

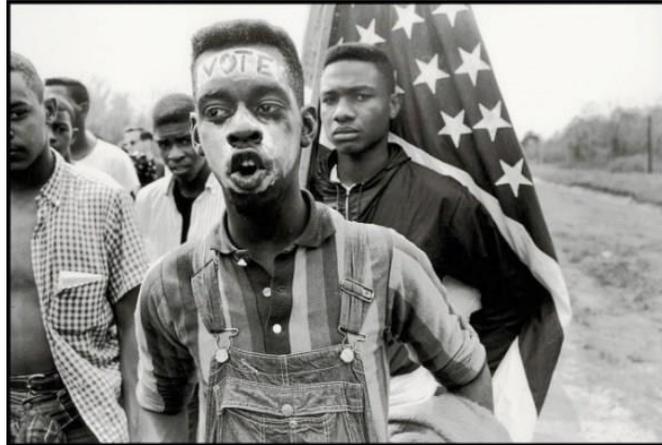
Lesson Plan: Voting Rights, Then and Now

By Rachel Roberson

Lesson opener

Discussion/quickwrite: Start by showing this [this Vox video](#), featured on The Lowdown, about current voting challenges. Does it make you more or less excited about voting? Explain why or why not, citing evidence from the video to support your claim.

(Note: The video's short, but has a lot of information. It may make sense to show it multiple times.



Young activists marching from Selma to Montgomery, 1965
(Bruce Davidson/Magnum)

Student Objectives

- Analyze the history and reasons for the 1965 Voting Rights Act.
- Evaluate the historical and current voting barriers for certain disenfranchised communities, and reflect on how those barriers impact civic participation.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

Is the Voting Rights Act still necessary?

Until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, entrenched racism in scores of regions throughout the South made it exceedingly difficult for large numbers of African-Americans to vote. The new law required federal oversight of voting jurisdictions that had a history of discrimination. Almost immediately, voter participation in black communities increased dramatically.

In 2013, the Supreme Court overturned the federal oversight provision of the law, ruling that such oversight was no longer necessary. Almost instantly (within hours in some cases), a number southern states began to pass photo ID requirements and other voter restriction laws, citing concerns over voter fraud. In the summer of 2016, however, a series of federal court decisions struck down these new restrictive rules in Texas, North Carolina and several other states.

Activity: Voting Rights Act jigsaw and discussion

- As a class, read *Ballot Battles, Part 1: The Voting Right Act of 1965* found in [An Illustrated History of the Voting Rights Act](#) on the Lowdown. (The comic is downloadable.) Make sure students understand the factors that led to the Act, including the barriers black voters faced in the South, and the increase in voter participation following the law's enactment in 1965.

- What specific problems did the Voting Rights Act seek to fix?
- What happened as a result of the law's passage?
- Assign groups or individuals to read ***EITHER Part 2: The Supreme Court OR Part 3: The States***, and then respond to the following questions:
 - What decision did the Supreme Court make in 2013 related to the Voting Rights Act?
 - What are arguments for and against the court's decision?
 - What happened as a result of the court's decision?

Discussion questions

- Is the Voting Rights Act still necessary? Why or why not?
- If you were on the Supreme Court, what is one specific argument you would use to reverse or sustain the 2013 decision? Why would you select that argument?
- Does what you've learned about voting rights make you more or less excited to vote in an election? Why or why not?

Extension activities

- Students compare/contrast voting requirements in two states of their choice using [this interactive map of new voting restrictions](#) from the Brennan Center for Justice. The map is regularly updated to reflect court cases related voter ID and other laws.
- Students brainstorm and share-out ways to get involved in this election, even if they're not old enough to vote (example: get out the vote drives, applying to be poll workers).
- Students make their voices heard on voting rights and other issues by participating in [Letters to the Next President 2.0](#). This national initiative gives youth a platform to express their opinions about election issues that matter most to them. For more resources and examples, see also [KQED's student video project](#), My Backyard Campaign.

Common Core reading/writing standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
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.R.9	Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.