

WOMEN'S LONG ROAD

MAINE STATE MUSEUM TEACHER MATERIALS



Lesson 3: *Mainers Speak Up* *Recreating a historic women's suffrage debate*

Recommended grade level: 8-12

Instructional Materials

Student packet [[Print 1 copy per student](#)]:

- Debate History Handout
- 1914 Debate Article
- Historical Hints
- Schedule of Events
- Debate Speech Planning Sheet

Team Packet [[Print 1 copy per student team, as needed](#)]

- Role A Handout
- Role B Handout
- Pro-suffrage Resource Packet
- Anti-suffrage Resource Packet

Judges' Sheet [[Print 1 copy per judge](#)]

Cast List [[Print 1 copy for teacher](#)]

Background Discussion

This lesson uses **analysis and interpretation of primary source documents** to dramatically recreate a 1914 Maine debate on women's suffrage. Students will conduct research to understand the historical context of the arguments in the article. They will not only have to read and understand historic text, but reinterpret it through writing and public speaking to make it meaningful to their classmates.

Students will take on the roles of historic characters and perform the debate. They will be able to interpret historic points of view on a topic and analyze the reasoning used at the time. They will use evidence to back up their analysis. Through the debate process, students will **effectively communicate their arguments** to their peers, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the Women's Suffrage Movement of the early 1900s.

This lesson plan can stand alone but ideally builds upon some knowledge of the women's suffrage movement. The **Introduction to Maine Women's Suffrage** document can provide a starting point for teachers and students. **Lesson 1: State by State** and **Lesson 2: Cartooning for a Cause** may also serve as a helpful introduction to build upon. They are designed to be accessible to younger students but can also be used as is or adapted to higher grade levels.

Essential Questions

- What role do public debates play in American politics, past and present?
- What were the main arguments used by pro-suffrage activists in the early 1900s?
- What were the main arguments used by anti-suffrage activists in the early 1900s?
- How can evidence be used to support an argument?
- How do primary source documents provide information on the perspectives and values of people in the past?
- Why is it still important to learn about this period of history today?

Plan of Instruction

Overview

A 1914 Maine newspaper article gives a detailed description of an event in Portland's Riverton Park. The Congregational Club hosted a debate between six women: three pro-suffrage, three anti-suffrage. This primary source document is the basis for the lesson.

The lesson begins with an overview of debates, connecting to the modern day. The debate process and format will be explained, and students will be assigned roles to play. They will read the article, conduct research to understand the historical context of the arguments in the article and reinterpret the text to make it meaningful in their own words. They will work as small groups to develop a speech.

In the final section of the lesson, the class will recreate the debate. Students will deliver speeches and will listen, evaluate, and address the opposing viewpoints. In the process of researching, writing, and performing the debate, they will actively demonstrate their understanding of the Women's Suffrage Movement. There will be an opportunity for reflection at the end.

Timing

This class can be broken into two approximately 60 minute sessions or combined into one 2 hour session.

Note to Teachers

Since this lesson has many variables, teachers should decide what format will work best for their class. Depending on class size, students should be divided into teams to ensure that

everyone participates in the reading, research, and writing process. There are seven speaking roles in the debate so the lesson will work best with at least seven students, but multiple roles could be assigned to students in smaller classes. With more students, teams will get larger and can have more distinct roles.

The bulk of the student work is in the process of turning a third-person article into a script to recreate a historic event. Students read a 1914 article about a Maine debate, and then focus in on a small section of the article to thoroughly analyze and interpret.

Students will have to do background research to understand some of the references in the text. They will need a thorough understanding of their section of the article so they can effectively communicate the arguments to their classmates in their debate speech. In this way, they will be learning by teaching.

Depending on student initiative and the amount of time available in the class, this could be a simple rephrasing of the article or it could be more fully developed with supporting examples and details drawn from student research. It can also range from a simple reading of a script to a much more theatrical and involved performance. Costumes and/or props are completely optional, but could add to the fun.

Pre-Lesson Student Preparation [Optional]

Teachers may wish to let students know that an upcoming class will feature a special activity. Any advance introduction to debating and to the women's suffrage movement will help lay the foundation for this lesson. Teachers may also wish to assign the **1914 Debate Article** as homework so students come to the class with an idea of what to expect.

