WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE AND WORLD WAR I

NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL STUDIES CORE CURRICULUM, GRADES 7/8:
UNITED STATES AND NEW YORK STATE HISTORY

UNIT SEVEN  An Industrial Society
Chapter III: The Progressive Movement; 1900–1920: Efforts to Reform the New Society

UNIT EIGHT  The United States as an Independent Nation in an Increasingly Interdependent World
Chapter II: The United States Begins to Take a Role in Global Politics

These questions and documents can be used in conjunction with the New York State Education Department core curriculum for grades 7/8 Social Studies: United States and New York State History.

FOCUS QUESTION
How did the fight for democracy abroad compare with the struggle for democracy within the United States?

MATERIALS
Nina Allender’s political cartoon from The Suffragist
Alva Belmont’s Letter to the Editor
President Woodrow Wilson’s speech
Notebook paper/pens/pencils

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY
• In notebooks, students answer the question: Your house and your neighborhood both need to be fixed up. Which would you fix up first? Why?
• Students share answers, and discuss with partners.
• Class shares. (If the class splits pretty evenly between the two answers, then the teacher can split class into two groups based on answers. Students who said they would fix up their house first will be Democracy at Home, and students who would fix up their neighborhood first will be Democracy Abroad. If class does not split pretty evenly, teacher may split class.)

PROCEDURE
• Teacher explains that addressing domestic vs. foreign problems has been a challenge throughout history.
• Teacher gives brief history and context for Belmont’s editorial.
• Entire class reads Belmont’s Letter to the Editor
• Students in the Democracy at Home group develop a strategy to use Wilson’s rhetoric to support women’s suffrage. Students sum up their strategies in paragraph form.
• Democracy Abroad group reads Wilson’s speech. Students develop arguments to support their cause. They sum up their strategies in paragraph form.
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DEBATE
• Pair up students of opposing sides or Democracy at Home will debate Democracy Abroad
• Each side is responsible for defending its stance.
• Debate the two sides—the debate is up to teacher discretion. Formal debates include opening and closing statements as well as question and response time. A good strategy for hearing from all students is to hand out index cards before the debate starts. Once a student has spoken, the index card is taken away and that student may not speak again; however they may help their team.

DEBATE WRAP-UP
• Teacher poses the question, “Can a society have both democracy at home and democracy abroad?” Class discussion.

HOMEWORK OR FOLLOW-UP
• All students analyze the political cartoon. Students answer the following questions:

1. What words and symbols are used in this cartoon?
2. What is physically happening in the cartoon? Tell the cartoon’s story.
3. What do you think the artist is trying to say?
4. Give a title to this cartoon.

OTHER SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
Teacher takes a class vote but restricts voting to just boys or another exclusive group. Discussion around, “Is this fair?”
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DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY’S NEW YORK TIMES

Descriptions of historic events in textbooks are often based on the original newspaper accounts. These questions help you compare the past with current reports in The New York Times.

1. Find an article about a protest — marching, picketing, etc. — in The New York Times. Who is protesting and what do they want?

2. Collect articles about protests reported in The New York Times. Compare the protests — what is similar and what is different?

3. Analyze several articles about protests in The Times. How would changes in the system of voting contribute to solving the reported problem? Write a letter to the editor expressing your opinion.

4. World War I was fought, according to President Wilson, to “make the world safe for democracy.” Find articles in The Times that report situations where there is a fight for democracy. Compare these conflicts with World War I — what are the similarities and differences?
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BACKGROUND TO LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Mrs. Alva Belmont divorced one of the richest men in the world, William K. Vanderbilt, to marry another man, Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont. A central figure in New York high society, she later became a champion of women’s rights. After her second husband’s death, Belmont became a leader and benefactor of the National Woman’s Party (NWP).

The National Woman’s Party, led by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, had broken away from the National American Woman’s Suffrage Association in order to pursue a more militant strategy to pass a constitutional amendment for women’s suffrage (modeled after the tactics of British suffragettes and of Susan B. Anthony’s civil disobedience). When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, the NWP picketed in front of the White House, protesting what they saw as President Wilson’s hypocrisy in endorsing democracy abroad but failing to support it for women at home.

DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY’S NEW YORK TIMES

Historical events described in textbooks often begin with reports in a newspaper. These questions help you compare the past with the present.

Find an article about a protest — marching, picketing, etc. — in The New York Times. Who is protesting and what do they want? Compare and contrast what these modern-day protestors are saying with the letter from Mrs. Belmont in 1917.
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Letter from President Wilson’s secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, to First Lady Edith Wilson.

