

Winning the Vote for Women: OBJECTION and ANSWER

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Summary and Purpose

In this activity, upper elementary and middle school students will examine two pairs of banners from the woman suffrage movement and then write a banner to match one banner that is missing its pair.¹ By examining the arguments for and against woman suffrage, students will build a better understanding of the woman suffrage movement and examine an example of civic debate. After viewing this example, students may feel encouraged to examine their feelings and view opposing perspectives on issues in their own lives.

Time Required

- 15-minute activity; 15-minute next-day assessment

Lesson Procedures

1. Distribute **HANDOUT A** (page 9) and invite students to take a look at these images of two pairs of banners.² One banner in each pair is an “objection” to woman suffrage, and the other is an “answer” from the suffragists. Have students rewrite the main message of each banner in their own words in the dialogue bubble near each banner.
2. Ask students to speculate how these banners, which were found in suffrage leader Alice Paul’s house, might have been used.³ Ask students to consider what the physical characteristics of the banners suggest about their use. Perhaps they were used in protest rallies, or were designed to help teach suffragists the major arguments against the cause and how best to counter them. For guidance on analyzing objects, see the National Museum of American History’s guide “Engaging Students with Primary Sources” at www.historyexplorer.si.edu/PrimarySources.pdf (Curators at the Museum are still investigating these banners to learn more about when and how they were used.)
3. **HANDOUT B** (page 10) includes a banner that does not have its partner, which was lost before it became part of the museum collection. Invite students to speculate about what the missing banner might have said. For example, try finishing these sentences as possible objections to woman suffrage:

- If a woman is voting, she can’t be at home to _____.

- A woman’s job is to _____, not to vote.

Assessment

1. On the next day, ask students to write down an example of an objection to woman suffrage that opponents might have held. Collect their statements and read them one at a time, asking for volunteers to respond as a suffragist might have.
2. Ask the class, Why might these banners have been a useful tool when preparing for a debate? Are there media today that are similar to the objection-and-answer banners? (For example, websites that list arguments “pro and con,” such as procon.org; Q&A fliers or pamphlets; topical blogs; etc.)



Library of Congress

Sewing stars on a suffrage flag, 1920.

Notes

1. For the complete set of resources on “Winning the Vote for Women”, visit americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/suffrage, which is part of the larger OurStory set of U.S. history resources at www.americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory.
2. Images pp. 9–10 courtesy of the Division of Political History, Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center.
3. Visit the website of Sewall-Belmont House and Museum, which was once Alice Paul’s home, at www.sewallbelmont.org.

JENNY WEI, an education specialist at the National Museum of American History, developed the activities included here. NMAH is located in Washington, D.C. Middle school teachers can find the vast array of educational resources at the National Museum of American History by visiting *History Explorer*, the Museum’s online portal for K–12 resources, at www.historyexplorer.si.edu.

OBJECTION
—
WOMEN ARE REPRESENTED ALREADY BY MEN.

ANSWER
—
Men and Women are **DIFFERENT** and **MEN'S VOTE CAN NOT REPRESENT Women's Point of View.**

OBJECTION
—
IT WOULD MAKE WOMEN LESS ATTRACTIVE.

ANSWER
—
IF TO BE ATTRACTIVE MEANS TO BE SILLY AND IRRESPONSIBLE. YES. It depends on what you like.

Handout B

OBJECTION
**Women are TOO PURE
for the DIRTY POOL of
politics.**

ANSWER
**If the Pool is dirty THE TIME
HAS COME TO CLEAN IT.
Women have had Long Experience
Cleaning up after Men.**



ANSWER
**VOTING takes only a FEW
MINUTES once a YEAR.**