SECTION ONE (approx. 60 min)

Part 1: Introducing the Debate

1. The teacher explains that the class will be working together to recreate a 1914 Maine debate on suffrage.
2. Distribute copies of the **Debate History Handout** and read individually or as a class. The teacher may also summarize this information, which is meant to provide some historical context to the activity. (Optional) Class discussion:
 - *Have you ever seen or heard a debate? What was it like?*
 - *Do you think debates are an effective way to educate the public? Why or why not?*
3. Practice setting up a simple debate as a class by writing a debate statement and asking students to come up with three reasons for “yes” and three reasons for no.”
 - For example, “Kittens are the cutest animal.”

- i. Yes
 - 1. They have tiny paws
 - 2. They are fluffy
 - 3. Cat photos are really popular on the internet
- ii. No
 - 1. Puppies have floppier ears
 - 2. Kittens' claws hurt
 - 3. The world is full of other cute animals
- The teacher encourages students to think about how they could be given the role to argue “yes” or “no.” They would have to spend a few minutes planning their reasons and try to convince people that they were right.
- 4. Distribute copies of the **1914 Debate Article** for students to look over on their own. Depending on the time available and student comfort with reading, the teacher may want to summarize as a class. This could also be assigned as homework in preparation for the class. Reading the full article will give students a sense of their own role in the debate and where it fits into the full event.

Part 2: Preparing for the Debate (note—this preparation will likely continue into the next class period. Parts could be assigned as homework.)

1. The teacher distributes the **Schedule of Events** and the class reviews this summarized version of what happened in the article they just read. This should help students get a big-picture view of the event they will be recreating.
NOTE: *the teacher decides whether to do the **Optional Rebuttal**. The benefit is that it gives students a reason to listen carefully and process the other side's arguments. Although including the rebuttal is better for a thorough debate experience, teachers may decide there is not enough time or that it overcomplicates the activity.*
2. The teacher distributes copies of the **Role A and Role B Handouts**, reviews the responsibilities of each team, and discusses the goals of each group. **Role A** includes the president and judges and **Role B** is for the debate participants. The teacher answers any student questions.
3. The class decides which students will take on the roles.
4. The teacher uses student input to fill out the **Cast List**, and then ensures that each student knows their assigned role.
5. The teacher distributes copies of the **Debate Speech Planning Sheet**, and explains that the students may use that to take notes on the article and start planning their arguments.

Part 3: Research and Writing

Students follow the prompts on the **Role A and B Handouts**:

1. Read their sections of the article very carefully.
2. Use the **Debate Speech Planning Sheet** to brainstorm ideas.
3. Conduct necessary background research using the **Pro-Suffrage Resource Packet and Anti-Suffrage Resource Packet**, in addition to websites, books, etc.
4. Write drafts of the debate speeches or introduction.
5. Go over the draft as a team and decide how to improve it to make it more persuasive.
6. Complete a final script for the speech/introduction.
7. The student performing the speech in the debate should have a chance to practice reading the speech out loud.

SECTION TWO (approx. 60 min)

The class should take any time they need to finish any steps not already completed in the previous session. More time to write, edit, and practice the scripts may be necessary.

Part 4: The Debate

1. When each group is ready, come back together as a full class to walk through the steps of the recreated debate (not reading the speeches, just making sure students know the order of events and are comfortable with the process). Use the **Schedule of Events** as a guide.
2. Set up the classroom, as needed.
3. Hold the debate.

Part 5: Reflection

The teacher prompts the students to **reflect on the debate, either as a guided discussion or as an optional writing exercise**. This will also allow the class to follow up on the activity at a later date if there is no more time in-class.

Suggested reflection questions (teachers may pick and choose):

- What challenges did you have when you were working on your part of the project?
- Did you learn anything that surprised you?
- What were the most effective debate techniques that you used or you saw other teams use?
- Was the project different depending on what side of the issue you had to argue for?
- What role do public debates play in American politics, past and present?
- What were the main arguments used by pro-suffrage activists in the early 1900s?
- What were the main arguments used by anti-suffrage activists in the early 1900s?

- How do primary source documents provide information on the perspectives and values of people in the past?
- Why is it still important to learn about this period of history today?
- Could you imagine a debate like this happening today? Which, if any of the issues discussed in 1914 are still important in America today?