

# Equal Rights Amendment Debates: Then and Now

**Overview:**

This lesson is designed to help students understand both sides of the Equal Rights Amendment debate in the 1970s and today.

**Lesson Summary:**

The fight for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) began a century ago when Alice Paul first penned the amendment in 1923. Women's Liberation Movement arose out of the national Civil Rights struggle, and second-wave feminists took up the ERA again in the 1960s. The ERA was passed by Congress in 1972 and sent to be ratified by the states. It was a highly contentious topic with organizations rallying to get it passed or to stop it. By 1982, the ERA had failed to receive the required 3/4 majority needed to pass. Since then, the ERA has had little political support until Virginia became the last state needed to ratify the amendment on January 15, 2020. In this lesson, students will use local newspaper articles and national sources to understand both sides of the Equal Rights Amendment debate then and now. Students will be separated into four teams to debate the issue. Each group is responsible for developing an argument using evidence from the primary source material and secondary sources provided. Students will learn the significance of amending the U.S. Constitution and immerse themselves in the various issues that continue to spur debate around the ERA.

**Time Allotment:**

20 minutes, 50 minutes

**Grade Level:**

Secondary - Grades 8, 9, 11 & 12

**Standards:**

Grade Eight US 8.6.6

Examine the women's suffrage movement (e.g., biographies, writings, and speeches of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Fuller, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony).

Grade Eight US 8.8.3

Describe the role of pioneer women and the new status that western women achieved (e.g., Laura Ingalls Wilder, Annie Bidwell; slave women gaining freedom in the West; Wyoming granting suffrage to women in 1869).

Grade Nine 9.4B.1

Analyze the factors contributing to modern feminism and compare the ideas, agendas, and strategies of feminist and counter-feminist organizations. [Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances].

Grade Nine 9.4B.2

Identify the major social, economic, and political issues affecting women and explain the conflicts these issues engendered.

Grade Nine 9.4B.3

Evaluate the conflicting perspectives over the Equal Rights Amendment, Title VII, and Roe v. Wade.

Grade Nine 9.2C.2

Analyze how feminist movements and social conditions have affected the lives of women in different parts of the world and compare women's progress toward social equality, economic opportunity, and political rights in various countries.

Grade Eleven US 11.5.4

Analyze the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the changing role of women in society.

Grade Eleven US 11.10.7

Analyze the women's rights movement from the era of Elizabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the movement launched in the 1960s, including differing perspectives on the roles of women.

Grade Eleven US 11.11.13

Describe the changing roles of women in society as reflected in the entry of more women into the labor force and the changing family structure.

Grade Twelve 12.2

Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured.

Grade Twelve 12.3

Students evaluate and take and defend positions on what the fundamental values and principles of civil society are (i.e., the autonomous sphere of voluntary personal, social, and economic relations that are not part of government), their interdependence, and the meaning and importance of

those values and principles for a free society.

Grade Twelve 12.10

Students formulate questions about and defend their analyses of tensions within our constitutional democracy and the importance of maintaining a balance between the following concepts: majority rule and individual rights; liberty and equality; state and national authority in a federal system; civil disobedience and the rule of law; freedom of the press and the right to a fair trial; the relationship of religion and government.

**Learning Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

Identify the Equal Rights Amendment proposed by Alice Paul in 1923.

Describe the context of the Equal Rights Amendment passing Congress in 1972 and going to states for ratification in the context of the second-wave feminist movement.

Describe the motivation behind both Pro-Equal Rights Amendment and Anti-Equal Rights Amendment movements.

Demonstrate an understanding of women's political activism in the 1960s - 1970s.

Understand the second wave of feminism was about dissatisfaction with domestic life, workplace discrimination, and the blatant sexism within society.

Understand the current wave of feminism is about women having equality in their rights, equality in the workplace, and that people are held accountable for their actions in regards to sexual violence and discrimination; #MeToo movement.

Understand the strategies and tactics that are used by activists to achieve their objectives, then and now.

Develop a more complete understanding of how the Women's Liberation Movement was a logical extension of the national Civil Rights Movement.

**Materials:**

Equal Rights Amendment. [Proposed Amendment to the Constitution of the United States](#), Second Session, Ninety Second Congress, March 23, 1972.

**Pro-Equal Rights Amendment Sources:**

Document. "Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Principles and Policies." Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Philadelphia, PA, June 1973. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Records, Special Collections Research Center, California State University, Fresno.

Document. Betty Friedan. "[The National Organization For Women's 1966 Statement of Purpose](#)." The National Organization For Women. Washington, D.C., October 29, 1966.

