

Leader's Guide 2016 Cluster Training: 2020 Vision – Failure Is Impossible

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Introduction/Purpose of our 2020 Vision: Show **VOTE** eye chart

- Today we are going to share with you about a special event coming up in 2020. Can anyone tell me what that event is?
- We are not here today to tell you how to celebrate or commemorate this anniversary in your personal life, at your club or community.
- It is our goal to let communities know well-enough in advance so they can plan an event worthy of the day!

Overview: Tennessee became “The Perfect 36” in 1920 – the essential last state that could ratify the 19th Amendment that summer. No other state was in a position to do it. The Suffrage Amendment was ratified in Tennessee on August 18, 1920, and certified by the U.S. Secretary of State on August 26th to become part of the Constitution.

The struggle, which lasted over 70 years, took place from 1848 to 1920. This story is one of women creating one of the most remarkable and successful nonviolent, civil rights efforts the world had ever seen.

What we now take for granted as a basic right of citizenship was only achieved through a hard-fought and decades-long battle that was seriously contested and complicated by associations with other controversial issues along the way, such as states’ rights, abolition and temperance.

It is all the more remarkable when one considers the barriers the suffragists had to overcome. No financial help, no political help, no legal standing and opposition that was firmly entrenched. Without firing a shot, throwing a rock or issuing any threats, the right to vote was won. The suffragists were harassed, attacked by mobs and thrown in jail. They championed the importance of the most fundamental democratic values – the right to vote and that a peaceful political change was possible.

Woman Suffrage and the 19th Amendment: Failure Is Impossible

By Rosemary H. Knowler

The original production of *Failure is Impossible* occurred on August 26, 1995, for the [National Archives commemoration](#) of the 75th anniversary of the 19th amendment. (2016 adaptation.) *No permission or royalty fees are required for educational uses of this script.*

Cast of Characters: Narrator
Reader #1
Reader #2
Reader #3

Each reader portrayed several different people in the suffrage movement. However, a teacher could also assign different students to read the part of each individual.

In order of appearance: Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Frederick Douglass
Susan B. Anthony
Sojourner Truth
Lucy Stone
Clara Barton
Harriot Stanton Blatch
Woodrow Wilson
Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Schuler
Phebb Burn
Harry Burn

Based on Eyewitness Accounts and Original Documents (2016 Adaptation)

Narrator: 2020 is the 100th anniversary of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote. Do I hear you say, wait a minute, the country is almost two hundred and forty years old, and women have only been voting for less than ninety-six years? What's the problem here? The problem began with the words of the Founding Fathers...not the ones they put in, the ones they left out. In 1776, when John Adams sat with a committee of men in Philadelphia, writing the Declaration of Independence, he got a letter from his wife, Abigail:

Reader #1 (Abigail Adams): John, in the new code of laws . . . remember the ladies. . . . Do not put such unlimited power in the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. . . . We . . . will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice, or representation.

Narrator: But when the Founding Fathers sat down to write the Declaration and the Constitution, they left out one critical word: "Women." In 1848 a group of women organized the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. It took great courage. In the 1840s respectable women did not even speak in public, let alone call meetings. Elizabeth Cady Stanton said later:

Reader #1 (Elizabeth Cady Stanton): We felt as helpless and hopeless as if we had suddenly been asked to construct a steam engine.

Narrator: But they were determined. They rewrote the Declaration of Independence.

Reader #1 (Stanton): "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal . . ."

Narrator: And they called for equal rights under the law. At the convention, abolitionist Frederick Douglass spoke in favor of women voting. Reporting the resolutions of the convention in his newspaper, *The North Star*, he noted:

Reader #3 (Frederick Douglass): In respect to political rights...there can be no reason in the world for denying to woman the elective franchise.

Narrator: In the 1850s, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucy Stone led a group of courageous women who plunged headlong into the fight for abolition and universal suffrage. They formed the American Equal Rights Association. One newspaper denounced them as:

Reader #3 (newspaper editorial): Mummified and fossilated females, void of domestic duties, habits, and natural affections.

Narrator: In fact, most of the women were married, with children. Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote suffrage speeches while nursing her sixth child, a daughter who would continue her mother's work. In 1860, Stanton challenged the Judiciary Committee of the New York State Legislature by advocating that voting was a liberty due women as American citizens.

Reader #1 (Stanton): (Those in power) "imagine that if the rights of this new class be granted, they must, of necessity, sacrifice something of what they already possess. They cannot divest themselves of the idea that rights are very much like lands, stocks, bonds and mortgages, and that if every new claimant be satisfied, the supply of human rights must in time run low. You might as well carp at the birth of every child, lest there should not be enough air left to inflate your lungs; at the success of every scholar, for fear that your draughts at the fountain of knowledge, could not be so long and deep; at the glory of every hero, lest there be no glory left for you."

Narrator: When the Civil War began in 1861, suffragists deferred their campaign for the vote to give full attention to the national crisis. In 1865, when the war was over, and Congress debated an amendment to give freed slaves the right to vote, the suffragists petitioned Congress to include women, too.

