

**Ignite students' interest** by sharing these resources, which demonstrate connections between the past and present. Please be sure to preview all resources.



# Voter Participation

Voting is a fundamental act of participation in democracy. During Reconstruction, African Americans were kept from exercising their right to vote in the South by newly formed restrictions hindering them from registering. Today, casting a ballot is still key to democracy and fundamental to citizen engagement. Why do so many Americans continue to believe the right to vote is worth fighting for?



## Discussion Questions

### 1. What kinds of organization, planning, and action does it take to empower voters to participate in elections?

(Possible answers: Providing accessible and easy voter registration; efficient access to polling stations; personal engagement and conversations with voters to present information and listen to issues that are most important to them; providing easy access to independent information about issues and candidates on the ballot; providing election materials in languages spoken by a community's electorate; opportunities for engagement such as clubs, organizations, and opportunities to work at polling places on election days.)



## 2. Why is media literacy important to informed voting?

(Possible answers: Media and social media play a large role in circulating information about political candidates, issues and the election process; media has the power to influence opinion and behavior; media can be biased, misleading, and manipulated; its is important to be able to analyze and evaluate media messages, subtext, inaccuracies, and the “tools” of persuasion to think critically about the messages you are consuming, source reliable information, and make informed decisions.)

## 3. Is voting important? If so, why do so few people choose to vote?

(Possible answers: Yes; apathy or lack of trust in the majority two party system; lack of information about ballot issues, candidates, where to vote, or how to find such information; voter suppression; economic barriers such as the need to change work schedules or find someone to cover work shifts to vote in person; campaigns and candidates that do not reflect or address the needs, values, or concerns of voters.)

**Share the online resources below with your class to stimulate discussion on these questions. Be sure to preview the clips before showing or sharing them in class to ensure the content is appropriate for your students.**

# Links to Resources



## Video



### Suffragette

Some suffragettes believed that the right to vote could only be won with deeds, not words. They used violent and non-violent direct action to gain attention to their cause. Share this preview with students. Invite them to discuss how these women are portrayed and their motives for seeking the vote. Were their actions justified? (Warning: scenes show violence, assault, and looting.)

### Selma

Share this clip with your students and invite them to discuss the arguments put forth by the actor playing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for why African Americans should risk imprisonment, their safety, and their lives for the right to vote.

### Election

In this clip, a highly competitive student finds out one of her classmates is running for office against her. Invite your students to watch this scene and discuss some of the issues around elections which she expresses—for example, the roles of name recognition, wealth, appearance, gender, popularity, and fame in elections.

## **Milk - Harvey Meets Cleve Jones**

In this clip, activist Harvey Milk, who would go on to become the first openly gay person elected to public office in California, meets Cleve Jones. Jones founded the largest and most influential memorial project and advocacy organization for HIV/AIDS. Milk entreats Cleve to register to vote. Invite students to watch the clip and discuss Harvey's argument for why Cleve should become politically involved. (Warning: smoking, strong language at 0:33, adult content)

## **Surge**

Women ran and were elected in record numbers in 2018. Share this trailer with students to generate discussion about what values the women in the documentary champion. If "No one invited us to this table", what do these women feel it is their responsibility to do?

## **Suppressed: The Fight To Vote**

Share these stories of individuals who experienced voter suppression in the state of GA during the 2018 election. Invite students to discuss some of the difficulties the individuals faced at the polls.

## **Why Americans Don't Vote (and What to Do About It)**

This video shares many graphs and statistics of why Americans tend not to vote. Discuss with students what they believe would be the most useful tool in getting more Americans to the ballot.

## **First Time Voter**

In this short clip, share with students how to register to vote.



# Media

## **"I Give You Power," by Arcade Fire Featuring Mavis Staples**

Invite students to discuss the meaning of these lyrics in the context of democracy.

## **Why Voting Is Important**

Students are able to read through several reasons why voting is important to our democracy and how voting rights have changed throughout U.S. history.



# Websites

## **The Sentencing Project**

Over six million Americans cannot vote due to felony convictions. Copy and paste this URL into your browser. Invite your students to explore this website to generate discussion about whether someone who has been convicted of a felony and who served their sentence(s) should be allowed to vote.

## **866 Our Vote**

Invite students to explore this website and discuss why it is important to ensure that all voters have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process.

## **Vote 411**

Copy and paste this URL into your browser. Share the website with your students to find voter registration information, election dates, polling places, who and what is on the ballot in their communities, and more.

## **League of Women Voters**

Since 1920, the nonpartisan League of Women Voters has worked to empower voters by helping to pass legislation aimed at achieving equity and to benefit the whole of our democracy. Invite students to explore their website and discuss their priorities and impact.

## **CIRCLE**

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement is a non-partisan organization focused on understanding and increasing equitable civic engagement of youth. Invite students to explore their website, research areas, and discuss their learning. Ask them why voting among young people in particular is so important.

## **Healthy Democracy**

Some states have adopted citizen's initiative reviews, where voters across gender, ethnicity, party, and voting history examine ballot measures and draft fact-based primers on ballot issues and best reasons to vote for and against those issues for their fellow voters. Invite students to explore this site, watch the video, and discuss whether initiatives like this might be helpful for voters. Why or why not?

## **Meme Generator**

Invite your students to create a meme using text and images encouraging young people to vote.

