

Law Day 2020

Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center

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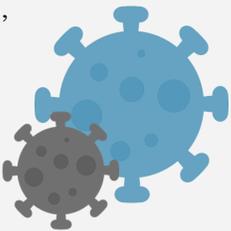
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These activities and lessons – with options for low-, medium-, and high-bandwidth, were developed with remote learning specifically in mind.

- Text-only (low)
- PDF (medium)
- Video (high)



About Law Day

More Information

Law Day
American Bar Association
lawday.org

Law Day 2020

Law Day is held May 1 every year to celebrate the role of law in our society and to cultivate a deeper understanding of the legal profession. The Learning Center participates annually.

The 2020 Law Day theme – *Your Vote, Your Voice, Our Democracy: The 19th Amendment at 100* – commemorates the centennial of the constitutional amendment guaranteeing that the right of citizens to vote would not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of their sex. American women fought for, and won, the vote through their voice and action.

Lessons & Activities

The goals of these lessons are to:

- Emphasize that citizens have the right and responsibility to vote.
- Introduce how voting rights have changed over time, including in Michigan.
- Encourage voting by those who are eligible through information and discussions.

These lessons are intended to be flexible.

- Activities can be used as individual 15-minute warm ups or as one or more 45-minute lessons when sequenced and/or paired with extension activities.
- Students can complete these activities individually or with whomever is physically or virtually nearby.
- To accommodate remote teaching and at-home learning, a variety of options are provided.
 - ◆ High-bandwidth (links to video and online resources)
 - ◆ Medium-bandwidth (PDF)
 - ◆ Low-bandwidth (copy/paste as plain text)



Michigan Social Studies Standards – Elementary C5 | HS Civics C4.2, C6.2, C6.3, C6.4 | USHG – 6.2.3 | 6.3.4

Why Vote?

More Information

Elections
Michigan Secretary of State
www.michigan.gov/vote

Voter Engagement
Right Question Institute
(RQI)
rightquestion.org/resources/field/voter-engagement/

*Note: Some RQI downloads
require a free account.*

U.S. Citizenship
U.S. Citizenship and
Immigration Services
www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship

Directions

Voting is both a right and a responsibility of citizens. By voting citizens make decisions that shape what government at all levels does. Find out how voters influence what happens in their communities.

1. **Review** Michigan's voter requirements:
 - Michigan resident (at the time you register) and a resident of your city or township for at least 30 days (when you vote)
 - United States citizen
 - At least 18 years old (when you vote)
 - Not currently serving a sentence in jail or prison
2. **Ask yourself:** Will I be eligible (able) to vote someday? Who do I know that is eligible to vote now?
3. **Choose** three important issues on the Why Vote? Tool from the Right Question Institute.
4. **Answer** the first two questions: Why would you want to vote? What questions do you have about being able to vote in the next election?

Extension Activities

1. **Conduct** a poll and report your data. Ask people around you if they are eligible (able) to vote by reading them Michigan's voter requirements in step 2. Then create a bar graph of the data collected to show how many are eligible to vote.
2. **Write** an answer for a class Voting FAQ. Pick one of your Why Vote questions and write a short answer using the Michigan Secretary of State (SOS) website, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website, and other sources.



EXAMPLES OF KEY ISSUES



YOUR VOTE AND KEY ISSUES

Elected officials make **decisions that affect all these issues.**

By voting, you can have a say in who's making those decisions.

Why would YOU want to vote?

What questions do you have about being able to vote in the next election?

Ask as many questions as you can.

What do you understand differently now?

For more information about voting, contact _____

You can also find where to vote by searching online "find my polling place."

Why Vote?

Why Vote? (Plain Text Version)

Voting is both a right and a responsibility of citizens. By voting, citizens make decisions that shape what government at all levels does. Find out how voters influence what happens in their communities.

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Directions

Review Michigan's voter requirements.

1. Michigan resident (at the time you register) and a resident of your city or township for at least 30 days (when you vote) | 2. United States citizen | 3. At least 18 years old (when you vote) | 4. Not currently serving a sentence in jail or prison

Ask yourself: Will I be eligible (able) to vote someday? Who do I know that is eligible to vote now?