Reader #2 (Susan B. Anthony): We represent fifteen million people—one-half the entire population of the country—the Constitution classes us as "free people," yet we are governed without our consent, compelled to pay taxes without appeal,

and punished for violations of law without choice of judge or juror. You are now amending the Constitution, and . . . placing new safeguards around the individual rights of four million emancipated slaves. We ask that you extend the right of suffrage to women—the only remaining class of disfranchised citizens—and thus fulfill your constitutional obligation.

Narrator: Sojourner Truth, whose speech "Ain't I a Woman?" had so moved the Equal Rights Convention in 1851, spoke again in 1867 for women's right to vote.

Reader # 1 (Sojourner Truth): I . . . speak for the rights of colored women. I want to keep the thing stirring, now that the ice is cracked. . . . You have been having our rights for so long, that you think, like a slaveholder, that you own us.

Narrator: But in spite of the petitions and the passion, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were silent on the issue of voting rights for women. Nevertheless, the suffragists would not give up. In 1869 Lucy Stone sent out "An Appeal to the Men and Women of America":

Reader #2 (Lucy Stone): Get every man or woman to sign [this petition] who is not satisfied while women, idiots, felons, and lunatics are the only classes excluded from the exercise of the right of suffrage. Let the great army of working-women, who wish to secure a fair day's wages for a fair day's work, Sign It. Let the wife, from whom the law takes the right to what she earns, Sign It. Let the mother, who has no legal right to her own children, Sign It . . .

Narrator: Civil War nurse Clara Barton spoke at the Suffrage Convention in 1870:

Reader #1 (Clara Barton): Brothers, when you were weak, and I was strong, I toiled for you. Now you are strong, and I ask your aid. I ask the ballot for myself and my sex. As I stood by you, I pray you stand by me and mine.

Narrator: When the Senate considered "The Woman Question" again in 1872, the same tired old arguments were raised to oppose women voting.

Narrator: The pioneer women who were then settling the West had no intention of being overlooked. Women in the territory of Wyoming won the vote in 1869, followed shortly by women in the neighboring territories of Utah, Colorado, and Idaho. When Wyoming applied for statehood in 1890, a furious block of senators opposed its admission because it allowed women to vote. The senator from Tennessee called it "a reform against nature" and predicted it would "unsex and degrade the women of America." But Wyoming's citizens refused to give in. Their legislature cabled back to Washington:

Reader #3: "We will remain out of the Union a hundred years rather than come in without our women!"

Narrator: Encouraging words, but as the years of struggle rolled by, the women of Seneca Falls realized that they would not live to vote. Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote:

Reader #1 (Stanton): We are sowing winter wheat, which other hands than ours will reap and enjoy.

Narrator: Twenty-four hours before she died, in 1902, Stanton dictated this plea to Theodore Roosevelt:

Reader #1 (Stanton): Mr. President, Abraham Lincoln immortalized himself by the emancipation of four million slaves. Immortalize yourself by bringing about the complete emancipation of thirty-six million women.

Narrator: By 1900, over three million women worked for wages outside the home, often in hazardous and exploitive conditions, often with their children beside them at the machinery. They needed the ballot to give them a voice in making labor laws. In the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, 146 workers were killed trying to escape an unsafe building into which they had been locked to keep them at work. Working women flocked to the suffragist banner. With this new army of supporters, women succeeded in putting suffrage on the states' agendas.

Reader #1: In 1912 the suffrage referendum was passed in Arizona, Kansas, and Oregon.

Reader #2: Defeated in Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin . . .

Narrator: In 1913, five thousand women marched down Pennsylvania Avenue on the day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration, asking for the vote. They were mobbed by a hostile crowd.

Reader #1: In 1914 the suffrage referendum passed in Montana and Nevada.

Reader #2: Defeated in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Missouri.

Reader #1: 1915. The suffrage referendum failed in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts.

Reader #3: In Massachusetts, the saloons handed out pink tickets printed with "Good for Two Drinks if Woman Suffrage is Defeated."

Narrator: When the United States entered World War I in 1917, women were urged, once again, to put aside their cause for the war effort. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter reminded them:

Reader #1 (Harriot Stanton Blatch): The suffragists of Civil War days gave up their campaign to work for their country, expecting to be enfranchised in return for all their good services. . . .

They were told they must wait. Now in 1917, women [are] still waiting.

Narrator: But the suffragists of 1917 had read history. They worked for the war, and they continued to work for the vote. While women in unprecedented numbers entered war service, standing in for soldiers in factories and on farms, they also held mass meetings, handed out countless leaflets, sponsored parades, plays, lectures, and teas—anything to get the arguments for women's suffrage before the public.

Reader #3 (eyewitness article): In New York, 1,030,000 women signed a petition asking for the right to vote. The petitions were pasted on placards borne by women marchers in a suffrage parade. The procession of the petitions alone covered more than half a mile.

