

# Perspectives on Women's Suffrage

## Historical Connections, Lesson Plan 3

**Women,  
Their Rights  
and Nothing Less**

The First Amendment and the  
Women's Suffrage Movement



Students explore how events throughout the women's suffrage movement shaped public opinion about women's role in society and their rights. They conduct research to make claims – supported with evidence – about the impact of individual events on favorable and unfavorable perspectives on woman suffrage.

**GRADE LEVEL:** Middle and high school

**TIME:** More than 90 minutes

**MATERIALS:** Perspectives on Women's Suffrage worksheet (download), Internet access

### PREPARE

1. Make copies of the worksheet, one per student.
2. Review the sample worksheet at the end of this packet. You may wish to distribute it to your students, as well.

### DO

(Note: For more support, see expanded procedure in downloadable lesson plan.)

1. Define "perspective" as a class.
2. Distribute the Perspectives on Women's Suffrage worksheet.
3. Students select an event they believe impacted perception of the women's suffrage movement and complete Part I of the worksheet.
4. In class or for homework, students then conduct research to back their claim. They document their findings in Part II of the worksheet.
5. Remind students that if they find information that weakens their claim, they should not ignore it, but instead adjust their position.

### DISCUSS

Students present their claims and, as a class, make a master list of events. Lead an analysis of their findings. Possible prompts:

- Which events had pro-suffrage impacts? Which events had anti-suffrage impacts? What are the similarities and differences between the events that encouraged a pro-suffrage perspective and those that encouraged an anti-suffrage perspective?
- What events had the greatest impact on perspectives, shifting people toward or away from support for woman suffrage? What common characteristics do these large-impact events share?
- What types of evidence did you find to show a change in perspective? Was it quantitative? Qualitative? A mix of both? Which evidence do you think is the most compelling and why?
- How do individuals today view the issue of women's rights? How have perspectives evolved since the time of the women's suffrage movement? How have they stayed the same?
- Why is it important to understand the impact of historical events on shaping public opinion?

Discuss the idea that perspectives are constantly evolving, and a change in a perspective on one issue that is then expressed by some of the means above can often trigger changes in other perspectives, creating an ongoing domino effect.

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## OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Controversial Issues Today:** Have students select a controversial social issue that is of interest to them. Students research the various perspectives on their issue and write short summaries of the perspective of those against the issue and those who support the issue. These summaries should include explanations of the arguments/ reasons each side cites to support their views. Then, students make a claim about an event/achievement/publication/etc. that they think could change public opinion/perspectives on this issue. They should explain their idea in detail, including how and why their idea would create this change.
2. **Historical Figures Weigh In:** Students select a key person from the women's suffrage movement and write a short essay about how they believe that person would feel about a contemporary controversial issue. For example, what would be Susan B. Anthony's perspective on women in combat roles? What would Alice Paul think about gay marriage? Students should use research about the individual and the issue to make specific arguments in support of their claim.

