

2009 Virginia Women in History

LESSON NAME:

Women's Voice in Government: Pauline Adams and the Suffrage Movement

VIRGINIA SOL CORRELATIONS:

USI.8(d), USII.3(e), VUS.6(c), VUS.8(d), GOVT.6

INTRODUCTION:

Pauline Adams and others were arrested for "flaunting their banners" in front of Woodrow Wilson's reviewing stand before a Selective Service parade in 1917. The suffragists chose prison over a \$25 fine and were sent to the workhouse at Occoquan for sixty days where Adams spent time in solitary confinement deprived of her blanket, hairbrush, and toothbrush.

HISTORY:

The woman suffrage movement, which succeeded in 1920 with the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment, occurred along with other major national reform movements seeking to improve public education, create public health programs, regulate business and industrial practices, and establish standards and create agencies to ensure pure food and public water supplies. Public debate on these issues and simultaneous demands for better roads and public services transformed politics in Virginia and brought into the political process people who had not been active participants earlier.

Women in the United States began agitating for the right to vote in the 1840s, even before all men in Virginia gained the right to vote. In 1870 Anna Whitehead Bodeker, of Richmond, formed the Virginia State Woman Suffrage Association, and twenty years later Orra Gray Langhorne, of Lynchburg, also attempted to rally proponents. In 1909 a group of Richmond women formed the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia to educate Virginians and win their support. The League argued that Virginia women were citizens and taxpayers, that they had special interests that were being poorly addressed by male legislators, and that the spheres of home and world overlapped. Although Virginia women gained the right to vote in 1920 with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the Virginia General Assembly did not ratify the amendment until 1952.

Activities:

- Pauline Adams invented two popular suffrage games (now lost), Politics and Political Auction, which were sold in Virginia and Maryland in 1913 to raise funds for suffrage work. Have students create their own suffrage game.
- Pauline Adams used more of a militant approach in favor of speaking in the city's streets, and marching as opposed to educational activities in order to win the vote for women. Have students debate the pros and cons of these different types of protest. Which format will create more success in the suffrage movement?
- Have students discuss the conditions in jail that Adams describes in her letters. Were the conditions justified based on Adams's actions? What would the punishment be for blocking traffic today?

2009 Virginia Women in History

- Divide students into two groups: suffragists, and anti-suffragists. After researching the events and attitudes of the early twentieth century, have students debate their arguments for and against woman suffrage? How did the woman suffrage movement both divide and bring the nation together? How has the addition of the Nineteenth Amendment changed the nation?
- The change Pauline Adams and other suffragists sought came with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Have students explore the contemporary history of women, the vote, and politics. Who are the women that use politics to make life better in your community, state, and nation? Ask students to draw parallels between the causes Adams fought for and the achievements of Mary Sue Terry and Drew Gilpin Faust. How are the lives of these women connected?

Primary Sources:

- Pauline Forstall Colclough Adams, Papers, 1917–1990, Accession 37402, Personal Papers Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
- Letter, Pauline Adams to Edward Forstall Adams, 30 September 1917, Manuscript, Pauline Forstall Colclough Adams, Papers, 1917–1990, Accession 37402, Personal Papers Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Suggested Reading:

McDaid, Jennifer Davis. “All Kinds of Revolutionaries: Pauline Adams, Jessie Townsend, and the Norfolk Suffrage League.” *Virginia Cavalcade* 49, no. 2, (Spring 2000): 84–95.

Lunardini, Christine A. *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman’s Party, 1910–1928*. New York: New York University Press, 1986.

Stevens, Doris. *Jailed for Freedom: American Women Win the Vote*. Edited by Carol O’Hare. Troutdale, Ore.: NewSage Press, 1995.

Wheeler, Marjorie Spruill. *New Women of the South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.