



Virtual Valentine Resources

History at Home Student Lesson Plans

Exploring Suffrage Propaganda & Memes Today

Grade: 6-12

Overview:

Using postcards from the early 20th century, students will explore about basic propaganda techniques used in the suffrage debate and create memes to celebrate the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage, or to encourage all citizens to vote in 2020.

Essential Questions:

- What is propaganda? How is it used to persuade?
- Describe the similarities and differences between how postcards were used in the early 20th century and how memes are used in social media today.
- What makes an effective meme?

Virginia SOL Alignment:

History & Social Sciences USII.1, USII.4, CE.1, VUS.8, English 6.3, 7.3, 8.3

Materials:

- Ballot Battle Suffrage Movement History PDF
- Women's suffrage era postcards PDF



Vocabulary

Propaganda-persuasive techniques used to influence public opinion or to influence a particular group of people. There are typically seven basic techniques: name-calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, card stacking and bandwagon. All of these techniques use either emotion or logic to influence their target audience.

For the purposes of this lesson, we are just going to focus on the use of emotion and logic to influence through the symbolic use of words and images.

Here is a Quizlet with more information on the seven basic propaganda techniques

<https://quizlet.com/2472312/7-types-of-propaganda-flash-cards/>

Here is more information on propaganda.

<https://propagandacritic.com/>

Suffrage-the right to vote.

Pro-Suffrage movement- for this lesson we are focusing on the movement in the late 19th and early 20th century to give women the ability to vote in the United States.

Anti-Suffrage movement-for this lesson we are focusing on the movement in the late 19th and early 20th century that did NOT want women to have the ability to vote in the United States.

Symbol- a tangible representation of an idea, action or thing. It is something that stands for something else. For example, the bald eagle is a symbol of strength and patriotism in the United States.

19th Amendment- Passed in 1920 this federal amendment granted women in the United States the right to vote.

Lesson Outline:

1. Review background on women's suffrage, using Ballot Battle Suffrage Movement History PDF
2. Create Suffrage postcards memes
3. Discussion
4. Take it further

1. Discuss the history of the Women's Suffrage in Virginia

Using the Ballot Battle Suffrage Movement History PDF, explore the brief history of the woman's suffrage movement in Virginia.

- While many think of the suffrage movement gaining speed in the early 1900s, there were spurts of enthusiasm across the country before that time. The Seneca Falls Convention led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other activists took place in 1848. Soon, Susan B Anthony would join the movement and it would pick up steam across the country. Here in Virginia interest would fall flat until 1909 when it came to women's suffrage – whether pro or anti. There were a few Richmond and Virginia women who tried to make the case for women's suffrage before 1900 but their efforts did not gain much support.
- In 1909, a group of Richmond women including Lila Meade Valentine, Adele Clark, Nora Houston, Ellen Glasgow, Agnes Randolph, the great-great granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson, and Lucy Randolph Mason, the great-granddaughter of George Mason, as well as teachers, journalists and business women banded together to form the Equal Suffrage League (ESL) which initially worked for a state amendment allowing women the right to vote. Nearly 120 members joined in the first year – most from Richmond.
- In 1912, the Virginia Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (VAOWS) was formed to lead the fight to defeat the efforts of the ESL and other pro-suffrage organizations. From 1915 through 1920, Mary Mason Anderson Williams was president of the Virginia Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. No organizational records survive to indicate how many members the association had, but at the May 1918 state convention officers reported on the addition of almost 1,350 new members. Its board of directors and committees included members of many influential social, business and political families in the state.
- The ESL and the VAOWS would each espouse their viewpoints to the people of Virginia, often engaging one another directly in editorials and other literature. During this time before social media and the internet, messages were delivered through a variety of means including newspaper articles, pamphlets, cartoons, postcards, buttons, sashes, etc.
- Virginia suffragists succeeded in bringing the issue to the floor of the General Assembly three times between 1912 and 1916, but the vote never came close to passage. The Equal Suffrage League's strategy focused on winning support in the General Assembly for a voting-rights amendment to the state constitution. Some suffragists grew impatient with the painstaking approach and broke ranks, joining the more militant Congressional Union (later the National Woman's Party), and then pressuring Congress and U.S. president Woodrow Wilson to enact a federal suffrage amendment.
- When Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment in June 1919, the ESL fought hard for ratification, but Virginia politicians did not relent. Despite the efforts of the Equal Suffrage League, Virginia was one of the nine southern states that refused to grant the vote to women. Virginia women at last won the right to vote in August 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment became law, and exercised that right soon after in the November elections. More than 13,000 Richmond women registered and voted in the 1920 election. The General Assembly stubbornly withheld its ratification until 1952 which was, of course, symbolic.

Source: McDaid, Jennifer Davis. Woman Suffrage in Virginia, Encyclopedia of Virginia, https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Woman_Suffrage_in_Virginia, accessed April 2, 2020.

2. Suffrage Postcard Memes

Student directions:

- Examine each postcard. These postcards were produced as propaganda to persuade people to support the two sides of the woman's suffrage debate. Those who wanted women to have the right to vote and those who did not want women to have the right to vote.
- Propaganda uses persuasive techniques to influence public opinion or to influence a particular group of people. It usually either plays upon people's emotions by creating fear or a sense of pride/patriotism or it can appeal to their logical side by relying on common sense and reason.
- Use the original suffrage era postcards from the early 20th century to create memes that either honor the 100th anniversary of women getting the vote in 1920 or to encourage all citizens to vote in our current elections.
- You can use a free meme generator to make your meme: <https://imgflip.com/memegenerator>

Here is an example:



3. Discussion

Share your memes and discuss the following questions:

- Describe the similarities and differences between how postcards were used in the early 20th century and how memes are used in social media today.
- What makes an effective meme?

- Possible answers may include a strong and identifiable image, humor, and popular culture references.
- Like postcards of the past, memes are often used today to illustrate political ideas and persuade people through their messages.
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4. Take it further...

Check out these links to read more about this topic!

- **The New York Times** - The Use of Memes in Politics
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/09/technology/political-memes-go-mainstream.html>
- **Encyclopedia of Virginia (suffrage links)**
https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/woman_suffrage_in_virginia#start_entry
https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Equal_Suffrage_League_of_Virginia_1909-1920
https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Valentine_Lila_Meade_1865-1921#start_entry
- **Library of Virginia (suffrage links)**
https://edu.lva.virginia.gov/online_classroom/shaping_the_constitution/people/lila_meade_valentine
https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Williams_Mary_Mason_Anderson