



SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

The Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s and Today

Teacher's Guide

Lesson Overview

The proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution has been a point of debate since it was first drafted by Alice Paul in 1923. Despite being introduced in every session of Congress, it did not reach the states for ratification until 1972. When the time limit for ratification expired after seven years, Congress extended it to 1982. Still, the amendment fell three states short of the required thirty-eight states.

The ERA never again gained enough traction to return to the states for ratification. However, it continues to be proposed in Congress and remains a topic of conversation. There were, and continue to be, strong, intelligent, and well-intentioned women and men on both sides of the debate.

This lesson asks students to examine the arguments for and against the ERA. If you are a School Violence Prevention teacher, you will recognize the use of intellectual tools from the Justice section of *Foundations of Democracy* to examine how each side, in the 1970s, perceived American women's need, capacity, and desert of this Constitutional amendment. Then they will decide whether or not the amendment is necessary and relevant today.

If you are not a School Violence Prevention teacher, a pre-lesson is provided that examines the basic concept of distributive justice and the use of the intellectual tools.

Suggested Grade Level

Middle school and high school (grades 7–12)

Estimated Time to Complete

60–90 minutes

Lesson Objectives

- Students will become familiar with the history of the Equal Rights Amendment and arguments for and against it.
- Students will form an opinion about the necessity of an Equal Rights Amendment based on arguments from both sides of the issue.
- Students will defend their opinions in writing or orally with specific examples.

Materials Needed

1. [Pre-lesson Teacher's Guide](#) (if you do not have *Foundations of Democracy* books)
2. [Pre-lesson Student Sheets](#) (if you do not have *Foundations of Democracy* books)
3. [Teacher Handout 1](#): Background: The Equal Rights Amendment Before 1972
4. [Teacher Handout 2](#): The Equal Rights Amendment as an Issue of Distributive Justice
5. [Student Worksheet 1](#): Evaluate, Take, and Defend a Position
6. Copies of [Shirley Chisholm's Speech](#) *
7. Copies of Pamphlet: [ERA Do You Know...WHAT it Means?](#) *
8. [Student Worksheet 2](#): The Equal Rights Amendment as an Issue of Distributive Justice

*Distribute copies of item 6 to one half of the class and item 7 for distribution to the other half.

Before the Lesson

Complete the pre-lesson on Justice, if your students are not familiar with its content.

Familiarize yourself with the history of the Equal Rights Amendment using the links provided at the end of the lesson and Teacher Handout 1. Teacher Handout 1 can also be used as a student handout to provide detailed information about the history of the ERA. You may want to assign it for homework the night before the lesson.

Review Teacher Handout 2, a completed example of Student Worksheet 2: The Equal Rights Amendment as an Issue of Distributive Justice.

Make copies of the provided resources.

Lesson Procedure

1. *Beginning the lesson.* Ask students to list all the ways they can think of that women today are treated unequally in comparison to men. When they've exhausted their ideas, have them make a list of the ways women have been treated unequally in the past.

Tell students that in 1923, shortly after women were granted the right to vote, Alice Paul, a suffragist, wrote a Constitutional amendment to eliminate legal inequalities between the sexes. Remind students that a Constitutional amendment must be approved by three-fourths of the members of both houses of Congress and then ratified by the legislators in three-fourths of the states. Only twenty-seven amendments have been made to the Constitution using this process. In addition to these twenty-seven, six potential amendments have gone to the states for ratification and failed; the ERA is one of them. Share other highlights from Teacher Handout 1 about the history of the ERA between 1923 and 1972.

2. *Working with primary source documents.* Tell students that they are going to look at documents from the time period in which the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment was the most heated, the 1970s, during the ratification process. Ask half of the class to read Shirley Chisholm's speech before congress, delivered August 10, 1970, and have the other half of the class read, "ERA Do You Know...WHAT it Means?", a brochure published by the National Council of Catholic Women in the 1970s.

Explain that Shirley Chisholm presents arguments for the Equal Rights Amendment, while the brochure, published by the National Council of Catholic Women, presents arguments against the ERA. Have students work in groups to read their assigned document and identify arguments within it.

As a small group, students should choose the six strongest arguments in their assigned reading and write them on one side of the Evaluate, Take, and Defend a Position worksheet. Have students who read Shirley Chisholm's speech put their arguments on side one and students who read the brochure put their arguments on side two.

Have students share their findings with the class so that everyone is familiar with both sides of the issue. Have students who filled in side one, fill in side two by listening to their classmates' findings and vice versa.

3. *Apply and Discuss.* Review the definitions of the principle of similarities, need, capacity, and desert in the *Foundations of Democracy, Justice, Lesson 3*, or the Student Handout. Have students use what they have learned to fill in the Student Worksheet in groups or individually. Before they start working, model using a few examples from Teacher Handout 2, the completed version of the Student Worksheet. When students are finished, discuss their findings as a class.

Ask students to identify and discuss the similarities and differences groups on each side of the debate perceive there to be between men and women (e.g. physical strength). Which similarities and differences do the groups on both sides of the argument think are most important in deciding whether this amendment should be ratified?

Remind students that the momentum for the ERA died in 1982 when its time for ratification expired, but that it has been proposed in Congress several times since then. Have them look at their completed Evaluate, Take, and Defend a Position worksheets. Have them put a star by the arguments that are still valid today. Considering all the points of view and the changes that have taken place since the 1970s, students should write a statement on their Evaluate, Take, and Defend a Position worksheet about whether or not the Equal Rights Amendment should be ratified today. Then they should defend their statement using the appropriate box.

4. *What We Have Learned.* Have students hold a debate in class or write a persuasive paper using the arguments on their Evaluate, Take, and Defend a Position worksheet.

Videos

A video from 1973 in which Ann Scott of NOW and Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum face off about the ERA. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWyv5Fw0JSk>

Recent video featuring people on either side of the current ERA debate.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiOnDEAzPF0>

Phyllis Schlafly testifies against the Equal Rights Amendment in Arkansas, in 2007.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAxuOd-8NzU>

Arkansas officials testify in support of the Equal Rights Amendment at the same hearing.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKVd0VE23Cc>

Other Resources

National Organization for Women's 2009 FAQs about the ERA.
<http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/misc/faq.pdf>

Post 1982 anti-ERA flyer from the Eagle Forum.
<http://www.eagleforum.org/era/flyer/StopERA.pdf>

History of the ERA according to Phyllis Schlafly and the Eagle Forum.
<http://www.eagleforum.org/psr/1986/sept86/psrsep86.html>

History of the ERA according to the Equal Rights Amendment Organization
<http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/era.htm>