



NC State Capitol | 984.867.8342 | [historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/north-carolina-state-capitol](https://historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/north-carolina-state-capitol)  
1 E. Edenton Street | 4624 Mail Service Center | Raleigh, North Carolina 27699

## Let's talk about the history of voting - and voting today!

### Overview

Voting is a very basic right of American citizens. America is a representative democracy, where individuals vote to elect people to serve in government positions. Voting is a way to guarantee personal rights and that the voices of individuals are heard and respected. But - who votes in elections today is very different from who was allowed to vote 200, 100, and even 60 years ago! This lesson explores the evolution of voting using the lens of North Carolina and the State Capitol. It also explores facets of modern elections. You have the option to teach the lesson by conducting a mock election. This lesson plan includes a ballot and an optional campaign poster activity.

### Grade

3rd, 4th, & 5th grade

### NC Essential Standards

- 3.H.2.1: Explain change over time through historical narratives
- 3.C&G.2.1: Exemplify how citizens contribute politically, socially and economically to their community
- 3.C&G.2.3: Apply skills in civic engagement and public discourse
- 4.H.2.1: Explain why important buildings, statues, monuments and place names are associated with the state's history
- 5.C&G.2.3: Exemplify ways in which the rights, responsibilities and privileges of citizens are protected under the United States Constitution
- 5.C&G.2.4: Explain why civic participation is important in the United States

### Objective & Statement of Learning Goals

At the end of this lesson (which could be divided easily into several lessons), students will have historical and modern context for voting and enfranchisement in North Carolina; this lesson also stresses civic participation and teaches the act of voting.

### Materials

- For Historic Information section, photographs (**SEE IMAGES**) are found at the end of lesson
- For mock election activity, the **BALLOT** for printing is found at the end of the lesson

### Duration

60-90 minutes

### Procedure

Before lesson, review **Historic Information** found beginning on page 4. This information can be inserted into the lesson beginning with the question “Have all grownups always been allowed to vote?”

Begin lesson by Introducing key terms for discussion:

- *The North Carolina State Capitol* - where laws of North Carolina were passed from 1840 -1961
- *Citizen* - a person who lives in a particular area
- *Vote* - to formally declare your choice
- *Suffrage* - the right to vote
- *Election* - a specific time when you vote for your choice
- *Polling place* - building where voting takes place during an election

Begin the lesson with a writing prompt:

- Before introducing the history and discussion of voting, have students respond in writing to the prompt, “What I Know about Voting.” Allow students to write this information in any form they choose, paragraphs, lists or graphs. This information will be a guide to the discussion, so it's important to do this writing before any reading or discussion about the voting process.
- Say “Respond to the prompt ‘What I Know About Voting.’ Write down anything you know about voting or the right to vote.”
- After the writing prompt is complete, discuss what everyone knew about voting prior to today.

Begin discussion with these questions and answers:

- *What does it mean to vote?*
- People who vote are making an important decision. Do you ever work with a group of people to decide something? What if your family can't decide what to eat for dinner? You take a vote! Pizza or mac and cheese? What if your friends can't decide what game to play during recess? You take a vote! Tag or duck, duck, goose? Each person in the group votes for their choice and together you decide a winner.
- *When you are voting in an election, what are you doing?*
- As a citizen, voting is an important right. People who vote send candidates to serve in different positions in government. Often you might vote for someone who shares your values or has similar life experience as you. It's a way you choose who represents you, or speaks for you, in government. In a state election, you are voting to send people to Raleigh to the General Assembly to make laws or the Governor's office to sign bills into law. These people make the laws that govern our state.
- *Who can vote?*
- Grownups who are 18 and older can register in their community and choose new leaders. They could be choosing a mayor of a city, the governor of the state, or the president of the country.