Choose three important issues on the Why Vote Tool (Youth).

Answer the first two questions.

Extension Activities

Take a poll and report your data. Ask those around you if they fulfill all of the Michigan voter requirements listed on the Secretary of State's Elections website (www.michigan.gov/vote). Then create a bar graph of the data collected to show how many are eligible to vote.

Contribute to a class Voting FAQ. Select one of your Why Vote questions and write a short answer using the Michigan Secretary of State (www.michigan.gov/vote) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/), and other sources.

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Why Vote?

Why Vote? (Plain Text Version) – Continued

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Why Vote Tool (Youth)

Directions: Which 3 Issues Are Most Important To You?

- Safety
- Health
- Environment
- Education (Schools)
- Jobs & Economy
- Equality
- Criminal Justice (Police & Courts)
- Neighborhoods
- Immigration (Rules About People from Other Countries Moving, Living, & Working Here)
-

Your Vote and Key Issues

Elected officials make decisions that affect all these issues. By voting, you can have a say in who’s making those decisions.

Why would YOU want to vote?

What questions do you have about being able to vote in the next election? (Ask as many questions as you can.)

What do you understand differently now?

For more information about voting, contact michigan.gov/vote. You can also find where to vote by searching online “find my polling place.”

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Source: The Right Question Institute (RQI). The “Why Vote?” Tool was created by RQI. Visit rightquestion.org for more information and free resources.

Let's Talk Voting

More Information

Elections
Michigan Secretary of State
www.michigan.gov/vote

U.S. Citizenship
U.S. Citizenship and
Immigration Services
www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship

Directions

Voting is both a right and a responsibility of citizens. By voting citizens make decisions about and for their communities. Find out what others think about voting.

1. **Think** about what you know about voting. In your opinion, is voting important?
2. **Ask** someone to talk with you about voting.
3. **Choose** the questions that fit by asking:
 - Are you eligible (able) to vote?
 - Have you ever voted?
4. **Ask** one or more questions from the Conversation Starters. Respectfully discuss your partner's answers to learn more about their views and opinions.
5. **Think** about your opinions about voting now. Have they changed or not? Write about your ideas.

Extension Activity

What more would you like to learn about voting now?
Write supporting questions to research. Sources may include the Michigan Secretary of State (SOS) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) websites.



What do Justices and Judges say about voting? Watch or read their answers (pages 12–16).



Videos at mjieducation.mi.gov/lawday

Let's Talk Voting

Conversation Starters



First, ask your partner these two questions. Then, choose the questions that fit.

- Can't Vote
- Can Vote, But Hasn't Yet
- Has Voted
- Personal Stories & Opinions

Are you eligible (able) to vote?

- Michigan resident & resident of your city or township for 30 days
- United States citizen
- At least 18 years old
- Not currently serving a sentence in jail or prison



Have you ever voted?



Can't Vote

If you could vote in the next election, do you think you would? Why or why not?



Can't Vote

How do you feel about not being able to vote?



Can't Vote

Give an example of when you vote informally, like choosing an activity with a group. How does that make you feel? Does it make a difference if your choice wins?



Can't Vote

What would you say to someone who is eligible to vote but does not?



Can Vote, But Hasn't Yet

What has stopped you from voting in the past?



Can Vote, But Hasn't Yet

What is one thing that might encourage you to vote in the future?



Let's Talk Voting

Conversation Starters

Has Voted Before

Why do you vote?



Has Voted Before

What do you remember about the first time you voted?



Has Voted Before

How do you feel before you vote? During? After?



Has Voted Before

How do you know who you want to vote for, or what issues to approve?



Has Voted Before

Where have you voted? What polling places you have used?



Has Voted Before

What types of ballots and/or voting machines have you used?



Has Voted Before

Have you voted by mail (absentee ballot)? How does it feel to vote that way?



Has Voted Before

Were you 18, 21, or another age when you first voted? What influenced this?



Has Voted Before

When I turn 18, do you think I should vote? Why or why not?



Let's Talk Voting

Conversation Starters

Anyone can talk about Personal Stories & Opinions.

Personal Stories & Opinions

What else do you wish you knew about voting?



Personal Stories & Opinions

Is there a presidential election you especially remember?



