

# LAWMAKING in the United States

by Barbara Magalnick

## Fun Facts

- In 1971 the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen.
- At forty-three, John F. Kennedy was the youngest man to be elected President. Ronald Reagan, at sixty-nine, was the oldest.
- New Jersey was the first state to allow women to vote.

| Genre      | Comprehension Skill   | Text Features   |
|------------|-----------------------|---|
| Nonfiction | Main Idea and Details | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glossary</li> <li>• Captions</li> <li>• Illustrations</li> <li>• Headings</li> </ul> |

Scott Foresman Social Studies





One of the most important rights in our country is the right to vote. You are going to read about the history of voting laws in the United States and how the laws have been changed. Read about each change and why it took place. Think about what these changes have meant.



## Vocabulary

President  
 freedom  
 citizen  
 Congress  
 government

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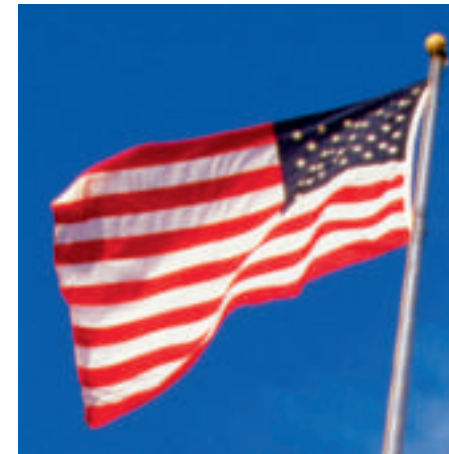
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Thomas Jefferson was the third President of our country. James Madison was the fourth.



## Voting for the President

The United States holds an election for **President** every four years. Some countries in the world do not vote for a president. In fact, some countries do not have the **freedom** to vote at all!

When our Constitution was written in 1787, a law was made about voting. The Constitution is a paper that tells how our country is run. Each state had the right to make laws about who could vote.

### The Constitution of the United States







## The Electoral College

Before the people vote, each state chooses electors. In most states the electors vote for the candidate who has won the popular vote.

The electors in each state meet. This is called the electoral college. The electors vote for their candidate. The winner of most of the electoral votes becomes President.



## The Pioneers Go West

During the 1800s, many states joined the Union. Because of hard times in Europe, many people came to America. At the same time people began to move west into land that was not yet part of the Union. The motto of the time was, "Go west, young man!"

The pioneers had to travel in wagons pulled by horses or oxen. Because of the many dangers of these long trips, not everyone survived the difficult journey.

Women in the West, working alongside the men, were some of the first women allowed to vote.

The pioneers were looking for land.







## The North and South Disagree

By the middle of the 19th century, the United States was becoming divided. The northern states had cities and factories, while the southern states had farms and plantations. Enslaved people in the South did much of the work, but they could not vote.

The northern states had put an end to slavery and wanted the southern states to do the same. Some Southerners were angry that the northern states were telling them what to do. They wanted to make their own choices about slavery.

