

The Suffragist

Educators' Guide for Classroom Videos



Through this set of three classroom videos, examine the actions taken by suffragists in 1917 as they fought to win the right to vote. Students will meet Rebecca, a historical character from Takoma Park, Maryland, who is grappling with the decision of whether, and if so how, she will join the movement. Using primary source analysis and class discussions, students will assess the suffragists' arguments and strategies, and investigate the guiding question: **What did it take for women to win the vote?**

This educators' guide contains critical thinking questions, discussion prompts, and links to a collection of primary sources at Smithsonian's Learning Lab. These resources guide students to explore how the suffragists used the First Amendment freedoms provided for citizens within the Constitution to take action, affect change, and reshape their democracy.



[The First Picket Line – College Day in the Picket Line, February 1917](#). Courtesy of Library of Congress Woman of Protest: Photographs from the Records of the National Woman's Party, Manuscript Division



Learning Objectives

By viewing *The Suffragist* videos and participating in the learning tasks included in this guide, students will:

1. Analyze the contribution of the Silent Sentinels to the woman suffrage movement using primary and secondary resources to engage in a discussion on their strategies and the resulting outcomes.
2. Examine a fictionalized historical narrative to evaluate how suffragists used the freedoms reserved for citizens within the first amendment of the US Constitution to build a movement and affect change.
3. Identify and describe the dispositions and actions of civically engaged individuals in the past using critical thinking prompts and facilitated discussions to create goals for their own civic participation.

Aligned Standards

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS

Historical Thinking Standards (Grades 5 – 12)

- Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision Making
 - 5A: Identify issues and problems in the past.
 - 5F: Evaluate the implementation of a decision.

United States History Standards (Grades 5 – 12)

- Era 7: The Emergence of Modern America (1890 – 1930)
 1. How Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption.

C3: COLLEGE, CAREER AND CIVIC LIFE FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL STUDIES STATE STANDARDS

- D2.Civ.2.6-8. Explain specific roles played by citizens (such as voters, jurors, taxpayers, members of the armed forces, petitioners, protesters, and office-holders).
- D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.
- D2.Civ.14.6-8. Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.
- D2.Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING, WRITING, AND SPEAKING AND LISTENING

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.



Key Vocabulary

Advocacy	Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.
Democracy	The belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves.
Open-air meeting	A purposeful gathering of individuals taking place outside, rather than in a building.
Picket	A person or group of people standing outside a place of work or other venue, protesting something or trying to persuade others.
Protest	An organized public demonstration expressing strong objection to an official policy or course of action.
Speech	A formal address or discourse delivered to an audience.
Suffrage	The right to vote in political elections.
Voting	Exercising the right of suffrage by expressing a choice or preference, commonly done with a ballot.

Assessment

Throughout this activity, students are asked to participate in discussions on key questions to process and analyze the information presented in the videos. These discussions provide an excellent opportunity to formatively assess student learning. This can be recorded using a simple tallying table like the one below. This formative assessment table could be completed by teachers or individual students to tally and record their own progress.

Student Name	Participating in the learning task	Analyzing the key discussion question	Listening to and responding to others	Evaluating historical context	Using Evidence to back up statements
<i>L. Burns</i>	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓
<i>W. Wilson</i>	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Conduct a summative assessment using the *Reflection* portion of the lesson, found on page 10. Suggested reflection questions guide students to evaluate the actions and impact of the Silent Sentinels and identify how individuals today can learn from the lessons of the suffragists. The reflection questions also encourage students to analyze how they want to participate in their communities or democracy and what issues they would like to address. Their thoughts could be recorded and shared through artistic expression, multimedia creation, or written narrative.



Pacing Guide

The learning tasks included in this guide can be modified to be conducted over varying amounts of time. The pacing guides below shows an example of how to run this as a 45 or 90 minute lesson.

Learning Task	45 Minute Lesson	90 Minute Lesson
Warm Up & Introduction	10 minutes	15 minutes
Video 1: Viewing	5 minutes	5 minutes
Video 1: Debrief & Discussion	5 minutes	15 minutes
Video 2: Viewing	5 minutes	5 minutes
Video 2: Debrief & Discussion	5 minutes	20 minutes
Video 3: Viewing	5 minutes	5 minutes
Video 3: Debrief & Discussion	5 minutes	15 minutes
Reflection	5 minutes	10 minutes
Total	45 minutes	90 minutes

Video Instructions

Each of the three videos are approximately 5 minutes long. They can be shown in their entirety or be segmented following the guidelines below.