Personal Stories & Opinions

Have you known someone who has run for office? What did you think?



Personal Stories & Opinions

Have you ever helped someone running for office or campaign for an issue? If so, what did you do?



Personal Stories & Opinions

Can you tell a personal story about a person who became eligible (able) to vote later than 18? How does that influence you?

Examples: "Grandma couldn't vote until the 19th Amendment."
"Dad became a citizen at 65."



Personal Stories & Opinions

Right now, you have to be 18 years old to vote. What if the age was raised to 21 or lowered to 16?



Personal Stories & Opinions

There are lots of people who can (are eligible to) vote, but choose not to. Why do you think that is?



Personal Stories & Opinions

If you were in charge of voting in America, what changes would you make to how it's done?



Let's Talk Voting

More Information

Justices

Michigan Supreme Court

courts.michigan.gov/courts/michigansupremecourt/justices/

Let's Talk Voting (video)

mjieducation.mi.gov/lawday



Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack
Michigan Supreme Court

Q. When I turn 18 and am eligible, do you think I should vote? Why or why not?

A. When you are 18 years old and eligible to vote, should you vote? Absolutely. In this country, the power of our government belongs to the people. That's what our state constitution says and that's what our federal constitution says. It is "We the People" who exercise the power in government and the way we exercise that power is by voting. It's when we vote that we express our feelings about how our government should run and you all at 18 years old will have great ideas about how our government should run and by voting you can make sure those ideas are counted and are delivered on.

Q. Can you tell me a personal story about someone who became eligible to vote later than age 18?

A. I'm going to tell you a personal story about somebody in my family who did not become eligible to vote until after her 18th birthday because women did not have the right to vote at the time when she was 18. My great grandmother, my grandmother's [mother], had four children. My grandmother was her oldest child, Margaret was her name. She was born in 1912. My great grandmother had three more children after Margaret was born and after her fourth child was born, about two years later, she died of an illness. We think it was the flu. That was probably around 1920 or 1921, we don't have exact records, but that's what my grandmother believed. We believe, therefore, she never had the opportunity to vote.

Women didn't get the right to vote until 1920 and because she died shortly after then, she never had the chance to vote. I remember that story, and I think of my great grandmother every single time I vote, and I will never miss the opportunity to vote because I feel grateful to have that say in my government.



Let's Talk Voting

More Information

Judges
Court of Appeals
courts.michigan.gov/courts/coa/judges/

Let's Talk Voting (video)
mjieducation.mi.gov/lawday



Chief Judge Christopher M. Murray
Court of Appeals

Q. When I turn 18 and am eligible, do you think I should vote? Why or why not?

A. The first question is, when your 18 years old and eligible to vote, do I think that you should? Why or why not? Well, my view and I think the Founding Father's view, was that once everyone turns 18 they should vote. Why is that? Because the Constitution starts off with the statement "We the People," and "We the People" means that all of us have a role in ensuring our government functions properly. And you can do that through contacting your legislators by letter or the Governor or the President, or you can go and speak at public hearings in front of the Legislature, but the best way to do that is to vote because politicians listen to voters. And if you're not happy with the way a legislator is doing their job or if you're happy with the way a legislator is doing their job, then you can vote in favor or in opposition to that person. And many, many people in our past have died for our right to do that. And so, it's a civic duty that all 18 year olds and above should exercise every year, in order to make sure that our democracy runs effectively.

Q. Can you tell me a personal story about someone who became eligible to vote later than age 18?

A. The question is, can I tell a personal story about someone who became eligible to vote later than the age of 18 and how does that story influence me today? Well, this isn't exactly responsive to the question, but I had a great aunt who passed away six years ago, at the age of 98. And she was born in 1915, which was five years before the enactment of the 19th Amendment. And I remember her telling me stories about how she remembers her mom having all the excitement knowing that women were now allowed to vote in the United States. And because of that, my great aunt, all the way until she passed away, made sure she voted in every election. Now, in the end, of course, it was a lot by absentee ballot, but she always, always wanted to make sure she exercised the voting franchise because she knew how hard it was to get that right and how important it was to make sure that she and her, her fellow citizens voted, to make sure that government was running the way they wanted it to run.