Video. [Phyllis Schlafly debates Betty Friedan on the Equal Rights Amendment](#). *Good Morning America*, January 28, 1976. Phyllis Schlafly Eagles. YouTube.

Article. Desa C. Belyea. "Who Decides What She Will Wear?" *The Fresno Bee*, May 11, 1964. Newspapers.com.

Article. "Full Emancipation." *The Fresno Bee*, June 30, 1964. Newspapers.com.

Article. Joy Miller. "World Mellows on Question of Women." *The Fresno Bee*, January 31, 1966. Newspapers.com.

Article. Desa C. Belyea. "We Are Our Own Worst Enemies." *The Fresno Bee*, January 31, 1966. Newspapers.com.

Article. Pamela Dugan. "Feminist Pleads: Give Us Equality." *The Fresno Bee*, October 25, 1968. Newspapers.com.

Article. Robert Slater. "Pipe Smoking Woman Legislator Puffs For Equality of Sexes." *The Fresno Bee*, April 26, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. Gay Pauly. "After 50 Years Woman Still 'Have A Long Way To Go' For Rights." *The Fresno Bee*, June 4, 1969. Newspapers.com.

Article. "So What Else Is New? Women Marched, Spoke Up 50 Years Ago." *The Fresno Bee*, August 24, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. Patricia McCormack. "A Pension Plan For Housewives?" *The Fresno Bee*, September 4, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. Helen Bottel. "Working Gal Thanks Libbers." *The Fresno Bee*, September 6, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. Roy McGhee. "Women Quit Drive Rather Than Retreat." *The Fresno Bee*, November 19, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. Donna Goodman. "[The Untold Side of Second Wave Feminism: A Multinational, Politically Diverse Movement.](#)" LiberationSchool.org, March 21, 2019.

Article. Editor in Chief. "[21 Strongest Pros and Cons of the Equal Rights Amendment.](#)" ConnectUSfund.org, April 4, 2019.

Article. Sydney Hamilton. "[Arguments For and Against the Equal Rights Amendment.](#)" *Policy Perspectives*, The George Washington University, November 21, 2019.

Article. Michael DeMarco. "[An Analysis of Arguments Against the ERA.](#)" Alice Paul Institute, August 20, 2018.

Article. Editorial. "[Pumping Life into the Equal Rights Amendment.](#)" *The New York Times*, March 25, 2017.

Article. "[Why We Need the Equal Rights Amendment.](#)" EqualRightsAmendment.org.

Article. "[The Equal Rights Amendment.](#)" Feminist Majority.

#### **Anti-Equal Rights Amendment Sources:**

Document. Phyllis Schlafly. "[What's Wrong With 'Equal Rights' For Women?](#)" *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*. February 1972, Vol. 5, No. 7. EagleForum.org

[Phyllis Schlafly discusses the Equal Rights Amendment.](#) *The Mike Douglas Show*, July 1979. Phyllis Schlafly Eagles. YouTube.

[Phyllis Schlafly Interview on the Women's Movement.](#) *The Merv Griffin Show*, 1978. Phyllis Schlafly Eagles. YouTube.

Article. James Kilpatrick. "Equal Rights For Harpies." *The Fresno Bee*, August 17, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. Hal Boyle. "What Is It Women Really Want." *The Fresno Bee*, August 24, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. "Counter March." *The Fresno Bee*, August 24, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. Clayton Fritchey. "Liberating Men May Be Result." *The Fresno Bee*, September 2, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. DC Lady. "Letter to the Editor – Ladies Are Few." *The Fresno Bee*,

September 8, 1970. Newspapers.com.

Article. Phyllis Schlafly. "[‘Equal rights’ for women: wrong then, wrong now.](#)" *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 2007.

Article. Editor in Chief. "[21 Strongest Pros and Cons of the Equal Rights Amendment.](#)" ConnectUSfund.org, April 4, 2019.

Article. Sydney Hamilton. "[Arguments For and Against the Equal Rights Amendment.](#)" *Policy Perspectives*, The George Washington University, November 21, 2019.

Article. Michael DeMarco. "[An Analysis of Arguments Against the ERA.](#)" Alice Paul Institute, August 20, 2018.

Article. George F. Will. "[Opinion | The Equal Rights Amendment Is Dead. It Should Stay That Way.](#)" *The Washington Post*, June 13, 2018.

Article. "[The ‘Equal Rights’ Amendment is a War on Women.](#)" Concerned Women for America of South Dakota, Spring 2019.

Article. "[10 Reasons to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment.](#)" EagleForum.org.

### Sample Timeline:

**Monday:** Ensure that students are familiar with the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Outline a brief history of the Equal Rights Amendment. Introduce debate project to students and assign teams. Review debate resources and share Debate Outline handout.

**Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday:** Remind students of their project and provide 10-15 min. work time daily. Encourage students to meet with their groups outside of class, and encourage outside research, and timed practice.

**Friday:** Hold both debates (if at all possible) on the same day. Assess based on student votes for best use of evidence and argumentative structure, as well as peer evaluation forms.

### Introductory Activity (20 minutes):

Introduce the Equal Rights Amendment ratification debates and its importance in the context of the second-wave feminist movement.

Separate students into four debate teams.

Pro-Equal Rights Amendment in the 1960s-1970s

Anti- Equal Rights Amendment in the 1960s-1970s

Pro-Equal Rights Amendment today

Anti- Equal Rights Amendment today

The debate teams will conduct two debates that weigh the merits of the Equal Rights Amendment in the past and present. All four groups should focus on making a strong and persuasive argument, and equally strong defense of their position. Emphasize the tight timeframe for presenting information during the debate and the importance of advance planning.

Each group will be responsible for utilizing the primary source material provided to them, as well as any secondary sources they find on their own, to make arguments that support their stance in the debates. Debates will be graded on use of evidence to support the arguments made.

Give students the Debate Outline handout and allow students 10-15 minutes of free time during class throughout the week to work as a group on their argument and defense. Students should also be working at home to research and structure their debate content.

**Debate Resources:**

Discuss the Debate Outline handout with students and ensure their understanding of the debate and rebuttal process. Direct students to assign roles to members of their team. Roles are: 1st speaker, 2nd speaker, 3rd speaker, 4th speaker, and closer. Everyone should have a role, multiple students can share a role if the class size is large.

Gini Beqiri. "[Complete Guide to Debating: How to Improve your Debating Skills](#)." VirtualSpeech, August 1, 2018.

"[The Debating Cheat Sheet](#)." St Leonard's College, Melbourne, Australia.

"[How to Debate](#)." Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada.

**Learning Activity (40 minutes, recommend to do this activity on a Friday or it can be split between two days):**

Time each session carefully to keep to strict time limits.

**Debate One (25 minutes):**

Pro-Equal Rights Amendment in the 1960s-1970s (affirmative team)

Anti-Equal Rights Amendment in the 1960s-1970s (negative team)

**Opening Arguments**

5 min. – Affirmative team – Speakers 1, 2 & 3

5 min. – Negative team – Speakers 1, 2 & 3

**Rebuttal**

5 min. – Break to plan rebuttal

2 min. – Affirmative team – Speaker 4

2 min. – Negative team – Speaker 4

**Closing Arguments**

2 min. – Affirmative team – Speaker 5

2 min. – Negative team – Speaker 5

**Debate Two (25 minutes):**

Pro-Equal Rights Amendment today (affirmative team)

v

Anti- Equal Rights Amendment today (negative team)

**Opening Arguments**

5 min. – Affirmative team – Speakers 1, 2 & 3

5 min. – Negative team – Speakers 1, 2 & 3

**Rebuttal**

5 min. – Break to plan rebuttal

2 min. – Affirmative team – Speaker 4

2 min. – Negative team – Speaker 4

**Closing Arguments**

2 min. – Affirmative team – Speaker 5

2 min. – Negative team – Speaker 5

**Assessment:**

Assessment will be in two parts. The first assessment will be based on the debate. Students will do a blind vote on which team did the best job of arguing and defending their stance based on the use of primary and secondary source evidence. Students should be encouraged to vote best use of evidence and argumentative structure, not on their personal opinion or friendships.

The second assessment will be within each group. Students will self evaluate and peer evaluate their team members based on performance and participation.

Teachers may choose to use the assessment forms provided or create their own. Teachers may also use the following questions to guide a recap discussion, as a quiz, or a guideline for a quick write assignment.

Describe the importance of primary sources in historical inquiry.

Assess the role of women in American society from 1920 to today.

List some of the various reforms feminists wanted.

Describe and compare methods used by suffragists to pass the 19th Amendment at the national level.

Why is it important to alter methods for achieving reforms in response to changing times?

How did feminist activities in the central San Joaquin Valley's compare with the national methods?

#### **Extension Activity (30 minutes):**

Students will write an argumentative essay of 250-500 words based on the primary source materials for their debate team and any secondary source materials they can gather.

#### **Distance Learning Options:**

- Assign the project, and debate teams. Encourage use of group text, or chat service like [Discord](#) for students to plan for their debate presentations. Remind students of debate project daily and encourage outside research, and timed practice.
- Use video conferencing software like [Zoom](#) to host debates. Each student is required to speak for 1 to 2 minutes. Audience participation is required as they will be creating the final grades.
- Assign 250-500 word reflection essay.