

I COULD DO THAT! ESTHER MORRIS GETS WOMEN THE VOTE

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by Linda Arms White, illustrated by Nancy Cooper
Ages: 6-12

Themes: Women's Suffrage, Stereotypes, U.S. history
Running Time: 16 minutes

SUMMARY

At a young age, Esther Morris began to do things that her parents and others doubted that she could do. Through quiet determination, Esther proved that she could accomplish whatever she set her mind to, from making a pot of tea to opening her own hat shop. Persevering through a life peppered with hardships, such as the deaths of her mother and first husband, Esther remained independent and socially conscious. Esther was a pioneer in many senses. After moving with her husband and children to the newly formed Wyoming Territory, Esther became a voice for women in a place where males outnumbered females, six to one. With intelligence and grace, Esther fought for women's suffrage and helped secure the vote for women in Wyoming in 1869. Shortly afterwards, she was elected Justice of the Peace, making her the first woman in the country to hold a public office. Esther Morris died eighteen years before all women were granted the right to vote, but her legacy set the stage for the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the women's suffrage movement.
- Students will discuss stereotypes.
- Students will examine the Bill of Rights.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Discuss **stereotypes**. Make a list of things that students think are "boy things" and things that students think are "girl things." Ask students to explain why they have these views. Ask students if boys can ever do any of the "girl things" or vice versa. Explain that **stereotypes** are categories that groups of people or things are placed in, based on one characteristic or idea, that do not necessarily reflect all of the characteristics

of those people or things. Give students examples, such as: Native Americans are stereotyped as always wearing feather headdresses, when in fact only some tribes of Native Americans wear feather headdresses. Help students understand why stereotypes may make people feel bad and create false impressions. Generate a list of stereotypes that students have heard or experienced. Using this list, break students into groups of 4-5. Have them choose one stereotype from the list to deconstruct. Students can research on the internet or in books to find 3-4 facts and or pictures that prove their chosen stereotype is incorrect.

Conduct a biographical study of some of the most influential people in the Women's Suffrage Movement. Include: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Julia Ward Howe, Henry Blackwell, and Sojourner Truth. Each student can choose one of these people (or others) to read a short biography about. After reading, students need to create a biographical poster with an illustration of the person and up to 10 facts about her, including at least 3 specific facts about her role in the Women's Suffrage Movement. Students should present their posters to the class.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Follow up on the discussion of stereotypes.

Guiding questions:

- What were some stereotypes about women that people had in the 1800s?
- How did Esther Morris help to undo those stereotypes?
- How did some men in the movie support Esther Morris? How did other men try to stop her?
- What are some stereotypes that people believe about women today? How can we deconstruct, or prove those wrong?

Women's right to vote came with the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. What were some other important Amendments that came before? Examine the Bill of Rights with the students. Start with the first ten Amendments that were included in the Constitution before it was ratified. Discuss with the students that those amendments were added to the Constitution to protect the rights of early Americans whose

rights had been taken away by the British. Highlight one or two amendments, such as the First Amendment (freedoms of speech, press, and assembly) and the Fifth Amendment (right to remain silent). Next, discuss how amendments are added as our society changes. Focus on the 14th and 15th Amendments, which provided African Americans and other people of color with equal protection under the law and the right to vote, respectively. Discuss how these amendments continued to exclude women from the right to vote. After the discussion, students can create a poster that represents one of the amendments. Students should write the basic idea of the amendment and draw a picture to represent the rights or freedoms protected under that amendment.

Watch the Weston Woods movie, *Martin's Big Words*. Use a graphic organizer, such as a Venn Diagram, to compare and contrast the Civil Rights Movement with the Women's Suffrage Movement, as depicted in *I Could Do That!*

Guiding questions:

- How were Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Esther Morris similar? How were they different?
- What were the African Americans fighting for in the Civil Rights Movement?
- How were the ways that women were treated in the 1800s similar to how African Americans were treated after slavery and into the 1900s?
- What were some major differences between the two movements?

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