Let's Talk Voting

More Information

Judges
54A District Court
www.lansingmi.gov/172/Meet-the-Judges

Let's Talk Voting (video)
mjieducation.mi.gov/lawday



Judge Cynthia M. Ward
54A District Court (City of Lansing)

Q. When I turn 18 and am eligible, do you think I should vote? Why or why not?

A. When you are 18 and eligible to vote, should you vote? Absolutely you should vote when you become eligible, and don't stop voting from that point forward. Your vote is your voice, and it is the one aspect of civic participation that has equal value to everyone else's. It doesn't matter how smart you are, it doesn't matter how rich you are, it doesn't even matter how connected you are. Your vote is important, and it has equal value to every other citizen. So remember that, and when you begin voting, don't stop voting.

Q. Have you ever run for office? What's it like to be on the ballot?

A. Did I run for office and what was it like to see my name on the ballot? Yes. I ran for office two years ago in 2018, and it was very exciting to see my name on the ballot, but it was also very humbling. It was exciting because, well, it was my name and all the hard work I put in to have my name placed on the ballot, but it was also very humbling because of what having my name on the ballot represented. It meant that I was asking citizens in my community to entrust an important part of their government in my hands and that was a very humbling experience.



Let's Talk Voting

More Information

74th District Court
www.baycounty-mi.gov/DistrictCourt/

Let's Talk Voting (video)
mjieducation.mi.gov/lawday



Judge Timothy J. Kelly
 74th District Court (Bay County)

Q. When I turn 18 and am eligible, do you think I should vote? Why or why not?

A. Should I vote or should I not? Well, of course you should and this is why. We are members of a free society. If we want to be part of that free society, we need to be involved.

How do we get involved? First and foremost, by voting. If you want to be involved, if you wish to know what's going on in your community, you need to know who the candidates are, what they stand for, and you need to vote for those who you think are going to do the best job for you, your family, your community.

There are so many elected offices out there, you'd be pretty much amazed at what's available when it comes time to vote. There are things like your city or county government, your local sheriff, the prosecuting attorney, local judges. There are statewide races including your state representatives, state senators, your governor. Then there's the national races which include congressmen, senators, and the President of the United States, not to mention many others who are running for a variety of offices.

But, if you want to have a say in what happens in your world, you need to get involved, and you need to vote. There's nothing worse than talking to someone who complains and complains about how badly things are, and when you ask them did you vote, they'll say no. Well, it's kind of hard to complain if you're not involved. It's a lot easier to sit on the sidelines than it is to get into the game, but if you want to get in the game, you have to get off the bench, okay, you need to get out there and do something and your vote is heard, your vote is counted, and every vote counts, even your vote. People often say, well it's just one vote. That can change, that can change an election, and it can change it drastically.

So, don't put off your right to vote. Many people have worked hard, died for that right to vote. Make sure that you do it, you exercise it, and do it each and every time it's available to you.



Let's Talk Voting

Judge Timothy J. Kelly (continued)

Q. Have you ever run for office? What's it like to be on the ballot?

A. What happens when you run for office? What's it like to see your name on the ballot? Well, for any of us who have done that and I have – I've been fortunately elected to the position of district court judge here in Bay County four different times, it's quite an awesome experience.

When you see your name on that ballot it makes it real. Even though you – in my case [I] was out working hard, knocking on doors, talking to people, going to as many events as possible to get connected to my community. Once that proof ballot came in the mail, I knew this was real, and it sure brought it into prospective for me, my family, and my friends who helped me so much to get to the position that I'm in today. It's hard to believe that that was back in the year 2000, when probably many of you weren't even born, most of you of course weren't born back then and a lot of things have changed since that time.

It's really an honor and a privilege to be able to serve your community. It takes a lot of work, a lot of dedication, but it is well worth it. It pays off.

What's even more, or even a better feeling than seeing your name on the ballot is actually seeing what's called the certificate of determination, which I'm not sure if you can see, but that's the piece of paper you get from your county clerk's office, and there's also one that comes from the State of Michigan, to indicate that after the voting has all been compiled, you are the winner. And it's signed and sealed and it's certainly suitable for framing. I have the original, my first one from the year 2000, framed in my office.