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### Extended Procedure

1. Ask your students to define “perspective.” A point of view, a way of looking at something.
2. Explain that every individual has a personal perspective that shapes their view of the world. Ask students, what does it mean to say that perspectives can evolve over time? The way you view the world when you are 15 years old will not be the same way you view the world when you are 50 years old. Similarly, but on a larger scale, the way individuals viewed the world in 1776 was not the same as the way they viewed in the world in 1920 or today. Why do perspectives change? New information, new experiences, new technological possibilities, etc. Ask students to share examples of how their own perspectives on issues have changed in their own life and explain why they changed. (This could be as simple as books/TV shows/movies they used to like and no longer do or could range to more complex social or political issues on which they’ve changed their minds.)
3. Distribute copies of the Perspectives on Woman Suffrage worksheet. Tell students that they are going to choose an event from the women’s suffrage timeline that they think had an impact on how people viewed woman suffrage. The impact could be either pro-suffrage or anti-suffrage. Then they will look for evidence to support their claims about the event’s impact.
4. Explain to students that they will be making a claim – an educated guess that they will later support with research-backed arguments – about the impact of the event they select on the public’s perspective on the issue of woman suffrage. In making their claims, they should consider what they have already learned about the movement. As they research, they may find information that goes against their original claim. If this happens, they should not ignore this information, but rather edit their claim to take this new information into account. This is the way historians work, constantly adjusting their arguments and conclusions as new information comes to light
5. In class or for homework, students complete the worksheet.
6. When they have completed the assignment, have students present their claims and their supporting evidence to the class. Make a master list of events, then discuss their findings. Possible discussion questions:
  - Which events had pro-suffrage impacts? Which events had anti-suffrage impacts? What are the similarities and differences between the events that encouraged a pro-suffrage perspective and those that encouraged an anti- suffrage perspective?
  - Which events had the greatest impact on perspectives, shifting people toward or away from support for woman suffrage? What common characteristics do these large-impact events share?
  - What types of evidence did you find to show a change in perspective? Was it quantitative? Qualitative? A mix of both? Which evidence do you think is the most compelling and why?
  - How do individuals today view the issue of women’s rights? How have perspectives evolved since the time of the women’s suffrage movement? How have they stayed the same?
7. Discuss the importance of perspectives on shaping history. Prompts include:

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- Why is it important to understand the impact of historical events on shaping public opinion? *Because public opinions/perspectives, expressed through many different means, shape the course of history. Many of history's changes/evolutions can be explained by changes/evolutions in perspectives.*
- How does public opinion shape the course of history? *Some ideas: elections, cultural expressions such as visual arts or literature, mass media, etc.*
- Why do perspectives constantly evolve? When do new perspectives cause social changes?

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## Example: Perspectives on Women's Suffrage

Look at the women's suffrage movement timeline and select an event that you think had an impact on people's perspectives on this issue. In other words, choose an event that you think convinced people to support the cause of women's suffrage or one that convinced people to oppose it.

### Part I: Make a Claim

**Name of event:** *First Women's National Convention for Abolition*

**Date:** 5/9/1837

### Summary (2-3 sentences):

*Women created anti-slavery groups to discuss abolition. In addition, raise money and create literature to help their cause. The groups gathered together for a national convention in New York City to discuss continuing issues and possible solutions. They decided to "regularly petition state legislatures and the federal government against slavery."*

I think this event convinced people to SUPPORT / OPPOSE (circle one) women's suffrage. Why do you think this event convinced people to support or oppose women's suffrage?

*While this didn't directly promote women's suffrage, it showed the power of the five freedoms in the First Amendment to help give groups a voice — a tool many of the women's suffrage leaders used in the future. At the time, women were not allowed to vote, so this was the only power they had. Additionally, the female leaders and participants of the abolition movement would also play a very important role in the women's suffrage movement.*

### Part II: Research

Find at least three pieces of evidence that support your claim about the impact of this event. Your evidence should be something that proves that after your chosen event, more people supported/opposed women's suffrage. This could be an election or a poll, a photograph, a publication/poster/brochure, etc. Begin by looking at the events on the NewseumED women's suffrage timeline that come after your event, then consult additional reference websites and books if needed. Be sure to list your evidence and sources.

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**Part II:** Evidence that after the First Women's National Convention for Abolition (your event name) more people supported / opposed (circle one) women's suffrage:

**Evidence type (photograph, letter, textbook, scholarly article, etc.):** *Scholarly article*

**Source:** *NewseumED women's suffrage timeline entry "Women Protest Slavery"*

**How does this source support your interpretation of the impact of your event?**

*Lucretia Mott was a leader of the National Convention for Abolition. She used what she learned from that experience to lead the Seneca Falls Convention, including petitioning the government for women's rights.*

**Evidence type (photograph, letter, textbook, scholarly article, etc.):** *Scholarly article*

**Source:** *National Women's History Museum article "The Abolition Movement and Its Leaders"*

**How does this source support your interpretation of the impact of your event?**

*Many of the female leaders of the abolition movement became leaders of the suffrage movement (Mott, Stanton and Grimké). Those that were involved in the abolition movement were also involved in the women's suffrage movement.*