Dear Mrs. Wilson:

The President’s last address to Congress made such a profound impression that I was anxious to have the original copy preserved, with the changes and revisions in his own handwriting. I took the matter up with Public Printer Ford and he has been good enough to have it bound for me. It gives me great pleasure to present it to you.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph P. Tumulty
Secretary to the President.
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PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON'S ADDRESS, APRIL 2, 1917

Corrections are in President Wilson's handwriting.

We are accepting this challenge of hostile purpose because we know that in such a government, following such methods, we can never have a friend; and that in the presence of its organized power, always lying in wait to accomplish we know not what purpose, there can be no assured security for the democratic governments of the world. We are now about to accept guage of battle with this natural foe to liberty and shall, if necessary, spend the whole force of the nation to check and nullify its pretensions and its power. We are glad, now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretence about them, to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included, for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

Just because we fight without rancour and without selfish object, seeking nothing for ourselves, we shall wish to share with all free peoples, we shall, I feel confident, conduct our operations as belligerents without passion and ourselves observe with proud punctilio the principles of right and of fair play we profess to be fighting for.
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http://www.sewallbelmont.org/mainpages/collections_allender.html

THE NEW YORK TIMES, JULY 9, 1917

EXCUSES FOR WHITE HOUSE PICKETING.

A Statement in Extenuation from Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont, of the National Woman's Party.

Newport, July 7, 1917.

To the Editor of The New York Times:

American women have been imprisoned for holding at the gates of the White House banners demanding democracy at the hands of a Democratic Administration. They have committed no violence, but have stood there quietly, peacefully, lawfully, and gloriously. In return they have been attacked by the metropolitan police and their property destroyed. One of the banners they were arrested for holding bore a quotation from President Wilson's book, “The New Freedom,” which read: “We are interested in the United States, politically speaking, in nothing but human liberty.”

Another banner bore this legend, “How long must women wait for liberty?”

And still another one carried the noble words of Susan B. Anthony, written at a time when our nation was also at war, which read:

“We press our demand for the ballot at this time in no narrow and captious or selfish spirit, but from purest patriotism for the highest good of every citizen, for the safety of the Republic, and as a glorious example to the nations of the earth.”

The other three women who were arrested and sentenced to prison carried the tricolors flags of purple, white and gold, the emblem of the National Woman’s Party.

Defenders of democracy abroad become outraged that American women should continue to demand democracy at home. In Italy and France, and even in Germany, the demand by women for participation in the Government is growing more powerful. In new free Russia women have already voted; in England the bill is assured of passage, and yet America, which has laid claim to leadership in world democracy, allows women to be unlawfully arrested through its Government at Washington for merely doing their patriotic duty—urging the wisdom and justice of the great ideal of democracy. Women cannot be so unpatriotic as not to complain of a grievous injustice which denies them freedom at home while they are asked to send their sons abroad to fight for world democracy.

If democracy is noble, if it is a principle, an ideal worth dying for, then is it not an extraordinary attitude on the part of the President and Congress which allows women no right even to appeal for justice, let alone receive it?

If we were now sitting in the halls of Congress or were represented nationally in that body, we would not have to take the humiliating method of printing our appeals on innocent banners. We should then be able to speak authoritatively through legislative channels. As it is we are forced to call to the attention of the world the resistance of our Government by the only method left to us. And shall we not protest when men not only continue to refuse to give us our liberty but decide the manner in which we shall demand our liberty?

Foreign Governments are allowed to present their claims to allegiance in the world war for democracy through representative commissions. These demands are officially recognized by our Government. Since the demands of women are not, we must take the only means left to us—"Militant?” Why all this tenderness and delicacy about "militancy” in the form of banner-bearing when the Governments of all nations are conscripting their men, including our own nation, to be militant? They leave them no choice. Why this horror of mild "militancy” on the part of subject citizens?

We insist that we women would be ashamed to stop trying to win democracy at home—now of all times—when the whole world is dying to possess this precious political freedom. We believe with Garibaldi that “only free men can fight for freedom.” All we ask is simple justice. And we ask it now, because we know that the enfranchisement of women as well as men will make the world permanently safe for democracy.

I ask you, Mr. President and gentlemen of the Congress, in the words of our valiant and beloved leader, Inez Milholland Boissevain, “How long must women wait for liberty?”

ALVA E. BELMONT,
Chairman New York Branch, National Woman's Party.
From The Suffragist, c. 1917 by Nina Allender
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GLOSSARY

belligerent aggressive; hostile; combative (adjective).

captious critical; finding fault (adjective).

dominion authority; power (noun).

enfranchisement to set free (verb).

gauge to measure; determine (verb).

grievous painful; serious; oppressive (adjective).

indemnity insurance; protection (noun).

militant confrontational; aggressive (adjective).

nullify to abolish; cancel out (verb).

pretension self-importance (noun).

rancor resentment; bitterness (noun).

suffrage the right of voting (noun).