And it's kind of like that feeling that you get when your teacher might tell you at the end of the year you're going to get an A in a certain course, or you're going to graduate, but when you actually see that diploma, or you see that report card, and you actually see that in writing.



Let's Talk Voting

Judge Timothy J. Kelly (continued)

You see the accomplishment, the hard work has paid off, and it gives you a really good feeling, a feeling of gratification, satisfaction, but it also makes you think, “I’ve taken on a big responsibility, it’s up to me to keep this going. No one’s going to do this but me. I have to carry on, I have to do the job that I was elected to do. I’ve taken an oath to protect the Constitution of the United States and the State of Michigan, to uphold the laws and do my job the best that I can, within the law.”

And that’s a tremendous responsibility, but it’s very rewarding. It’s a good feeling to know that you can make a difference in someone’s life as a judge.

We make those decisions every day, and we are more than pleased when someone finally understands that it’s much better to be a productive member of society than one who we have to continually remind, and sometimes, unfortunately, have to have them put themselves in jail to learn that it’s not the way to go by breaking the law. The better way to go is by being a productive member of society.



Let's Talk Voting

Let's Talk Voting (Plain Text Version)

Voting is both a right and a responsibility of citizens. By voting citizens make decisions about and for their communities. Find out what others think about voting.

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Directions

Think about what you know about voting. In your opinion, is voting important?

Ask someone to talk with you about voting.

Choose the questions that fit by asking: 1. Are you eligible (able) to vote? | 2. Have you ever voted?

Ask one or more questions from the Conversation Starters. Respectfully discuss your partner's answers to learn more about their views and opinions.

Think about your opinions about voting now. Have they changed or not? Write about your ideas.

Extension Activity

What more would you like to learn about voting now? Write supporting questions to research. Use the Michigan Secretary of State (www.michigan.gov/vote), the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/), and other sources.

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Let's Talk Voting

Let's Talk Voting (Plain Text Version) – Continued

Conversation Starters

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First, ask your partner: Are you eligible (able) to vote? | To vote you must: 1. Be a Michigan resident and resident of your city or township for at least 30 days | 2. Be a United States citizen | 3. Be at least 18 years old | 4. Not be currently serving a sentence in jail or prison.

Next, ask: Have you ever voted?

Then, pick the questions that fit. Anyone can answer Personal Stories and Opinions.

- Can't Vote -

If you could vote in the next election, do you think you would? Why or why not?

How do you feel about not being able to vote?

Give an example of when you vote informally, like choosing an activity with a group. How does that make you feel? Does it make a difference if your choice wins?

What would you say to someone who is eligible to vote but does not?

- Can Vote, But Hasn't Yet -

What has stopped you from voting in the past?

What is one thing that might encourage you to vote in the future?

Continued on the next page

Let's Talk Voting

Let's Talk Voting (Plain Text Version) – Continued

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- Has Voted Before -

Why do you vote?

What do you remember about the first time you voted?

How do you feel before you vote? During? After?

How do you know who you want to vote for, or what issues to approve?

Where have you voted? What polling places you have used?

What types of ballots and/or voting machines have you used?

Have you voted by mail (absentee ballot)? How does it feel to vote that way?

Were you 18, 21, or another age when you first voted? What influenced this?

When I turn 18, do you think I should vote? Why or why not?

- Person Stories and Opinions -

What else do you wish you knew about voting?

Is there a presidential election you especially remember?

Have you known someone who has run for office? What did you think?

Have you ever helped someone running for office or campaign for an issue? If so, what did you do?

Can you tell a personal story about a person who became eligible (able) to vote later than 18? How does that influence you? Examples: "Grandma couldn't vote until the 19th Amendment." "Dad became a citizen at 65."

Right now, you have to be 18 years old to vote. What if the age was raised to 21 or lowered to 16?

There are lots of people who can (are eligible to) vote, but choose not to. Why do you think that is?

If you were in charge of voting in America, what changes would you make to how it's done?

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Suffrage Theater: Eva R. Belles

More Information

Eva Belles' Vote
State Bar of Michigan
www.michbar.org/programs/milestone/milestones_evebellesvote

Key Words

Suffrage – The right to vote.

