

# Teacher Toolkit

## League of Women Voters Minnesota: *Your Vote Your Voice*

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### Project Overview

Your Vote Your Voice is a project of the League of Women Voters Minnesota and twelve partner organizations generously funded by the Joyce Foundation. This site is intended to be a resource for high school students outlining brief histories of marginalized communities and their ongoing struggles to attain full citizenship.

Your Vote Your Voice defines full citizenship as requiring equal civil, political, and economic rights. The website acknowledges these rights as necessary and interconnected components of citizenship that allow voices to influence political and social life. This project primarily focuses on voting rights while incorporating a framework of full citizenship.

The website contains a wealth of written content as well as filmed interviews. In addition to having a national focus, the site also highlights the stories of Minnesota.

### Purpose

1. To show the histories of the attainment of citizenship and voting rights of communities whose histories are not represented in the mainstream.
1. To encourage students to reflect upon and discuss the connections between the past and present, and how such themes overlap and continue in the future.
2. To spark conversations on the politics of identity-making.
3. To motivate younger generations to take action in their respective communities and in different levels of government.

The website was designed to be used by high school students who are taking a class in U.S. history, government or civics. The communities highlighted in YVYV are: American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Latinx and Hispanic Americans, People of African Heritage, People with Disabilities, and Women. The “Women” section focuses on the women’s struggle to gain voting rights, including content on both the suffrage movement and when different communities’ of color won the right to vote.

Your Vote Your Voice is a unique educational tool that incorporates cumulative histories with interactive features, along with glossaries, sources, and discussion questions within each topic section. The website focuses on voting rights and the fight for citizenship from the beginning of American history to the present day while introducing the concept of intersectionality in a contextual manner.

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Through the use of interactive platforms for student contributions, the website aims to facilitate reflection and civic engagement. While the website holds a national focus, it also highlights Minnesota's histories.

### Navigation

Your Vote Your Voice seeks to connect the history of voting rights and the fight for citizenship with current and future issues. Therefore, it paints history with strokes of a broad brush, but still attempts to highlight nuances relating to identity.

To make navigation easy for both teachers and students, the website is split into three sections, each with their own subcategories: past, present, and future.

### PAST

- Communities
  - This section of the website focuses on the history of colonization and slavery. It points to struggles of citizenship and disenfranchisement. The stories are presented through the lenses of different communities to highlight the separate, simultaneous and/or interconnected movements related to the fight for citizenship and voting rights.
- Issues
  - This section covers historical barriers to enfranchisement, such as age, immigrant status, military service, and felony convictions. Each individual issue is given a narrative that analyzes how various communities and identities are impacted by a system that disenfranchises them. It encourages student examination of historical tools of voter suppression.
- Timelines
  - By explaining important events, this section illustrates paths toward enfranchisement. Timelines are useful to give students chronological overviews of different movements toward citizenship and voting rights. Links to more in-depth content are included throughout the timelines.
- Videos
  - The website includes a handful of filmed interviews to supplement written material. Videos include personal narratives and professional interviews.

### PRESENT



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- Communities
  - This section mirrors the past section, but focuses more on organizing and issues pertaining to the present.
- Issues
  - Students are encouraged to examine the historical roots and broader context associated with issues pertaining to voting barriers, including systemic racism. A sub-section identifies sixteen to seventeen year olds as one of these groups; students may find this section useful because it relates directly to their lives.
- Videos
  - The videos feature a broad range of interviews, including student activists discussing what voting means to them, community members telling stories of their struggles with citizenship, and young organizers resisting power structures and empowering people to use their voices.

### FUTURE

- This section aims to spark conversations related to the struggles of different communities. Topics will connect the themes from the “past” and “present” sections to the “future.” A blog will be added Fall 2016 to feature articles, thoughts and discussion questions related to these topics. The “future” section will provide a space for comments and student submissions in an effort to be an interactive platform for students to use their voices.
- The website facilitates engagement, containing links throughout to other segments of the page to foster deeper thinking and reflection. A main goal is to demonstrate the connections between the past and the present, including reflecting upon structural injustice.
- In addition, this section will provide resources related to voting while also discussing the impact of America’s changing landscape pertaining to voting rights.

### How to Use It

The website is designed to be used both inside and outside of the classroom. It can be integrated into your lessons in a variety of ways, here are a few examples:

- Share the URL with your students to encourage them to use it as a resource
- Subscribe to us on YouTube (search for the “Your Vote Your Voice” channel) and choose a video to share during class (URL: <http://goo.gl/qGdQCp>)

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- Look to the site map found on the website footer to determine what content you might incorporate into your curriculum
- Utilize the unique Minnesota focus of the website to help your students learn about their own communities
- To add more depth and critical thinking to your lesson, incorporate the “intersectionality” sections of the website
- Encourage your students to respond to the material. Do your students have their own stories to share? We welcome student reflection pieces that include photography, written word, music, video and more. We will include such publications on in the “Future” section.
- Give us your feedback on how we can make it a better resource.
- Contact [yourvote@lwvmn.org](mailto:yourvote@lwvmn.org) if you have students interested in creating a larger project that incorporates and/or adds to the website content.

### **In a History Classroom**

History is traditionally taught from one perspective: mainstream white society. By doing so, it excludes the voices of people of color, and their struggles and contributions to American society. Many communities are not incorporated into history texts and classrooms even though such groups are an important part of American history.

Your Vote Your Voice describes voting rights and citizenship in the United States by incorporating the perspectives and histories of marginalized communities into a historical narrative. Through integrating Your Vote Your Voice in a history classroom, a more comprehensive and accurate narrative of the fight for citizenship and voting will be shown.

