abzug (1920–1998), a U.S. representative from New York City; and Gloria Steinem (1934–), cofounder of *Ms.* magazine, an influential feminist publication.

CONNECT

Watch a short documentary about the women's suffrage movement. How was it connected to the abolitionist movement?

Annenbergclassroom women's right vote

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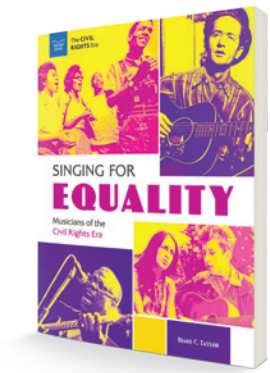
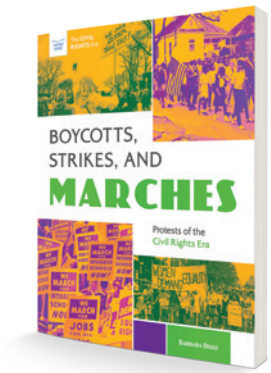
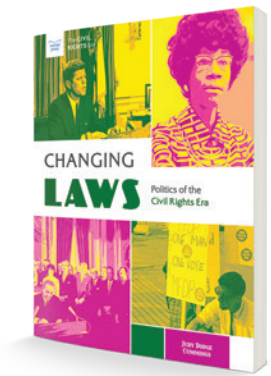
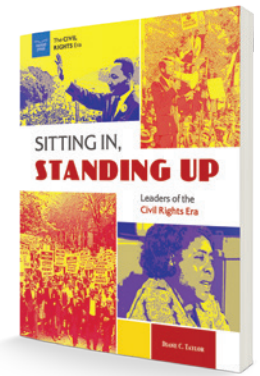
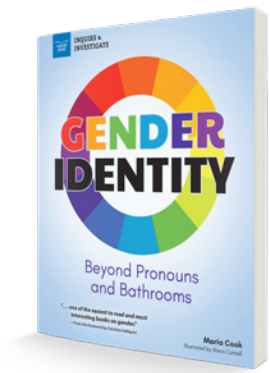
Civil Rights Books from Nomad Press

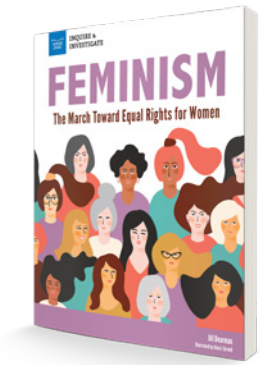


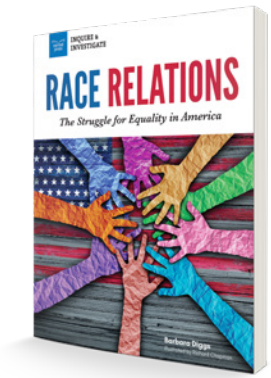


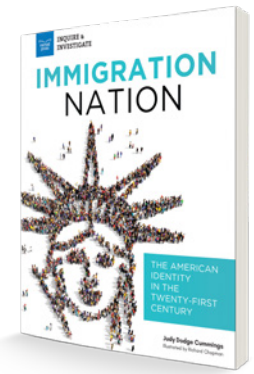


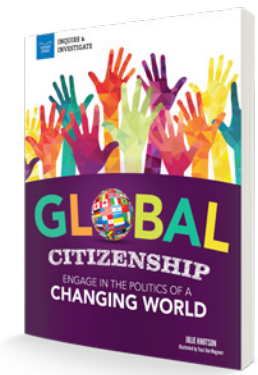


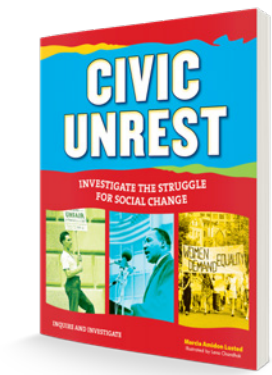












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