Suffragist – A person who works to get the right to vote for a group that cannot. *Eva R. Belles was a suffragist who tried to vote in a school election.*

Directions

The U.S. Constitution did not guarantee the right to vote for women citizens until after the 19th Amendment (1920). However, a Michigan law allowed women to vote in school elections several decades before that.

Eva R. Belles, a suffragist, took her case to the Michigan Supreme Court after her vote was not accepted by election inspectors in Flint in 1888.

1. **Watch or read** the Suffrage Theater play video or script (pages 21–22).
2. **Write** a journal entry, using one of these prompts:
 - My favorite character was _____ because ...
 - If I was a friend of her daughter Jennie Belles, I would have thought ...
 - My understanding of voting has changed because

Why did Eva R. Belles go to court?

Learn more in this play. Still interested? There's an interview, too!

Videos at mjeducation.mi.gov/lawday



Suffrage Theater: Eva R. Belles

Characters

- Narrator
- Mrs. Eva R. Belles
- Women
- Mr. William Burr and Election Inspectors
- Mr. George Durand
- Mr. John Jay Carton
- Judge William Newton
- Justice John Champlin
- Justice Thomas Sherwood
- Justice Allen Morse
- Justice James Campbell

Play Script

SCENE 1

NARRATOR: Before the 19th Amendment, the U.S. Constitution didn't guarantee women citizens the right to vote. Some people were okay with that. Others – called suffragists, thought that wasn't fair. They thought women should be able to vote.

Eva R. Belles was a woman who wanted change.

SCENE 2

NARRATOR: In 1888, Eva Belles and some other women tried to vote in a school election in Flint, Michigan. A local law listed the qualifications.

WOMEN: Let's see. ... We're persons. Over 21. Child in school. Taxable property. We have all these. We can vote! Let's go!

NARRATOR: But Mr. Burr and other election inspectors said:

BURR: Our apologies – we can't take your ballots. The state constitution says you must be a male citizen to vote. ... And you are not.

NARRATOR: The women didn't vote. But Eva Belles didn't give up.

SCENE 3

BELLES: Mr. Durand, I'm sure this law means I can vote in school elections. But the inspectors wouldn't take my ballot.

I want to take this to court. Will you help me? Will you be my attorney?

DURAND: Mrs. Belles, you have a good case. I will file suit in Genesee County Circuit Court.

Suffrage Theater: Eva R. Belles

SCENE 4

- DURAND:** Judge Newton, I am George Durand, representing Mrs. Belles. She has the qualifications listed in the law. The inspectors should have taken her ballot. Mrs. Belles qualifies but was denied a vote in the school election.
- CARTON:** Your Honor, John Jay Carton, for Mr. Burr and others. The state constitution says voters must be male citizens. Mrs. Belles is not. She cannot vote, even in school elections.
- JUDGE:** Both parties make good points. After listening to the arguments and reading the law, this Court instructs the jury to find that Mrs. Belles qualified to vote in the school election. Inspector Burr and others should have accepted her ballot.

SCENE 5

- NARRATOR:** But the case didn't stop there.
- BURR:** Could there be an error in this decision? We need to know for future elections. We must appeal to the state's highest court – the Michigan Supreme Court.

SCENE 6

- NARRATOR:** The Supreme Court thought Belles' case was important to future cases and to the public. Voters and election inspectors needed to know how to follow the law. So the Justices listened to arguments for both sides.
- Could women qualify to vote in school elections? After discussing the question, the Justices wrote an opinion to interpret the law.

SCENE 7

- NARRATOR:** Justice Champlin wrote the majority opinion. He interpreted the law – explaining what the law meant.
- CHAMPLIN:** School elections are different. The Legislature had the authority to make this law. The law is constitutional.
- The mother or legal female guardian of a child in a school district who is at least 21 years old can vote in school elections not related to raising tax money.
- NARRATOR:** And Justice Sherwood agreed.
- So did Justice Morse. But he raised other points.

Suffrage Theater: Eva R. Belles

- MORSE: I will uphold this law as the state constitution demands, but I have concerns. Households with two votes will have more say than those that do not.
- NARRATOR: Justice Campbell dissented.
- CAMPBELL: The law was changed too much when it was amended. Plaintiff Belles had no right to vote in this school election.
- NARRATOR: Because three of the four Justices agreed, women in Michigan could qualify to vote in school elections.

