Directions for Student Interviewers

Over the course of our history, women have had strong feelings about the right to vote. Some believed that voting was important to women’s equality and citizenship. Other women believed that voting was not in their best interest as wives and mothers. Some white women also believed that voting should be only for them.

Talking to each other has always been one of the most important ways that women learned about the arguments for and against women’s suffrage and voting rights and formed their own views about it. In this activity, you will get the chance to become a part of this important conversation by talking with women in your family and community about voting: whether they do it, why they do it, and how else they participate in the political process. Sharing our stories and beliefs is one of the most important ways we can all participate in our democracy.

Preparing for Your Interview

Step One: Read the resources in this tool kit about the history of women’s suffrage and voting rights in the United States. You can talk with a teacher or librarian to get more information if you have questions. The Schlesinger Library’s Suffrage Research Portal is a great place to learn more about suffrage history and voting rights.

Step Two: Choose the women you will interview. Remember that women who are older than you or who come from different racial, religious, class, or ethnic backgrounds than your own may have experiences and perspectives that are new to you. Some people you could choose to interview include:

- People you know at school (teacher, clerk, cafeteria worker, crossing guard)
- Family members (mother, grandmother, aunt, cousin, sibling, guardian)
- Community leaders (religious leader, elder, family friend, neighbor)
- Extracurricular mentors (coach, boss, community member)

Step Three: Once you know whom you would like to interview, tell her about the #HerVote project and your interest in interviewing her about her experience with voting. Choose a time and a place to meet. It should be someplace quiet where you will not be interrupted. If you want to and your narrator agrees, it’s great to record your conversation. You can do this easily with a voice recording app on your phone. Or take a video! Later, you can share what you learned from your interview with others in your Girl Scout troop, your school, or your family.

Setting Up for Your Interview

Make sure you each have a comfortable place to sit.

It’s nice to bring water for both you and the person you are interviewing.
Take a look at the question guide below and think about what you want to ask from each section. Print out the guide and circle or highlight the questions you want to be sure to ask. Bring a notebook or a pad of paper and a pen to take notes. Don’t forget your #HerVote template and a pen!

**Tips for Conducting a Great Interview**

Go with the flow! These questions are suggestions. You don’t have to ask every question on the list. And if new questions occur to you, ask them!

Remember: Some questions may be more appropriate for women of particular generations or backgrounds. For example, only the oldest interview subjects are likely to have any direct memories of the first elections in which women had the right to vote. Similarly, some women come from families of recent immigrants or may be immigrants themselves, while others may come from families that have been in the United States for generations. Use your judgement about which questions to ask and which to skip depending on whom you are interviewing.

Give your narrator a chance to answer without interrupting them. You can always nod or smile in encouragement, but try not to cut them off or talk over them.

Ask follow-up questions. If someone gives you a one-word answer or if you just want to know more, try asking: What was that like? Can you tell me more about that? How did you feel? Can you describe that to me?

**When the Interview Is Over**

Give your interviewee the #HerVote template or help her to fill it out. (Hint: The last question in the interview topic guide is the same as the question on the #HerVote template.) Explain to her that her answer will be part of a national project collecting women’s answers to this question.

Take a picture of your interviewee holding her #HerVote sign and upload it to _______. If she is older than 18, she can choose whether or not to include her face in the picture. If she is younger than 18, make sure to follow the advice from your parents and troop leaders about how to frame the photo.

**#HerVote Question Topic Guide**

**Family and Historical Background**

As I’m sure you know, voting has always been an important part of our democracy, and it’s something that not everyone has been able to participate in historically. Can you tell me a little bit about your own background and family history with voting?

Did members of your family vote?

Were there any members of your family who couldn’t vote or who chose not to? Were there any obstacles to voting?

Do you remember listening to or participating in political discussions growing up?
What did the older members of your family communicate to you about the importance of voting in our country?

What are some other ways besides voting that you or members of your family and community have participated in elections? What about politics more generally?

What is your earliest memory about voting or elections?

**Your Views about and Experience with Voting**

Do you consider yourself a voter?

   If yes, how regularly do you vote and in what kind of elections (local, state, national)?
   If not, why?

What do you remember about the first time you voted?

What was the first presidential election you voted in?

In your own experience or what you’ve heard from others, do you think that voting has changed in any significant ways over the years?

If you were alive in the 60s, do you remember the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965? Tell me about that.

The 19th Amendment, which gave some (primarily white) women the right to vote, was passed in 1920. Do you or anyone you know remember what it was like during the first few elections in which women were allowed to vote?

As far as you know, were any members of your family active in the women’s suffrage movement? What did they do?

Since the passage of the 19th Amendment, many groups of women (for example disabled women and women of color) have continued to have limited access to voting. Have any members of your family been involved in the fight for voting rights? Voting rights for whom? What did they do?

**Women as Voters**

Do you think that being a woman has ever made it harder or easier for you to vote? How?

Do you think that women as a group are an important constituency? Why or why not?

Does being a woman influence the way that you vote or the issues you think are important?

   Do you think that women, in general, are interested in different political issues than men? If so, how and why?

In your experience or observation, has women’s participation in the electoral process—including the fight for voting rights—made a difference? How?

Do you think that electing women to Congress, local government, and even the presidency makes a difference in how our country is governed and what issues are considered most important?
The 2020 Election and Beyond

Do you talk about or follow politics much now?

   Whom do you talk to?

   Where do you get your information about political topics and campaigns?

In a democracy like ours, how important do you think it is for individuals to vote?

Do you think that women’s votes in particular will matter in the 2020 election?

What do you want younger generations to know about voting?

When you think about all of the elections in your lifetime, does the 2020 election stand out in any particular way? Tell me about that.

Are you planning to vote or participate in other ways in the 2020 election? How? Why?