- *Have all grownups always been allowed to vote?*
- No! Over the history of our country, the people who were allowed to vote have changed many times. In the days of George Washington and our Founding Fathers only adult white men who owned property were allowed to vote. That left out a lot of people! When the NC State Capitol opened in 1840, only white men were allowed to vote. Before the Civil War, people who weren't wealthy white men fought hard for the right to vote. This included women and African American men. Why would they want this right? Because if you are involved in choosing who represents you then the laws will be more in your favor. After the Civil War and emancipation, African American men were allowed to vote. But southern states passed laws that discriminated against African Americans, designed specifically to keep them from voting and holding public office. So it wasn't until the Civil Rights movement that all grown-ups, regardless of race, were allowed to vote. Women gained the right to vote in 1920, when an Amendment - or change - to the US Constitution was passed.
- Continue with as much or as little discussion of the history of voting (**SEE HISTORIC INFORMATION BELOW**).
- During the discussion of the history of voting, make sure to emphasize the following groups and when they were or were not allowed the right to vote:  
African American men  
Women  
All African Americans

Following Historic Information discussion, continue questions with:

- *What actually happens when people vote?*
- On Election Day (which is a special day set aside for voting), people go to special spots called "polling places." These locations are designated in advance by the community. They could be a public library or the gym of a school or a multipurpose room at a church. People go to these places to vote for leaders in their community. Inside the polling place there are voting booths and ballots. When they arrive, people tell the workers who they are, usually signing a piece of paper to confirm their identity. Once their identity is confirmed, they are given a ballot. The ballot has their voting choices on it - choices for each race in which that voter is eligible to vote. Their ballot could be a piece of paper or it could be the screen on an electronic device. Once they have their ballot, the voters take it into a voting booth. Voters stand separately in different voting booths because ballots are secret. Voting is done by secret ballot, which means you don't have to tell anyone who or why you are voting for a specific candidate. Inside the voting booth, they read the choices for each office and vote for a choice in each race. Voters do not have to make a choice in every race - they can fill in as much or as little of the ballot as they choose. When they are done with their ballot, voters turn the complete ballot in. If it's an electronic screen, that might be done by hitting "submit." If the ballot is paper, it's put in a ballot box to keep it private and anonymous and to be counted. After all the votes have been counted, new leaders are chosen in each contest.

- *Emphasize that voting is a personal choice and also that ballots are secret.*
- *Shh! When you vote, your ballot is a secret! A secret ballot is a type of vote where the voter's choice is anonymous. This means you don't have to tell anyone who you voted for. Your ballot is secret to make it more difficult for people to bribe you or intimidate you into changing your vote.*
- *Let's review the history of voting and how voting is done today.*  
 Anyone who is a citizen can vote today.  
 Not everyone was always able to vote. Remember especially when African American men, women, and all African Americans gained the right to vote.  
 When people vote, they are making an important choice for their community.  
 Citizens vote for leaders like mayor, governor, or president.  
 Election Day is a special day meant for voting.  
 Citizens go to polling places to vote.  
 At polling places citizens cast ballots to vote.  
 Ballots are secret.  
 When the votes are counted, a new leader is chosen!

### Historic Information

**(When discussing historic information, use the images provided below)**

The groups of people who have held the right to vote have changed over time. In the United States, voting began as a right for white, protestant land-owning men. Anyone not in that group has fought for the right to vote over the years. The Founding Fathers promoted only white male suffrage. "Suffrage" is the right to vote.

In North Carolina, when Raleigh was founded to be the capital city of our state in the 1790s and in the first State House in downtown Raleigh (**SEE IMAGE 1**), only white men who owned property were allowed to vote, or come to Raleigh and make laws. When the NC State Capitol (**SEE IMAGE 2**) first opened in 1840, it was where all the laws in the state were passed, but when it came to voting, not much had changed. It was still only white men who came to Raleigh to make the laws in the Capitol.

Women fighting for the right to vote

- By the 1840s, women were demanding the right to vote.
- In July of 1848, a convention for women's rights was held at Seneca Falls, New York.
- Women from all over the country met at the Seneca Falls Convention to discuss their demands.
- At this meeting, the women wrote a "Declaration of Sentiments." This document was based on the Declaration of Independence, but it also stated that women should be equal to men (**SEE IMAGE 3**).
- They did not get the rights they wanted; it would be almost 80 years before all women were granted the right to vote.
- For more information on the Seneca Falls Convention, visit:  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/july-19>

#### African American men fighting for the right to vote

- After the Civil War and after Emancipation, African American men began to participate in state and local governments.
- In 1868, North Carolina elected African American men to our legislature to make laws for the first time. Many African American men served in the legislature during this time - over 100 total **(SEE IMAGE 4)**!
- One individual who was elected to the state senate was Abraham Galloway **(SEE IMAGE 5)**. Galloway was born enslaved in eastern North Carolina. He ran away and served as a spy for the Union during the Civil War.
- For more information on Abraham Galloway, visit:  
<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/galloway-abraham>
- By the 1890s, poll taxes and literacy tests were used throughout the southern states; these laws were designed to keep African American men from voting.