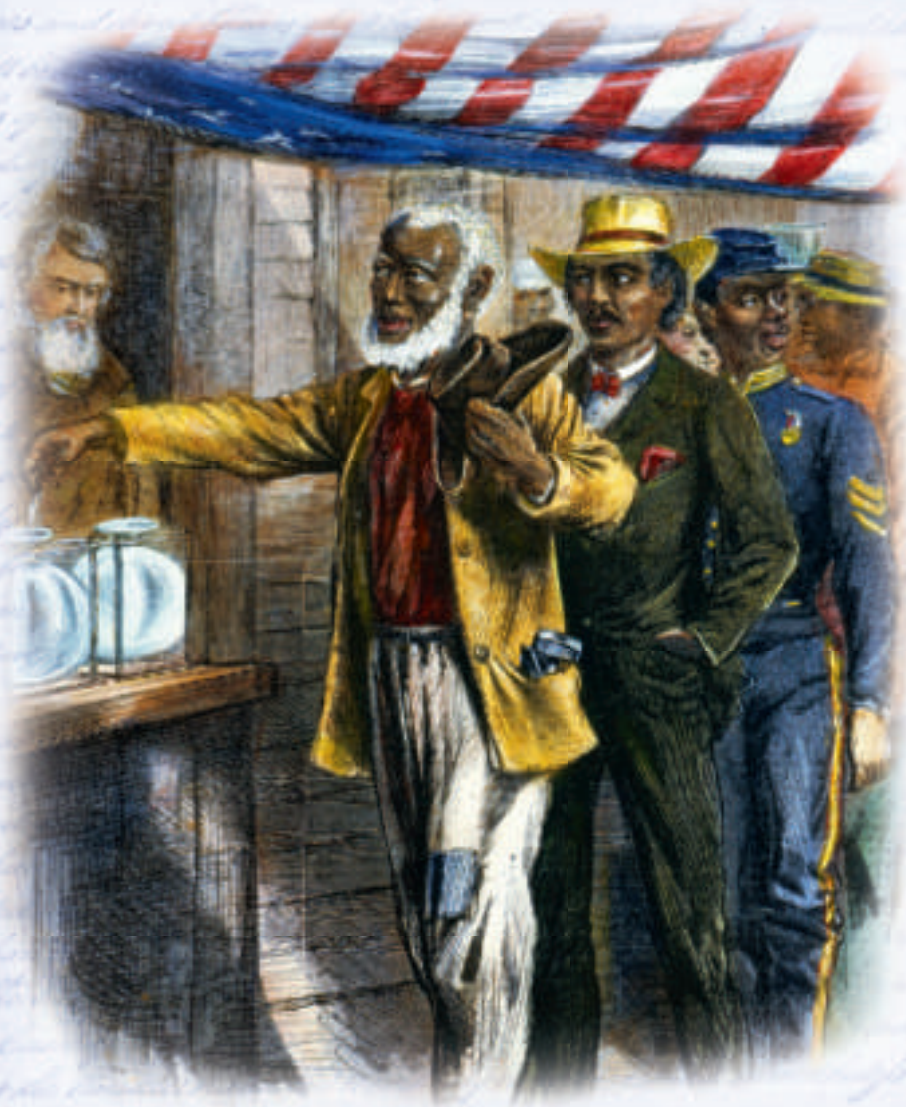


With the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, Civil War broke out in the United States. During the war, Abraham Lincoln started to give the enslaved people their freedom. He did this by signing a paper called the Emancipation Proclamation. As the war continued, some former slaves joined the Union army.

Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation during the Civil War.







## The Civil War Wins Freedom for Enslaved People

While enslaved people were given freedom, they had a hard time getting their full rights. After the Civil War the 15th Amendment was added to the Constitution. An amendment is a change to the Constitution. This gave voting rights to African American men, who were now **citizens** of the Union.

Some southern states, however, made it very hard for the men to vote. They had laws that made men pay a tax in order to vote, and some men did not have enough money. The men also had to show they could read and write. It had been against the law, however, to teach these skills to slaves, and many former slaves had never been to school.



The 15th Amendment gave African American men the right to vote.





## The Difficulty of Trying to Vote

There were other things that made it hard for African American men to vote. In some states there were “grandfather” laws that said men who were descended from slaves could not vote. This meant that if someone’s father or grandfather had been a slave, they could not vote.

It seemed that only the small number of African American men who had been raised in northern states got to vote. In northern states, there were also rules that said voters must own land.



Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony worked hard telling people that women should be allowed to vote.



## Women Work to Get the Vote

While some men were allowed to vote, women could not. For many years Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were part of a group of women who worked to change this. They had a difficult time! The women and their followers were often insulted. Anthony was once arrested for voting illegally.





## Western States First to Give Women Voting Rights

When the Civil War ended, many people decided to go west. Families settled on land and worked on farms. Women worked hard, along with the men. Women in the West were the first to be given voting rights for local elections.

Wyoming was the first territory to give voting rights to women in 1869. Women could not yet vote for President, but they could now vote in some elections.

When the United States entered World War I, women worked in factories and on farms while the men were away fighting. Women continued to work hard to prove that they should be allowed to vote.



Men and women worked together. There was lots of work to do!







## Amending the Constitution

Since voting laws for our President were written in the Constitution, it would have to be changed so that women could vote. An amendment would have to be added to make this change.

Adding an amendment can take a long time. First, **Congress** must approve the new amendment. Then it is sent to the states for approval. In 1920, women's long fight for the vote succeeded when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was approved. Women could now vote for President!



The 24th Amendment says that every citizen is allowed to vote.



## Voting Rights Are Civil Rights!

During the 1960s people asked if our laws were fair to everyone. In 1964 the 24th Amendment to the Constitution said that unpaid taxes could not be used to keep anyone from voting. Congress later passed the Voting Rights Act. This allowed the federal **government** to make sure states did not keep anyone from voting. Every citizen was now allowed to vote!



## Glossary

**citizen** a member of a country

**Congress** the part of the United States government that writes and votes on our laws

**freedom** every citizen's right to make choices

**government** a group of people who work together to run a city, state, or country

**President** the leader of our country



## Write to It!

Write one paragraph about some reasons why people should vote in presidential elections.

Write your paragraph on another sheet of paper.

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