SCENE 8

NARRATOR: But the story doesn't end there.

Suffragists campaigned for 30 more years before “We the People” of Michigan approved an amendment to the state constitution.

And in 1919, Michigan became one of the first states to ratify – approve – the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Although Eva Belles wasn't alive to see this happen she helped to lead the way.

THE END

Legal Legacy: Eva R. Belles

More Information

Eva Belles' Vote
 State Bar of Michigan
www.michbar.org/programs/milestone/milestones_evebellesvote

Key Words

Suffrage – The right to vote.

Suffragist – A person who works to get the right to vote for a group that cannot. *Eva R. Belles was a suffragist who tried to vote in a school election.*

Directions

The U.S. Constitution did not guarantee the right to vote for women citizens until after the 19th Amendment (1920). However, a Michigan law allowed women to vote in school elections several decades before that.

Eva R. Belles, a suffragist, took her case to the Michigan Supreme Court after her vote was not accepted by election inspectors in Flint in 1888.

1. **Watch or read** with a partner the Legal Legacy interview video or script (page 25–26).
2. **Write** a journal entry, using one of these prompts:
 - If I lived in Flint with Eva R. Belles, I would or would not have agreed that women should be able to vote because ...
 - If I was a friend of her daughter Jennie Belles, I would have thought ...
 - My understanding of voting has changed because

Why did Eva R. Belles go to court?

Learn more in this interview. Still interested? There's a play, too!

Legal Legacy
 Eva R. Belles, Suffragist

Videos at mjeducation.mi.gov/lawday



Legal Legacy: Eva R. Belles

Interview Script

Characters

- Sandra Jean Lee, host of the Legal Legacy interview program
- Eva R. Belles, a suffragist who tried to vote in a school election in 1888

LEE: This is Legal Legacy. I'm Sandra Jean Lee. Today, we're interviewing Eva R. Belles, a suffragist, who in 1888 tried to vote in a school election in Flint, Michigan. Her court case – *Belles v Burr* – became a Michigan Legal Milestone and a win for women's rights.

Mrs. Belles, welcome to the show.

BELLES: Thanks for having me, Miss Lee.

LEE: Tell us what happened.

BELLES: Well, back in 1888, I was a private school teacher living in Flint, Michigan. As a woman, I wanted to help make political decisions about my community, which means voting.

So, on election day in April that year, some ladies and I went to vote for the school election. But Mr. Burr and the other inspectors told us we couldn't.

I knew they were wrong – even if they had talked about it to lawyers.

LEE: Why did you think they were wrong?

BELLES: At the time, the state constitution said men over the age of 21 who lived in Michigan could vote in all elections.

But the Legislature also made a law saying women could vote in school elections. They figured women were concerned about their children and would know about schools.

I had the qualifications, including taxable property and a school-age daughter named Jennie.

LEE: So there was a dispute – a disagreement – over what the law meant. What did you do next?

BELLES: Well, I took it to court. That's where these types of disputes are resolved – where they're decided.

As I said, there were other ladies interested in voting, so we arranged to have Mr. Durand – later Justice Durand of the Michigan Supreme Court – represent me.

In Genesee County Circuit Court, Judge Newton listened to the evidence – the facts – from both sides. And he looked at the law. The Court decided I should have been allowed to vote.

Legal Legacy: Eva R. Belles

Interview Script (Continued)

LEE: Did the case stop there?

BELLES: No, the law had been controversial. And it was confusing to apply. So the election inspectors, including Mr. Burr, appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court.

If the state's highest court decided the case, then election inspectors and voters across Michigan would know what to do in future elections.

And in the end, I won the case. Women could qualify to vote in school elections.

LEE: So, did you benefit personally from this win?

BELLES: Well, perhaps, but not in the way you might think.

As the dispute went on, I realized that I needed to make a change in my life. Things were difficult in my home, so I divorced and moved with my daughter Jennie to Cleveland, Ohio. I taught school there – eventually high school art, and was active in the temperance movement.

