

Opening the Gates to Change: the Erie Canal and Woman's Suffrage

LESSON DESCRIPTION

In this lesson students will analyze the impacts of the Erie Canal on development of 19th century social reform movements, particularly women's rights. Students will examine historic examples of groups who struggled for equality and will compare past movements to contemporary issues. Students will consider their own capacities as change-makers.

LESSON LENGTH

Two to three 45-minute class periods

KEY VOCABULARY AND TERMS

- Erie Canal
- Women's Suffrage
- Women's Rights Movement
- Declaration of Sentiments
- Haudenosaunee
- 19th Amendment
- Voting Rights
- Gender Equality
- Abolitionism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Students will learn about the impact of the Erie Canal on the development of 19th century reform movements, such as, women's rights, abolitionism, and religious revival.
2. Students will understand how 19th century social reformers used the Erie Canal to promote their causes.
3. Students will be able to make connections between past reform movements and contemporary issues of equality and social and environmental justice.

MATERIALS

- Video Clip- [Opening the Gates to Change: the Erie Canal and Woman's Suffrage](#)
- Video Screen/Projector (if showing film to whole class)
- [Declaration of Sentiments](#) (link)
- Worksheet- Note Catcher
- Worksheet- Create a Declaration

LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. **Watch *Opening the Gates to Change: the Erie Canal and Woman's Suffrage* and Take Notes** (10 minutes)

- a. Distribute Note Catcher worksheet and review background information.
 - i. Sample statement to introduce the topic: *You are about to learn about the Erie Canal and the impacts it had on social reform movements in the 1800s, including women's rights and abolitionism. The canal served as an early "information highway" spreading ideas of equality across New York state and the nation. The work of social reformers from this time continues to inspire activists today.*

2. **Classroom Discussion (30 minutes)**

- a. Teacher will facilitate a discussion about the effects of the Erie Canal on 19th century reform movements including women's rights, abolition, and religious revival.
- b. Teacher will review the history of the Seneca Falls Convention and 19th century gender inequality. Students will analyze the Declaration of Sentiments to discover rights women did not have in 1848.
 - i. Examples including women could not vote, married women could not own property, and women could not attend most colleges.
- c. Teacher will lead a discussion about the Erie Canal and its importance in transporting people, goods, and ideas.
- d. Teacher will facilitate a discussion about methods suffragists used to spread information about the movement including use of the Erie Canal, newspapers, speeches, and Women's Rights Conventions. Students will compare past modes of communication to today's including internet, social media, tv, radio, and print.
- e. Teacher will facilitate a discussion about groups who were historically excluded from the women's suffrage movement and how they fought against discrimination.
 - i. Examples include African American's, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and immigrants.
- f. Students will brainstorm contemporary issues or movements that are important to them as a class. Teacher will write answers on whiteboard as students respond.
 - i. Examples may include voting rights, gender/racial equality, climate change, LGBTQ+ rights, environmental justice, etc.

3. **"Create a Declaration" Group Activity (45 minutes)**

- a. Students are broken up into groups of 3-4. Students will choose a contemporary issue that is important to them.
 - i. Example topics could include gender equality, racial justice, climate change, or voting rights.

- b. Groups will conduct research on the major issues and debates about their topic. Students should be able to define their chosen topic, identify three (3) major issues and/or debates about the topic, and identify whether any groups have been historically excluded from participating.
- c. Students will create their own “Declaration” modeled after the Declaration of Sentiments including five (5) action statements that relate to their chosen topic. Teacher may need to provide examples of action statements.
 - i. For example, a statement about climate change may read, “All states should pass mandatory recycling program laws by 2025.”
- d. Thinking about how suffragists utilized the canal to promote their cause, students will provide a strategy for spreading the word about their Declaration. What forms of media will they use? How will they use social media? What social media platforms would be most effective and why? Would they use more traditional forms of media (print, television, radio, etc.)?
- e. Each group will share their Declaration and marketing ideas with the class.

3. Extension Activity: Letter to an Elected Official (45 minutes)

As a lesson extension activity, students could identify elected officials (local, state, or federal) who represent their school district. Each group could choose one elected official or the whole class choose the same official and write a letter explaining why their chosen topic is important and the action steps included in their Declaration.

NATIONAL LEARNING 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.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.6

Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

PART 1

Opening the Gates to Change: the Erie Canal and Woman’s Suffrage

Note Catcher

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Answer the questions below based on the information presented in the video.

1. Since it opened in 1825, what are three things that have been carried on the Erie Canal?
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

2. What document was the focus of discussion at the 1848 Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York?

3. Women’s suffragists and the structure of American government were influenced by what Native American nation?

4. What are two (2) student projects featured in the film that were inspired by the women’s rights movement?
 1. _____
 2. _____

5. Who organized a women’s suffrage canal boat campaign on the Erie Canal in 1908?

6. Identify two (2) groups who faced discrimination in the women’s suffrage movement, even after passage of the 19th Amendment.
 1. _____
 2. _____

7. The film highlights several careers which were once male-dominated. What are two (2) examples of employment opportunities now open to women discussed in the video?
 1. _____
 2. _____

8. After watching the film, what is one thing you can do to make sure your voice is heard?

PART 2

Create a Declaration

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: As a group, choose one (1) contemporary issue or social movement. Research the topic and create a "Declaration" of five (5) steps that can be taken to address the issue.

Declaration _____
(Name of Topic)

Action Statements

(Write one-sentence descriptions of specific actions to meet goals, objectives, or visions.)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

In the 1800s, the Erie Canal served as an "information superhighway" spreading big ideas about women's rights, abolitionism, and more. What would you use to spread the word about the declaration you created? Think about what types of communication are available today like the internet, social media, television, and radio. How would you use more traditional methods of communication like newspapers, magazines, and letters?

