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Feminist Revolution

Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Political Women

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

Grade Level: Grades 6-12

Estimated Time: One class period

Introduction

History is full of women cracking or breaking through glass ceilings in their respective fields of work. The concept of the “glass ceiling” refers to an invisible but real barrier that keeps women (and other groups) from rising to the top of their field. The metaphor was coined in 1978 and popularized the next years when it was used by an increasing number of conference speakers and authors.

This lesson plan looks at women politicians who cracked the glass ceiling of politics. In 1984, Democrat Geraldine Ferraro became the first woman vice-presidential candidate on a major party ticket. In 2008, Sarah Palin became the second woman vice-presidential candidate on a major party ticket. After losing her bid for the Democratic presidential ticket in 2008, Hillary Clinton stated: “Although we weren’t able to shatter the highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it’s got about 18 million cracks in it.” In 2016, after becoming the Democratic presidential candidate, Clinton stated: “we just put the biggest crack in that glass ceiling yet.”

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to demonstrate a beginning understanding of the process of advancement for women in the political sphere.
- Student will be able to identify individual women and their contributions to American political life.

Essential Question

- How do ideas of gender influence political participation?

Materials

- Computer with Speakers and Internet Access

Warm Up Activity: Brainstorming

1. Divide the class into pairs. Have the pairs brainstorm around the metaphor “glass ceiling.” Have them envision where and why glass ceilings exist.
 - a. Guide them to thinking about political glass ceilings by discussing national and local political situations that might be familiar to them.
 - b. Guide them to thinking about workplace glass ceilings by discussing major corporations that they might know, local industries, and notable business leaders.
2. Have the students share their understanding and knowledge of glass ceilings.

Main Activity: Research, Written Summary, and Discussion

1. Divide students into groups and have them go to [Click](#) and use the search box at the top right of the home page to search for “glass ceiling.”
 - a. Have the students read the timeline entry for “1979: Glass Ceiling.”
 - b. If there is time, they can also follow the two links and read more about the glass ceilings. The second link discusses race and gender. Students might notice that different sources give different information about who coined the term “glass ceiling.” This opens the opportunity for more student research about the topic.
2. Have the students search the essay sections of *Click* for the three women politicians: Geraldine Ferraro, Sarah Palin, and Hillary Clinton. Make sure students check the box “Essays” before their search.
3. Their search will take them to the essay “[Women and Politics: A Very Short History.](#)”
 - a. Have students read the essay and create a list of all the women mentioned in it. Have them put a check mark next to those women they think cracked or broke through a glass ceiling. (Their list should include Ferraro, Palin, and Clinton.)
 - b. Have each group discuss their lists.
4. Assign 1, 2, or 3 women to each group for further research. The women mentioned in the essay who should be assigned are:

Bella Abzug	Madeleine Kunin
Hattie Caraway	Patsy Mink
Shirley Chisholm	Sandra Day O’Connor
Millicent Fenwick	Patricia Schroeder
Ella Grasso	Margaret Chase Smith

(Add other names as needed or wanted)

5. Have each group research their woman/women. Together they should write a summary statement of how this woman did or did not crack or break through a glass ceiling.
6. Have the groups share their summaries with the class. Continue with discussion about how gender influences political inclusion and political success.

Extension Activity: Research

Shift the focus from politics to the workplace and have the students do more research on women, gender, and glass ceilings. Broaden the focus by discussing race and ethnicity.

Common Core Anchor Standards

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

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

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

[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.

Range of Writing:

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

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.