LEE: So you did all of this in order to vote and then moved out of state where the laws were different?

BELLES: Yes, but my work was important. And I didn't do it just for me.

Before I left Flint, I headed a group of women who discussed and promoted women's suffrage. They met in my home.

Getting the vote took decades, and it needed networks of women fighting for the cause. I was part of that Legal Legacy.

LEE: Eva R. Belles, I want to thank you so much, and I wish you well.

BELLES: It was a pleasure.

A History of Voting Rights

Further Reading

Insights: The 19th
Amendment at 100
American Bar Association
www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/publications/insights-on-law-and-society/volume-20/issue-1/

U.S. Constitution Online

U.S. Constitution
National Archives
www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution

Interactive Constitution
National Constitution Center
constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution

In the Nation

The U.S. Constitution, as originally framed, said little about qualifications for voting. Election practices were left almost entirely up to the states. In the young United States, only white males age 21 and older who owned land typically qualified.

Over time, voting rights were expanded at the national level but not without protest, petition, and struggle by those who wanted change. By 1850, states had eliminated land ownership requirements. Following the Civil War, the 14th Amendment (1868) defined citizenship – a qualification for voting, and the 15th Amendment (1870), which expanded voting to all male citizens above age 21.

Although the birth of the women’s suffrage movement predates the Civil War, an active anti-suffrage movement prevented votes for women on a national level until 1920. This right was guaranteed through ratification of the 19th Amendment; however, the long history of disenfranchisement and other factors meant women did not immediately exercise this right fully.

And barriers remained for many, especially for persons of color, the young, the old, and those with disabilities. Native Americans were not granted citizenship until 1924, and the voting rights of African Americans in the South were severely limited until ratification of the 24th Amendment (1964), which eliminated poll taxes, and passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), which took aim at other tactics such as literacy tests and harassment. The 26th Amendment (1971) lowered the voting age to 18, and the federal Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act (1984) required polling places to be accessible to those with disabilities.



A History of Voting Rights

Further Reading

Michigan and the 19th Amendment
National Park Service
www.nps.gov/articles/michigan-and-the-19th-amendment.htm

Michigan Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission
www.womensvote100.org/michigan

State Constitution Online

Michigan Constitution
Michigan Legislature
www.legislature.mi.gov/

In Michigan

At statehood in 1837, only white male citizens above the age of 21 years who had lived in Michigan for at least six months qualified to vote.

Thirty years later, the state legislature allowed Michigan women to vote in school elections; however, local provisions varied, and it was not until 1889 that the Michigan Supreme Court confirmed women could vote in school elections. *Eva R. Belles v William A. Burr, et al.* (1889).

Around this time, those who supported women's suffrage in Michigan started focusing on votes for women in city elections. Although the Legislature passed a measure in 1893, the Michigan Supreme Court decided the act was unconstitutional. *Coffin et al v Board of Elections Com'rs of the City of Detroit.* (1893).

With the support of national figures like Anna Shaw Howard and Helen Gougar, who both had roots in Michigan, state suffragists worked toward new laws. In November 1918, Michigan voters passed a referendum to amend the state constitution, granting women the vote. Less than a year later, Michigan ratified the 19th Amendment, just days after passage by Congress on June 5, 1919.



More Resources

Women's Suffrage

American Bar Association, Digital Resources

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/law-day/law-day-2020/planning-guide/digital-resources/

National Constitution Center, Amendment Nineteen

constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/interpretation/amendment-xix/interps/145

Lessons

American Bar Association, Lessons (Elem/MS/HS)

www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/law-day/law-day-2020/planning-guide/

National Archives, Docs Teach: Women's Rights

www.docsteach.org/topics/women

Multimedia

iCivics, Cast Your Vote Game

www.icivics.org/games/cast-your-vote

Roy Rosenzweig Center, Eagle Eye Citizen: Civics Challenges

www.eagleeyecitizen.org/

Time after Time: Evolution of the Vote

eagleeyecitizen.org/solve/tat?sid=9918

Big Picture: How to Be Heard

eagleeyecitizen.org/solve/bp/?sid=10726

Big Picture: Participation Nation

eagleeyecitizen.org/solve/bp/?sid=9544