Video 1: Joining the Movement

00:00 – 01:58	Rebecca’s reasons for wanting the vote
01:59 – 03:33	The Silent Sentinels and public reaction to their picket
03:34 – 05:17	Risks and reasons for joining the Silent Sentinels

Video 2: Votes for Women

00:00 – 01:58	Responding to anti-suffrage arguments
01:59 – 02:58	Public issues and why women should have input
02:59 – 03:43	Reasons for a federal suffrage amendment
03:44 – 05:01	As women are citizens, women deserve the vote

Video 3: Silent Sentinels

00:00 – 01:19	Calling on others to join the movement
01:20 – 03:28	Arrests and treatment of the Silent Sentinels
03:29 – 05:13	Strategies for taking civic action



Historical Background



Woman suffrage wagon, 1870s–1920

For more than a century, women in the United States struggled to obtain the right to vote. In the early 1800s women were culturally and legally subordinated to men. While more men gained the right to vote, women were still barred from the ballot box.

In 1848 a group led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton called a convention on women's rights, where they drafted a Declaration of Sentiments. Based on the Declaration of Independence, it demanded reforms to women's legal status. The most daring was the right to vote. It took decades of fighting for rights to their children, property, money, education, and employment and successfully leading national reform movements before they convinced a majority of American men that women also had a right to the ballot.

As they sought to claim their rights as citizens, women confronted deeply entrenched prejudices against women's participation in political life. Opponents claimed that woman suffrage would lead to neglected children, masculine women, confused gender roles, and prohibition. Suffragists and supporters countered with images of strong but feminine voters with years of experience and contributions as mothers, homemakers, breadwinners, and community activists.

The western states were the first to accept women as voters. To pressure President Woodrow Wilson to support a constitutional amendment giving women throughout the nation the vote, suffragists from the National Woman's Party began to picket the White House. These suffragists, called the Silent Sentinels, became the first people to take such an action. When they began in the winter of 1917, the public tolerated, even admired, the pickets for their dignity and tenacity.

When America entered World War I, the picketing seemed unpatriotic and embarrassing to the government. The suffragists were arrested and jailed for obstructing traffic. Reports of abuse and force-feeding, and the courage of the imprisoned women generated public sympathy and the pickets were released.

After nearly four decades of persistent lobbying and demonstrations, the movement finally won President Woodrow Wilson's endorsement. After a year's delay, congressmen worked quickly to pass the woman suffrage amendment hoping it would be ratified in time for new voters to show their gratitude in the 1920 election.



Woman Suffrage Fan, 1915



Warm Up & Introduction to the Videos

1. Have students closely examine images of suffragists from a Learning Lab collection found at: <https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/vote-for-women-classroom-videos/eCtLoNW1C2cbDG7k#>. Students should use the following questions to help them examine the images. A note taking sheet for this task is included at the end of this guide.
 - What is your first reaction to these images?
 - Who is shown in the images? Where are they? When were these photographs taken?
 - How would you describe the people? What is happening in these pictures?
 - What do the people portrayed in the pictures want to happen? What makes you think that?
2. Explain that students will be stepping into the role of historical investigators to analyze the question “What did it take for women to win the vote?” as they watch three videos from the National Museum of American History. After each video they will have an opportunity to review primary source materials and/or discuss their findings with each other, as they build their case to answer the guiding question.
3. Discuss with students how our modern perspectives can influence how we feel about challenging issues of the past. Today it is difficult to imagine that people only a century ago would have opposed granting women the right to vote. However, students should try to suspend their judgement as they learn how Rebecca and her contemporaries would have felt about and understood this issue.



Photograph: Suffrage Procession, 1917

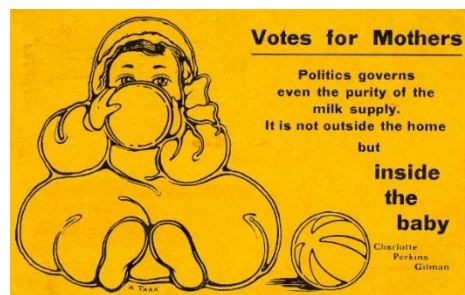


Video 1: Joining the Movement

<https://vimeo.com/258091287> (05:17)

