

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# “VOTES FOR WOMEN”

## THE BATTLE FOR THE 19TH AMENDMENT



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**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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*“Votes for Women”—The Battle for the 19th Amendment*

# Introduction

## **The Struggle for Woman’s Suffrage**

This booklet and visual image set can stand alone. However, it is also meant to be a companion set that continues the story begun in *“A Complete Emancipation”—The Birth of the Women’s Rights Movement*.

In that first booklet, we focused on the roots of a wide ranging movement to free women from the limitations imposed on them by their less than equal status in American society. In this set, we carry that story forward as the women’s rights movement focused increasingly on one overriding goal—the right to vote.

Of course this single goal did not prevent women from taking a more active part in many other areas of American life. In fact, the late 1800s saw the emergence of an increasingly vocal professional class of women who led all sorts of reform efforts. In journalism, education, child welfare, union organizing, civil rights advocacy and more, women were playing a much greater role. In fact, it may well have been this multifaceted public activity that made the lack of voting rights for women seem increasingly unfair to millions of Americans, both male and female. In 1920, with the ratification of the 19th Amendment, that barrier to equality was removed for good.

The 12 visual displays in this booklet focus on some of the key themes in this story of struggle and ultimate triumph. The visuals are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **Changing Roles in the Gilded Age**

The illustrations here focus on cultural images of womanhood and the ways in which those images were changing in the late 1800s.

### **The Long Struggle for Equality**

The struggle for the right to vote was a long one. Resistance to this in society at large and divisions within the women’s movement itself both played a part in this. This lesson deals with both.

### **The Women’s Movement in a “Progressive” Age**

The progressive movement was a response to the disorder and injustices generated by the first full flowering of the industrial age. It was led by an emerging group of middle class professionals, including many women taking a more active part in the nation’s life. Their experience in the many progressive reform efforts added considerably to the strength and diversity of the women’s rights movement itself.

### **Votes for Women**

The final battle for the vote was actually a complex one in which the activists argued a good deal about tactics. Nevertheless, by the second decade of the 20th Century, the momentum was unstoppable, despite the bitter opposition of some Americans. The illustrations here capture this sense of a movement on the march to victory.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*“Votes for Women”—The Battle for the 19th Amendment***OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will discuss the idea of a “cult of domesticity” in the 1800s and its impact on women in America.
2. Students will better understand how images of womanhood were changing in these years.

# Changing Roles in the Gilded Age

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

This illustration is an example of the soft and warm image of motherhood that was widely held in the 19th century. A woman’s role as wife, mother and homemaker was seen as central to her happiness and to society’s well being. In fact, many women did find this role deeply rewarding. However, the separation of work from the home could leave such women feeling isolated and confined. Images like this one glorified women’s domestic role and hid some of its less pleasant realities.

**Illustration 2**

The so-called “cult of domesticity,” as represented by the last illustration, was probably not an accurate way to view the lives of many homemakers. In the late 1800s, moreover, an increasing number of women were not even working at home, though many of them may well have wanted to. Millions of women were at work in factories and shops all across America. In an age of rapidly growing cities and giant corporations, work settings were often insecure and impersonal. As the illustration on the left suggests, women especially often found themselves at the mercy of predatory men. And their efforts to organize unions and protect themselves in other ways often met with stiff resistance.

**Illustration 3**

The Gilded Age was a time of rapid, even bewildering change. Along with much else, the place of women in society was not at all certain. Traditional images of womanhood were under attack. On the one hand, advertising often pictured women as forever young and easily fulfilled by a growing supply of consumer goods. Yet in these years, a large number of middle class women felt such a life of ease to be empty of meaning. Some took the stance of the rebel, as photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston does in a playful way in the photo on the right. But some saw the need for a more serious kind of challenge to society. Often, they found that challenge in the women’s rights movement.



## Lesson 1—Changing Roles in the Gilded Age

# Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### **Discussing the Illustration**

1. Many people would say that this 1900 illustration of a mother and her children conveys a very positive and warm image of motherhood and the family. Do you agree with them? What helps the image to convey this feeling?
2. In the late 1800s, scenes such as this were what millions of Americans thought of as the most natural and important role women could play. Can you explain? Do you think this role is the most natural and important one for women? Why or why not?
3. Some historians talk about a “cult of domesticity” in the 1800s regarding women and their proper role in society. What do you think they mean? In what way might an illustration like this be seen as an example of this idea of a “cult of domesticity”?

### **Follow-up Activity**

1. **Small-group activity:** Not all women’s rights leaders over the years have held the same views about the role of marriage, motherhood and children in the lives of women. Some have mainly seen these aspects of a woman’s life as a source of great strength. Others have stressed the problems they can cause. To learn more about this issue, have each group member find out how one of the following viewed it:

Elizabeth Cady Stanton	Susan B. Anthony
Victoria Woodhull	Frances Willard
Charlotte Perkins	Gillman Dorothy Day
Margaret Sanger	Fannie Lou Hamer
Betty Friedan	Patricia Ireland

Have each group member pretend to be one of these women and write a long diary entry commenting on the illustration shown here. The diary entry should express the reaction this woman would most likely have to the illustration and her thoughts about women and the family in general.