By the early 1900s in some places, including North Carolina, it was once again only white men who were able to vote - not much had changed!

#### Women fighting for the right to vote

- During WWI, women supported the war effort and showed that they were just as deserving of the right to vote as men **(SEE IMAGE 6)**.
- In 1920, an amendment, or change to the US Constitution was sent to the states. Amendments need states to vote for them before they are added to the Constitution.
- This amendment - the 19th amendment - granted women the right to vote and hold public office.
- For more information on the 19th amendment, visit:  
<https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-19th-amendment>
- After the passage of this amendment, North Carolina became the first southern state to elect a woman to the state legislature. Lillian Exum Clement **(SEE IMAGE 7)**, from Asheville, was elected to serve in North Carolina's House of Representatives.
- For more information on Lillian Exum Clement, visit:  
<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/stafford-lillian>

#### All African Americans fighting for the right to vote

- The 19th Amendment only guaranteed suffrage, or the right to vote, for white women.
- Voting continued to be an issue for African Americans because of segregation laws.
- During the Civil Rights movement, African American men and women fought for an end to segregation laws.
- They wanted equality in education and in public places, and an end to voter suppression.
- In 1964, the US Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which banned discrimination based on race, national origin, color, sex, or religion.
- For more information on the Civil Rights Act, visit:  
<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/civil-rights-act-of-1964.html>

- On August 6th, 1965, the Voting Rights Act was signed into law., making it much easier for African American men and women to gain the right to vote.
- For more information on the Voting Rights Act, visit:  
<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965>

### Activity

#### Let's Vote - Campaign for your candidate and cast your ballot!

- *Introduce the election and candidates.*
- In this election, we are voting for best ice cream flavor. Our candidates are chocolate, vanilla, or cookies 'n cream. Would anyone like to speak on behalf of one of the candidates? Is one your favorite? Make an impassioned speech convincing everyone else that your choice is the best using reasons why you love this flavor!
- *Campaign!*
- It's time to make your own election signage or campaign posters.  
There are a lot of signs an election is near including tv commercials, bumper stickers on cars, election signs in front yards, and even campaign phone calls that interrupt dinner. All of these signal the election is coming, encourage us to learn about the candidates, and remind us to vote. Design your own sign or poster telling us about your candidate (chocolate, vanilla, cookies n cream or another flavor of your choice) and why others should vote for them.
- *Now it's time to cast your ballot (SEE BALLOT BELOW)!*
- Everyone will receive a ballot and can fill in the bubble to vote for your choice. Remember, you don't have to show anyone what choice you voted for - your ballot can be secret if you want it to be!
- *Hooray! The winner is ....*

### Additional Resources

- For more information on the NC State Capitol and other state historic sites visit:  
<https://historicsites.nc.gov/>
- Election Collection from PBS: <https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/election-collection/>
- Together We Can, a series of videos, were produced by PBS Kids, PBS NC, and Music Director Bud'da, who composed the songs that you hear in the clips:  
<https://pbskids.org/videos/together-we-can>
- A timeline for voting from Scholastic.com:  
<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/history-voting/>
- Resources to support remote learning: <https://www.icivics.org/>
- From PBS kids: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6oFLipB6g8>
- Voting Fun Facts for Kids: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RM1TQCsWjaQ>

**BALLOT**

**NC State Capitol Ballot**

**Please cast your vote for the best ice cream flavor by filling in the oval next to your choice. You may also write in the flavor you think is the best choice.**



