

Lesson Plan to Accompany Video: Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage

“We women of America tell you that America is not a democracy. Twenty million women are denied the right to vote.”

- Alice Paul



Alice Paul, Co- Founder of NWA

Building Background

National Woman's Party (NWP): Founded in 1916 when Alice Paul and others broke away from the NAWSA (National American Women's Suffrage Association) because of differences of opinions about how best to win the right to vote for women in the United States. While NAWSA's leaders believed in a state by state approach, the younger generation of suffragists that made up the majority of the NWP's membership strongly believed in a national Constitutional Amendment that would finally allow all American women to vote.

The National Woman's Party's tactics were seen by many to be radical and militant. Immediately after forming the NWP, Alice Paul and other members targeted the dominant political powers in Washington D.C., especially the Woodrow Wilson's Administration and the Congress. The suffragists held marches and rallies, but most famously, they picketed the White House, placing "Silent Sentinels" at each entrance to the Executive Mansion. Read More about the Sentinels below.

The radical acts of non - violence practiced by these women finally forced the President of the United States to agree to support a Constitutional Amendment enfranchising millions of American Women. All American women, young and old, owe a debt of gratitude to Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, founders of the NWP, who fought valiantly to secure full and equal rights for women.

Non Violent Action in History: While there have been countless examples of protesting an unjust law by means of non violent action throughout history, the 20th century saw the movement become mainstream and more commonly used to address injustice. Mohandas Gandhi used tactics such as marches and sit-ins in the early 1900's. Suffrage activists in Britain copied his non-violent campaigns and used them in their fight for justice. IN the United States, both the NWP and the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 60's made wide use of non-violent protest in their fight for social equality.

➡ **Learn More!** Research the meaning and history of these terms commonly associated with the non-violent movement include: **Boycott, Marches, Picketing, and Sit-Ins.**



Who Were the Silent Sentinels? The NWP women who stood outside the entrances to the White House from January, 1917 to June of 1919. These women were directly challenging President Wilson because of his anti-suffrage stance. These Sentinels brought much unwanted attention to the President, especially during World War I. The fact that they continued their protests during the war angered many citizens, and made the women the target of angry men and women, some of whom used violence against them.

[Click here to read more about their protests](#)

[Click here to see the newspaper coverage of the event](#)

(To view links hold ctrl key while clicking on link)

(Wikipedia- silent sentinels) link 1

(New York Times article) Link 2

Weeks of Terror : Time spent in Occoquan



Lucy Burns, pictured at left, was a co-founder of the NWP. She and many other members of the movement were arrested on trumped up charges during their Silent Sentinels protest. Taken to Occoquan Workhouse near Washington, DC, the suffragists were mistreated and abused by the prison staff. Ms. Burns considered herself and all other suffragists at the workhouse “Political Prisoners”, and began a Hunger Strike. Others joined in and public outrage over their treatment grew. This last radical step by these women brought about passage of the 19th Amendment.

(photo courtesy Library of Congress)



Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage

Lessons Activity 1:

The women who were arrested by the police for protesting at the White House were sentenced to serve 60 days in the Occoquan Workhouse near Washington, DC. Several refused to eat until their conditions improved. Eventually they were force fed and sent for psychiatric evaluations. This dramatic climax to the suffrage movement in the United States is an often untold story that deserves to be heard.

Step One: Watch the Video: Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage

Take note of the imagery used by the film producer. Jail cells, straight jackets, and force feeding were all part of the NWP members experiences while demanding enfranchisement. (The right to vote) Research the events surrounding Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and the National Women's Party's fight for equality.

Step Two: Think about and research other civil rights movements in our nation's history. In a short and well written essay, compare and contrast the themes and tactics employed by each movement to meet their demand for justice. Look at the dates. Who possibly influenced who? Were the tactics the same? Did the movements eventually reach their goal of equality? You may create a graphic organizer to help you organize your information.

Step Three: Classroom Discussion / Debate: After watching the video and researching the true story of the NWA's tactics, how do you feel about what they did and how they accomplished their goals? Were their tactics more effective than those of other groups fighting for women's suffrage?

Significance of the rose in the video: The red rose was worn by anti-suffrage legislators and the yellow rose by pro-suffrage legislators in Tennessee, the state needed to help ratify the 19th amendment, finally enfranchising women. It appeared that the vote would be close or even fail, until one young legislator, Mr. Harry Burn, switched his vote from 'no' to 'yes' at the last minute. Angry anti-suffrage legislators physically attacked him inside the Tennessee Capitol building, and he had to climb out the window to escape. When asked to explain why he had switched his vote at the last minute, he explained that he had received a telegram from his mother earlier that day, urging him to "do the right thing" and vote yes for enfranchising women! The rest is history. Link: <http://www.blueshoenashville.com/suffragehistory.html>

Activity two: Data Based Question

Look at the anti suffrage posters below and answer the following questions in the form of a one or two paragraph essay.

What is the message being sent by these images?

Who were the artists appealing to?

Why would these be shocking images for the time? (1910s)

What connection can you make between the video (Bad Romance) and these images?

