

Policy and Humanity

Use the activity below to help your students think critically about states' rights and the expansion of voting rights access throughout the nation's history. Do this by helping students consider how they might work together to develop new policies that aim to make voting easier for everyone.

Materials Needed: a virtual meeting space like Zoom, facts about states' rights and voting rights

- To begin, tell your students that they are going to collaborate in an exercise that asks them to think about states' rights and voting rights. Have a conversation with your students about how policy becomes law and how legislation affects—favorably and adversely—the very people it's supposed to serve. **Note:** *One timely offering would be the subject of the struggle for equity in voting rights. In order to dispel with the myth that the fight for equal and accessible voting rights is over, offer information and examples about gerrymandering and voter suppression laws, perhaps citing the most recent voter suppression legislation that was just passed in Georgia. You might want to refer to this [State Voting Bills Tracker](#) and this [Current Partisan Gerrymandering Cases](#) list for more information.*
- Next, utilizing a Jamboard or similar platform, have students offer up a few facts they already know about the process of passing legislation. Have them do so using imagery, text or visual art. Ask volunteers to share verbally what they've added to the Jamboard, and why.
- Now, offer five groups of facts about voting legislation and ask students to choose which one resonates with them most. A few suggestions are:
 - 1776–1789:** The Articles of Confederation and the Constitution leave the power to decide who gets to vote to the states. In **1790**, enslaved men and women are denied the right to vote in all 13 states. Free women are denied the right to vote in 12 of 13 states.
 - 1845–1864:** States expand voting rights for white men. The last property requirement for white men is lifted. New York votes to keep property restrictions in place for Black voters. In **1848**, the federal government expands voting rights for some Mexican Americans living in some Southwestern states and territories.
 - 1875–1885:** Congress denies voting rights to Chinese American men. The Supreme Court upholds the denial of voting rights to Native American men.
 - 1965:** The Voting Rights Act Passes: for the first time, Black people of all ages can exercise their right to vote throughout the South. Then, from **1970–1975**, the Voting Rights Act is expanded, protecting the right to vote for people who don't speak English, while in **1984**, voting accessibility rights are expanded to people with disabilities.
 - 2013:** The Supreme Court overturns some parts of the Voting Rights Act, and as of March **2021**, 361 laws restricting the right to vote are introduced by Republicans in a number of states across the nation.
- Once they've chosen their respective corner, have students discuss the legislation and, perhaps, give them time to research how and why the policy was introduced and how it became law to offer more context.
- Next, have individuals in each group choose one word or phrase from that legislation. Then, have them use those words as inspiration to physicalize their response to the legislation through a sequence of three gestures.
- Next, give students time to discuss an idea, or range of ideas, which could be developed into policy that, if it became law, would improve their chosen legislation and positively impact those who were adversely affected by it. Then, have them physicalize that new policy idea in a sequence of three new movements.
- To culminate, ask groups to sequence all six of their movements into a cohesive story, illustrating the evolution from oppressive policy to liberatory policy!
- Finally, have each group present their movement sequences to the full group.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*What did you find most challenging about this activity?
 What did it feel like to embody emotion based on a policy?
 What was it like to create a movement piece based on oppressive and liberatory legislation?
 How would you like to share our policy ideas with others?*