**Chocolate**



**Vanilla**



**Cookies N Cream**



**OR write in your choice below:**

**IMAGE 1 - The State House of North Carolina, ca. 1800**



**IMAGE 2 - The North Carolina State Capitol, ca. 2021**





IMAGE 3 - The front page of the Report of the Seneca Falls Convention, 1848

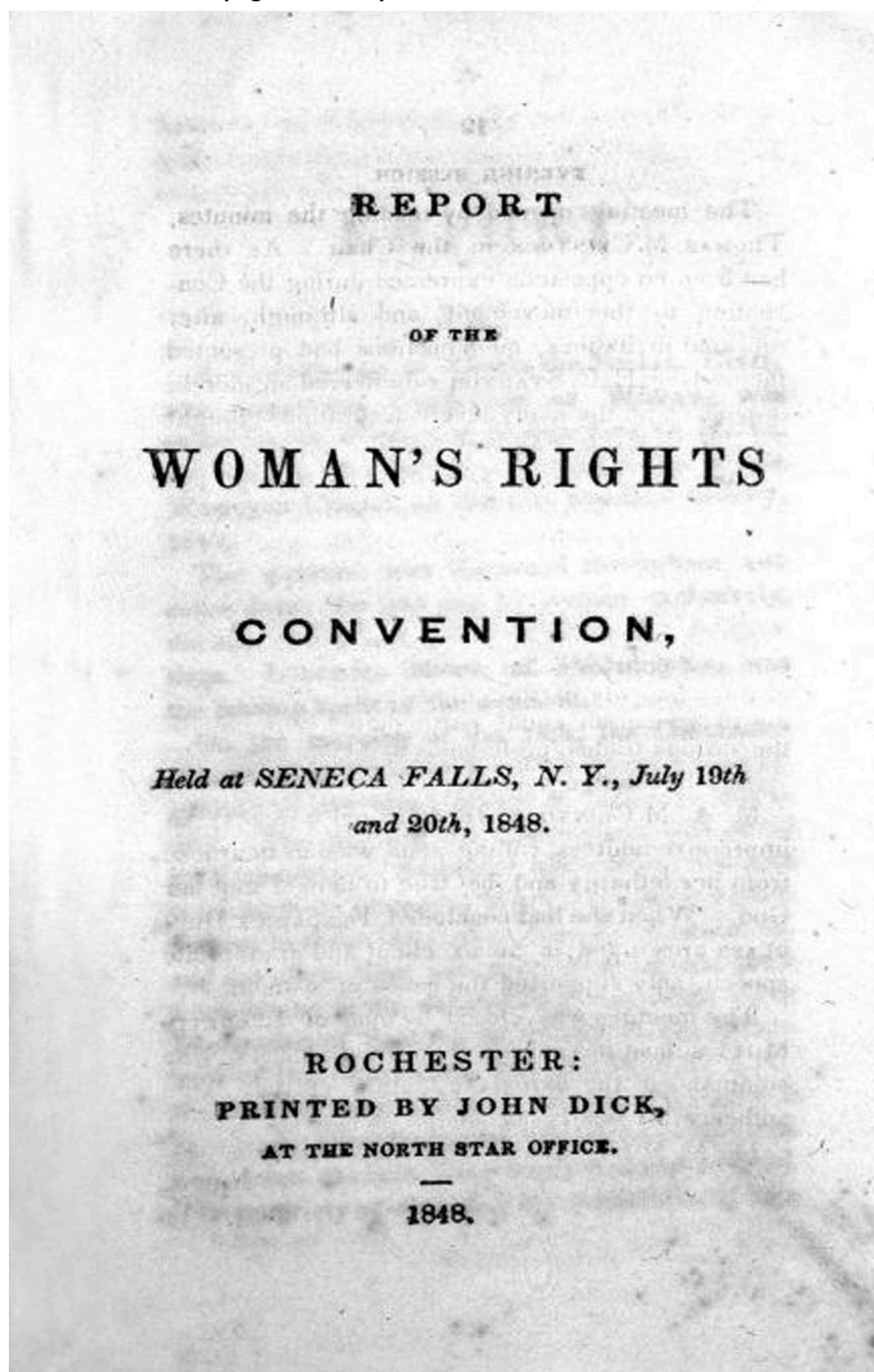


IMAGE 4 - Image of the North Carolina State Senate, 1874



IMAGE 5 - Illustration of Abraham Galloway

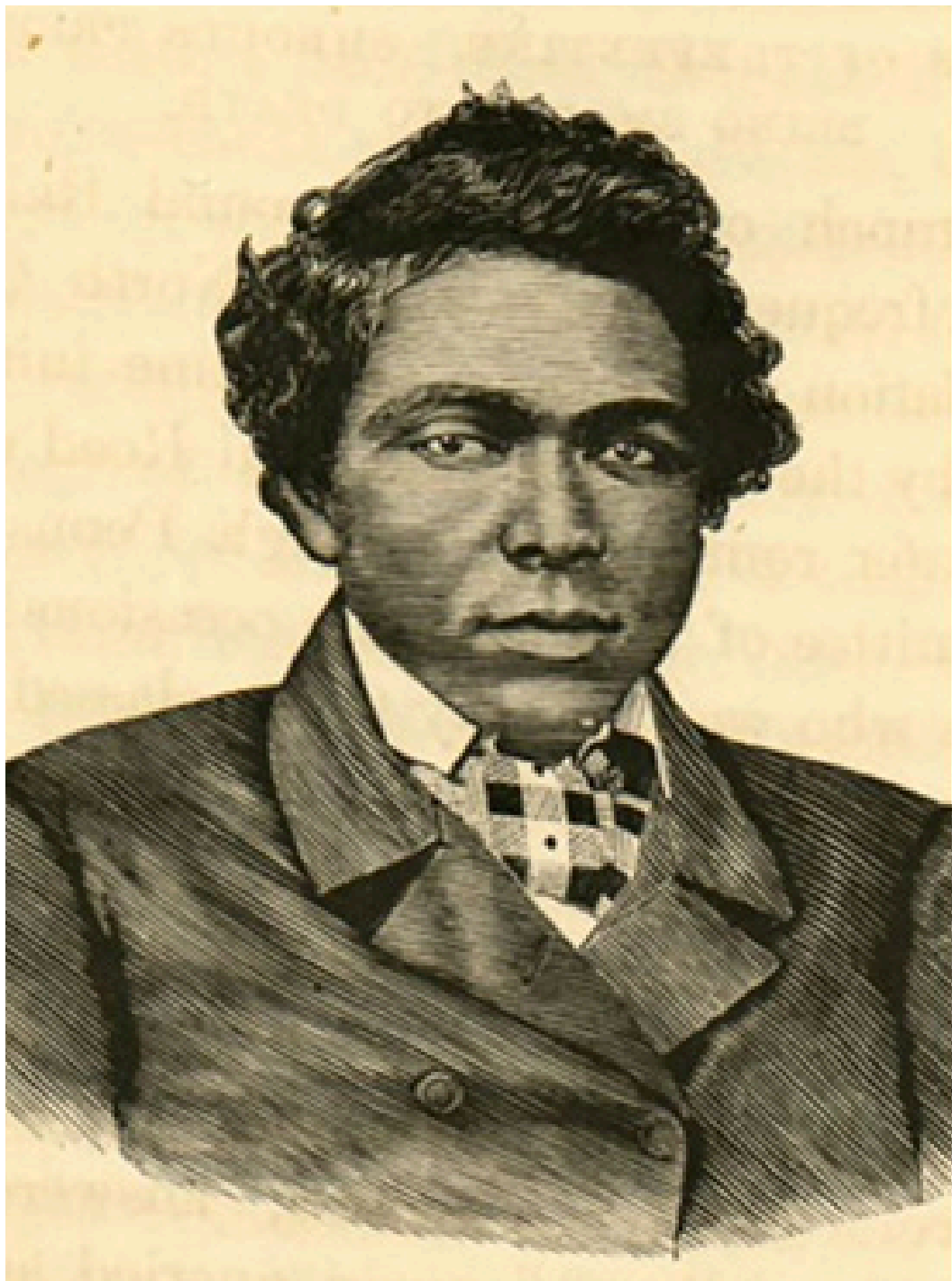


IMAGE 6 - Poster featuring female laborers, c. 1918



IMAGE 7 - Image of Lillian Exum Clement, ca. 1916

