

Click! The Ongoing Feminist Revolution

The Equal Rights Amendment: A Constitutional Question

View Online: www.cliohistory.org/click/classroom/politics-social/era

Grade Level: Grades 6-12

Estimated Time: One class period

Introduction

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the United States Constitution was first introduced in Congress in 1923 and had some support in the following decades. In the 1960s, passage of the ERA became a major cause of women's rights activists. In 1971, the ERA passed both houses of Congress and was submitted to the state legislatures for ratification. By 1977, 35 of the necessary 38 states had ratified the amendment. In 1978, despite growing opposition to the amendment, Congress extended the 1979 deadline for ratification to 1982. There were no more state ratifications during the extension period and the ERA continues to be an unfinished issue for women's rights activists. Nevada ratified the amendment in March 2017 and Illinois did so in May 2018.

This lesson introduces students to the Equal Rights Amendment, the ratification process of the United States Constitution, and debates over equality under the law.

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to understand how the U.S. Constitution defines and protects the rights of citizens.
- Students will be able to discuss the reasons individuals have supported and have opposed the Equal Rights Amendment.

Essential Questions

- What is the Equal Rights Amendment?
- Should the U.S. Constitution guarantee equal rights for women and men?
- Does gender equality exist today in the United States?

Materials

- Technology Needs: Computer with Speakers and Internet Access; Printer/Copier
- [Mind Map Worksheet](#) (PDF)
- [Document Analysis Worksheet](#) (PDF)
- [Note Taking Guide](#) (PDF)

- Primary Source Document: [Phyllis Schlafly Report, 1972](#) (PDF)
- Primary Source Document: [Shirley Chisholm Speech, 1970](#) (PDF)

Warm Up Activity: Mind Map, Discussion, and Film Viewing

1. Divide the class into pairs and hand out a Mind Map to each student.
 - a. Have the students write the term “gender equality” in the middle of their Mind Map.
 - b. Tell them to brainstorm examples of “gender equality.”
2. Have students share their Mind Maps with each other.
3. Open up the class discussion by having the students explain their examples.
4. Conclude the discussion by providing a short summary of the Equal Rights Amendment and by telling students that it will be their focus to help them understand how activists have supported the goal of gender equality.
 - a. Move into the main activity by explaining that the class will now watch a film clip that provides national and state examples of how women discussed and debated the ERA and other political issues. Each film clip has short interviews with notable political women who might be recognizable to students.
5. Show the clip from the film [Sisters of '77](#) (11:23 min.)
 - a. If there is time, show the clip from the film [Passing the Torch](#) (4:50 min.)

Main Activity:

1. Place the pairs into groups. Hand out the Note Taking Guide (PDF) to each student.
 - a. Alternatively, use the Document Analysis Worksheet (PDF).
2. Assign each group to read and take notes on either Shirley Chisholm’s speech (PDF) or Phyllis Schlafly’s article (PDF).
 - a. Give the students adequate time to read the sources.
 - b. Help them with their note taking as needed.
3. Have the students discuss their research with each other and then have them select a member or members of their group to present their findings to the class.
4. After the presentations, discuss their findings.
5. After the discussion, have students return to their pairs to revisit their Mind Maps.
6. Bring the class back together and ask how their initial ideas about men’s and women’s equality have changed or been enlarged now that they have read, watched, and researched.

Extension Activity: Debate

1. Have students debate the two ratification strategies for the ERA.
2. Background: The ERA passed both Houses of Congress in 1972. The ratification deadline was set for 1979 and extended to 1982. In 2017 and 2018, Nevada and Illinois became the 36th and 37th states to ratify the amendment after the 1972 deadline.
3. The “traditional ratification” strategy requires that the ERA pass the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives by a 2/3 majority and be ratified by legislatures in $\frac{3}{4}$ (38) states. This is based on Article V of the Constitution.
4. The “three-state strategy” requires that the ERA needs to be ratified by three more states. This is based on questions that were raised about the ratification process, especially time limits, with the passage of the 27th Amendment in 1992 (about pay for members of Congress).

Common Core Anchor Standards

Reading

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7](#)

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10](#)

Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.