Narrator: Other suffragists turned to the militant tactics of the Women's Party. They picketed outside the White House, keeping their vigil in rain and cold. This was a new tactic in 1917! The police finally arrested them for "obstructing traffic." One eyewitness described the arrests:

Reader #2 (Suffragist): An intense silence fell. The watchers . . . saw not only younger women, but white-haired grandmothers, hoisted into the crowded patrol [wagon], their heads erect, and their frail hands holding tightly to the banner until [it was] wrested from them by brute force.

Narrator: Other suffrage organizations lobbied, appealed to every state, and canvassed every legislature while the White House pickets kept public attention focused on the issue. Finally, in 1917, at the height of the First World War, President Wilson spoke to urge the Congress to act on suffrage:

Reader #3 (Woodrow Wilson): This is a people's war. They think that democracy means that women shall play their part alongside men, and upon an equal footing with them. If we reject measures like this, in ignorant defiance of what a new age has brought forth, they will cease to follow us or trust us.

Narrator: In January of 1918, the Nineteenth Amendment to give women the right to vote came before the House: *"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."*

Reader #2 (Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Schuler): Down the roll-call, name by name, droned the voice of the Clerk. Mann of Illinois and Barnhart of Indiana had come from hospital beds to vote for suffrage; Sims of Tennessee came, in agony from a broken shoulder, to vote yes; Hicks of New

York came from his wife's deathbed to keep his promise to her and vote for suffrage.

Yes—No—name-by-name came the vote. It was close, but it was enough.

Narrator: Despite this monumental triumph, the suffragists still had much work to do. It would be another year before the Senate passed the suffrage amendment, and then it would take the legislatures of 36 states to vote in favor of ratification to make it part of the U.S. Constitution.

Tennessee became “The Perfect 36” in 1920 – the essential last state that could ratify the 19th Amendment. No other state was in a position to vote that summer. It was up to Tennessee, suddenly the focus of national attention. Carrie Chapman Catt, a leading national strategist of the suffrage movement, became actively involved in local efforts to ensure ratification. The anti-suffrage activists were out in full force as well. The capitol building in Nashville hummed with lobbying efforts from both sides. The Hermitage Hotel was swarming with women of opposing convictions, each hard at work to achieve their goals. The suffragists wore yellow roses to display their cause, while their opponents wore red ones.

The State Senate Chamber voted in favor of ratification with ample margin. Based on some preliminary and procedural votes, the representatives looked likely to defeat it when the vote was called. But then no one knew about a letter young Harry Burn from McMinn County held in his pocket. A letter from his mother,

Reader #1 (Phebb Burn): ...Hurrah and vote for suffrage and don't keep them in doubt. I noticed Chandler's speech. It was very bitter. I've been watching to see how you stood, but have not seen anything yet.

Write mother every time you have a chance for I am always looking for a letter when you are away. Don't forget to be a good boy. And help Mrs. “Thomas Catt” with her “Rats.”

Is she the one that put rat in ratification? Ha!

Narrator: And when the vote was called...

Reader #3 (Harry Burn): Harry Burn votes “Yea”

Narrator: Finally, on August 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment was certified by the U.S. Secretary of State as federal law, giving women throughout the nation the right to vote.

At the last Suffrage Convention of 1920, Carrie Chapman Catt spoke to the joyful women:

Reader #1 (Catt): Ours has been a movement with a soul, ever leading on. Women came, served, and passed on, but others came to take their places. Who shall say that all the hosts of the millions of women who have toiled and hoped and met delay are not here today, and joining in the rejoicing?

Their cause has won. Be glad today.

Let your joy be unconfined. Let it speak so clearly that its echo will be heard around the world.

[Let] it find its way into the soul of every woman . . . who is longing for the opportunity and liberty still denied her.

Let your voices ring out the gladness in your hearts! . . .

Narrator: We are proud of and grateful to the dedicated activists, women & men, many of whom spent much of their lifetimes in the effort...and to the men in the Tennessee General Assembly who cast their votes to ratify.

In the words of Abigail Scott Duniway: *"The young women of today - free to study, to speak, to write, to choose their occupation - should remember that every inch of this freedom was bought for them at a great price... the debt that each generation owes to the past, it must pay to the future."*

Let us sing, together, "My Country, 'Tis of Thee: (Optional)

My Country 'Tis of Thee,

Sweet Land of Liberty,

Of Thee I Sing.

Land Where My Fathers Died

Land of My Mothers' Pride

From Every Mountainside

Let Freedom Ring.

Activity: Discuss in small groups any family or community memories of local women involved in the suffrage movement. How can those stories be discovered, honored and saved for posterity? Share ideas with the entire group.

Review of materials in your county/club Leader's Kit:

2020 Vision Book Marks-one for each club member.

2020 Vision Mini Poster

Leader's Training Guide (2 versions): "The Perfect 36" and "Failure Is Impossible"

Resource List

Harry Burn's picture and letter from mother

Evaluation