1. Before starting the video, share with students questions to think about while they watch:
 - Who is the main character? How would you describe her personality?
 - What prompted her to want to do something to help women gain the right to vote?
 - What does she fear could happen if she joins the movement? What if she doesn't?
 2. During the video, have students record their thoughts in response to the questions, as well as several reasons why they think Rebecca should join the Silent Sentinels and the risks that come with making this choice. A note taking sheet for this purpose is included at the end of this guide.
 3. After the video, facilitate a discussion with students about the question "When might an individual take a stand on a public issue?" Using the questions below, have students prepare their thoughts and marshal evidence to support their statements.
 - Why does Rebecca think voting matters? Do you agree?
 - Who are the Silent Sentinels? What emotions do you think Rebecca felt as she decided to join them?
 - Would you join their protest? Explain your reasoning.
- The discussion can be structured in a number of ways and used as a method to formatively assess student learning. Suggested formats include think-pair-shares, fishbowl discussions, or a full class conversation. Before getting started, have students establish a set of discussion norms, including:
- Participate thoughtfully and use evidence to back up your statements
 - Be respectful of other people, their opinions, and their speaking time
 - Be open to new ideas and ways of thinking about the topic at hand

Additional primary source materials that connect to the history of the woman suffrage movement referenced in this video are available at this guide's Smithsonian Learning Lab collection, which can be found at this link:
<https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/vote-for-women-classroom-videos/eCtLoNW1C2cbDG7k#>.



Woman Suffrage Postcard, 1913



Video 2: Votes for Women

<https://vimeo.com/258089443> [05:01]

1. Before starting the video, share with students questions to think about while they watch:
 - Who is Rebecca talking to?
 - What arguments is she making in support of woman suffrage?
 - How does she respond to arguments against women having the right to vote?
 - What do you think she wanted to accomplish through her speech? Was she successful?
2. During the video, have students record their thoughts in response to the questions and the two arguments made by Rebecca in favor of woman suffrage that they think are the most powerful. A note taking sheet for this purpose is included at the end of this guide.
3. After the video, facilitate a discussion with students about the question “How does having a well-thought-out argument help a movement be successful?” Using the questions below, have students prepare their thoughts and marshal evidence to support their statements.
 - Why might Rebecca have felt an open-air speech was an effective way to share her message?
 - Did it seem like Rebecca had studied and was informed about the issue? Why would this be important for her to do?
 - What makes an argument persuasive? *Answers might include:*
 - *Not misleading*
 - *Pulls at emotions*
 - *Relevant to the conversation*
 - *Based in evidence*
 - *Addresses multiple concerns, particularly those of the people hearing the argument*
 - Were her arguments persuasive? Explain your reasoning using evidence.

➤ The discussion can be structured in a number of ways and used as a method to formatively assess student learning. Suggested formats include think-pair-shares, fishbowl discussions, or a full class conversation. Remind students of the discussion norms they created earlier.
4. Extension activity: Have students closely examine a collection of pro- and anti-suffrage materials using the following questions. The collection can be found at this link:
<https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/vote-for-women-classroom-videos/eCtLoNW1C2cbDG7k#>.
 - What are the strongest points made by each side? Justify your answers.
 - Do you trust these sources? What might be their motivation or bias?
 - Which side presents a stronger argument? Explain your reasoning.



Woman Suffrage “Objection” and “Answer” Banners



Video 3: Silent Sentinels

<https://vimeo.com/258090364> [05:13]

1. Before starting the video, share with students questions to think about while they watch:
 - Where is Rebecca headed?
 - What will she do there? What will she not do?
 - Who will be with her?
 - What are they trying to accomplish?
2. During the video, have students record their thoughts in response to the questions and describe both the public reaction to the Silent Sentinels and their response. A note taking sheet for this purpose is included at the end of this guide.
3. After the video, facilitate a discussion with students about the question “Were the Silent Sentinels within their rights to picket the White House?” Read the text of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and use the questions below to help students prepare their thoughts and marshal evidence to support their statements.
 - What strategy did the Silent Sentinels use to share their opinions and concerns? Why might they have chosen to be silent?
 - Do you think it was an effective way to protest? Use evidence from the video and primary sources to justify your answer.
 - What did Rebecca say happened to some of the suffragists who participated in the picket? How do you feel about this?

➤ The discussion can be structured in a number of ways and used as a method to formatively assess student learning. Suggested formats include think-pair-shares, fishbowl discussions, or a full class conversation. Remind students of the discussion norms they created earlier.

Additional primary source materials that connect to the history of the woman suffrage movement referenced in this video are available at this guide’s Smithsonian Learning Lab collection, which can be found at this link:

<https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/vote-for-women-classroom-videos/eCtLoNW1C2cbDG7k#>.