The website draws connections between the issues of the past and their impact on the future, in the hope students will achieve a more holistic understanding of history with an appreciation of the complexity of present day political issues. Opportunities for student engagement allow students to take control of their own education and complete projects demonstrating their understanding. The “Future” section hopes to further spark conversation by displaying students’ perspectives and responses.

### **Potential Projects or Assignments:**

- Have your students pick an activist - either listed on the website or added by the student and write a report on that activist. What affect did they have on history? How and why did they become an activist? What challenges did they face in their work? Who opposed them? This report could be written content or in video form.



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- Write a speech as one of the lesser-known leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. Some examples include Diane Nash, Bayard Rustin, Rev. T.J. Jemison, Daisy Bates, Ella Baker, and Rev. C.K. Steele, among many more. Persuade your audience that they should become active in the movement.
- Try to choose a specific movement, like Baton Rouge or Tallahassee, from which your student has to find an activist. This speech can be delivered in video form, read aloud to the class, or on paper.
- Simulate an activist training at a place like the Highlander Folk School (a school where activists such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis and others were trained in grassroots organizing in Appalachia and the South; it was similar to Wellstone Action in MN today). Have your students lead a citizenship class or a grassroots training exercise. The students identify and create the curriculum (this demonstrates their understanding of Highlander's function and goals) and take on the roles of teachers and students. After the simulation, have a class-wide discussion on how these trainings affected the Civil Rights Movement. This can be done as a class, or in multiple groups.
- Find a partner and each of you choose an activist from different times and movements. Simulate a conversation between the two activists. This can be done as a script, a screenplay, a roleplay, or a film. What would these two activists discuss? How do their movements differ? In what ways do they connect? How might they work together if they had lived in the same time period? Reflecting on this conversation, how does resistance play out in different points throughout history?

### **In a Government/Civics Classroom**

The Minnesota social studies standard states that “the civic identity of the United States is shaped by historical figures, places, and events,” and that “The United States is based on democratic values and principles that include liberty, individual rights, justice, equality...common good, and minority rights.” Therefore, the past and present sections of the website are both important aspects of the study of civics and government.

Your Vote Your Voice allows students to see the connection between historical events and current issues. By focusing on voting rights, particularly those for historically marginalized groups, young students can begin to understand the power of their voice and discover the ways that they can become involved as citizens. Civic engagement is a vitally important aspect of participating in society. The website allows students to follow the history of voting rights and citizenship to realize how the past affects their right to vote today.

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Your Vote Your Voice presents a unique opportunity for government and civics classes as the “Future” section of the website attempts to engage students with current issues. Students can create videos, podcasts, articles, etc. that relate to voting rights of the past, present, or future. The platforms allow the students to take control of their own education and complete projects to show their understanding of citizenship and voting rights.

### Potential Projects or Assignments:

- Students identify an issue on the “Present” part of the website that is important to them, connect it to public policy, and identify “civic actions” .
- In government classes, students study the Constitution. For this project, suggest they utilize the “Past” and “Present” sections of the website to understand how those left out in the Constitutional process still face disenfranchisement and discrimination today because of decisions made at the Constitutional Convention.
- Compare the struggles of one group of Americans, like Asian Americans, to another, like Latinx. What made these struggles different? Were there any similarities? What was unique about the situations of these different communities?
- Simulate an activist training at a place like the Highlander Folk School (a school where activists such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis and others were trained in grassroots organizing in Appalachia and the South). Have your students lead a citizenship class or a grassroots training exercise. Pick one protest strategy the student can teach, like registering to vote, or sit-ins, or perhaps more policy-based. The students come up with the curriculum, take on the roles of teachers and students, and present to the class. After the simulation, have a class-wide discussion on how these trainings affected the Civil Rights Movement. This can be done as a class, or in multiple groups. If the student (or the teacher) wants to add another level of research, he or she can research how trainings like these are organized today (there is at least one example in Minnesota, Wellstone Action).
- Create a rendering of an activist highlighted on the website. This is open to interpretation, it could be a painting or drawing, but the student must use research on the activist to justify their interpretation.
- Write a newspaper article as an activist, or even a social media post for more recent campaigns. There were many magazines and newspapers devoted to furthering the cause of civil rights. Some examples include *Women’s Era*, where women from the Black women’s clubs would write in to stay connected to one another, or the *Wilmington Advocate*, an abolitionist paper written by Alice Dunbar Nelson and her husband. The student has to do research on the lives of the activists involved in these publications and try to write as them.

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- Taking the previous exercise a bit further, your class could create your own classroom publication. This could include anything from writing to drawing, and would allow each student to contribute something unique.

### Why Should You Use It In Your Classroom?

It is imperative for students to understand American history so that they can begin to reflect upon on their own identities and engage with the current American reality. Studying the history of marginalized groups and their struggles to become full citizens in America is integral to American history and identity.

Voter turnout rates for young people are consistently low; by utilizing the information and tools on the website, students can learn and become civically engaged at a crucial point in their lives. Your Vote Your Voice hopes to spark important conversations and give students a platform to reflect and engage on important topics.

Contact us at [yourvote@lwvmn.org](mailto:yourvote@lwvmn.org) or contact Liz Haan directly at [lhaan@lwvmn.org](mailto:lhaan@lwvmn.org) with questions, a request for a staff member to visit your classroom to present the website, or to include your students' work on our site.



YOUR VOTE  

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YOUR VOICE