Jailed for Freedom Pin, 1917



Reflection and Wrap Up

1. As a class or in small groups, have students consider and discuss one or more of the following questions:
 - The federal woman suffrage amendment, originally introduced in 1878, was passed by both houses of Congress in 1919 and ratified by the states and signed into law in 1920. Looking at this history and what you learned from Rebecca, what do you think it took for women to win the vote?
 - In what ways have perspectives changed about women's suffrage and political participation?
 - How does the Constitution, while not perfect, provide space for citizens to take action, affect change, and reshape their democracy?
2. Individually, have students reflect on the following prompts. Invite students to record their thoughts through writing, drawing or other media, as appropriate.
 - Rebecca, and the Silent Sentinels, demonstrated that history is not inevitable—that it takes informed, committed and passionate individuals to affect change. What are ways that individuals today could take informed, thoughtful, and peaceful action to address public issues?
 - What lessons can individuals working to affect change learn from the Silent Sentinels? How has this history, and Rebecca's story, inspired you?

Suggested Extension Activities

1. Dive deeper into the woman suffrage movement using resources from the National Museum of American History's *American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith* online exhibition. Have students compare and contrast the different factions of the movement and different strategies used to win the vote. (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/democracy-exhibition>)
2. Launch an inquiry analysis that examines the question: Who should get to vote? Have students examine who is, and is not, currently legally eligible to vote, and create an argument about whether the franchise should be expanded, reduced, or remain the same. Students should use evidence to build their argument and share their findings through a panel discussion or in-school museum exhibit.
3. Examine modern movements for women's rights. Have students research women's rights advocacy campaigns over the past fifty years, the strategies used, and their level of effectiveness. Using their findings, have students anticipate what future movements for women's rights and equality might look like.



Images of the Woman Suffrage Movement

Closely examine the images of suffragists. Use this sheet to record your findings.

- What is your first reaction to these images?
- Who is shown in the images? Where are they? When were these photographs taken?
- How would you describe the people? What is happening in these pictures?
- What do the people portrayed in the pictures want to happen? What makes you think that?



Video 1: Joining the Movement

As you watch the video, think about and record your answers to the following questions:

- 1. Who is the main character? How would you describe her personality?
- 2. What prompted her to want to do something to help women gain the right to vote?
- 3. Rebecca is struggling with whether or not to join the Silent Sentinels. As she weighs her options, take notes on:

Why should Rebecca join the Silent Sentinels?	What does Rebecca risk if she joins the Silent Sentinels?

After the video, discuss with your classmates: When should an individual take a stand on an issue?

Use these questions to guide your thinking as you build your argument.

- 1. Why does Rebecca think voting matters? Do you agree?
- 2. Who are the Silent Sentinels? What emotions do you think Rebecca felt as she decided to join them?
- 3. Would you join their protest? Explain your reasoning using evidence.



Video 2: Votes for Women

As you watch the video, think about and record your answers to the following questions:

1. Who is Rebecca talking to?
2. What are the two strongest arguments Rebecca said in favor of woman suffrage? Explain your reasoning.

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3. How does she respond to arguments against women having the right to vote?
4. What do you think she wanted to accomplish through her speech? Was she successful?

After the video, discuss with your classmates: How does having a well-thought-out argument help a movement be successful?

Use these questions to guide your thinking as you build your argument.

1. Why might Rebecca have felt an open-air speech was an effective way to share her message?
2. Did it seem like Rebecca had studied and was informed about the issue? Why would this matter?
3. What makes an argument persuasive? Were her arguments persuasive? Explain your reasoning using evidence.



Video 3: Silent Sentinels

As you watch the video, think about and record your answers to the following questions:

- 1. Where is Rebecca headed? Who will be with her there?
- 2. What will she do there? What will she not do?
- 3. Rebecca describes the public’s reaction to the picket and how the Silent Sentinels responded. As she talks about this, take notes on:

How did the public react?	How did the Silent Sentinels respond?

After the video, discuss with your classmates: Were the Silent Sentinels within their rights to picket the White House?

Use these questions to guide your thinking as you build your argument.

- 1. What strategy did the Silent Sentinels use to share their opinions and concerns? Why might they have chosen this method?
- 2. Do you think it was an effective way to protest? Explain your reasoning using evidence to justify your answer.
- 3. What did Rebecca say happened to some of the suffragists who participated in the picket? How do you feel about this?

