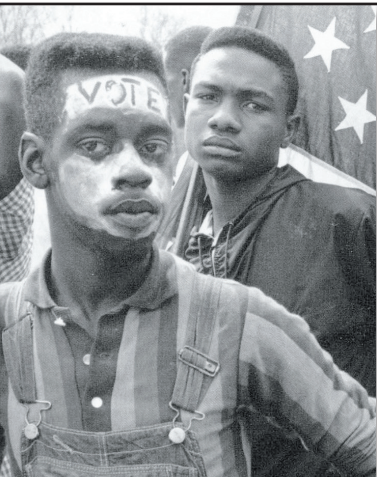




The Voting Rights Act of 1965

On Aug. 6, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act. This is one of the most important laws ever passed in our nation's history. It ended more than 100 years of African Americans being discriminated against when they tried to vote.



The 15th Amendment, which was ratified in 1870, prohibited both the federal and state governments from denying a man the right to vote because of race or because he had been a slave.

For a short time, African-American men were voting and being elected to office,

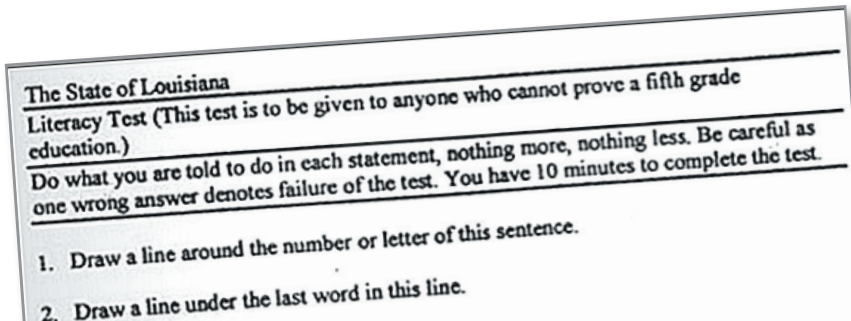
even in former slave states, but that soon changed. In some states, efforts by African-American men to vote were met by violence. Some states passed literacy tests that only African Americans had to take. These were very difficult tests. Some states made

African-American men pay to vote; this was called a poll tax. Many could not afford to pay the tax. When women got the right to vote in 1920, African-American women were treated the same way.

Dr. Martin Luther, King, Jr., and other civil rights leaders told President Lyndon Johnson about these unfair practices. He was upset that some Americans were not being allowed to vote so he went to Congress and got them to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Voting Rights Act and other laws stopped poll taxes and literacy tests. It punished people who tried to stop African Americans from voting. Within months, the number of registered African-American voters soared.

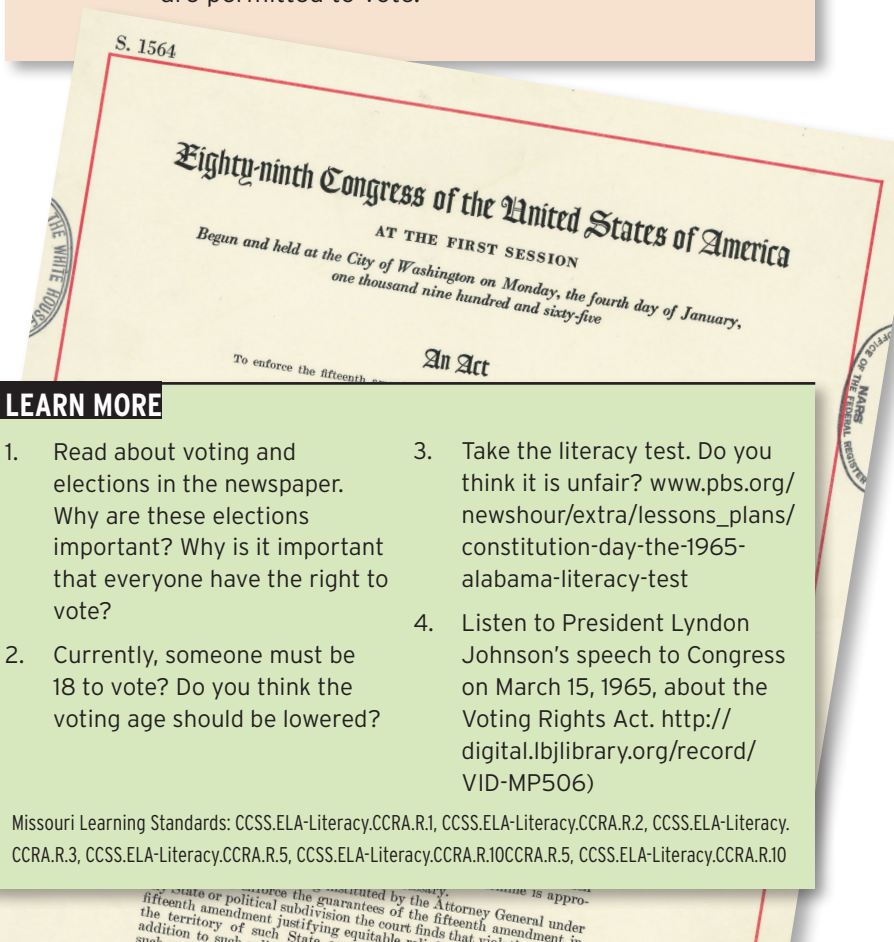
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VOTING RIGHTS LANDMARKS

African Americans have not been the only group that has had to fight for the right to vote. Other landmark suffrage events in our nation's history are:

- 1920** Women win the right vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment. The first president whose mother could vote for him was Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- 1924** The Indian Citizenship Act grants citizenship and therefore voting rights to Native Americans.
- 1961** Residents of Washington, D.C. gain the right to vote with the 23rd Amendment.
- 1971** The 26th Amendment establishes age 18 as the voting age. Supporters of this amendment argued that soldiers who were old enough to fight for their country in Vietnam should be granted the vote.
- 1975** Congress extends the protections of the Voting Rights Act to members of "languages minorities," including voters who speak Spanish, Native American languages, Alaskan Native languages, and Asian languages. Jurisdictions with significant language minority populations are to provide non-English ballots and oral voting instructions.
- 1986** Military personnel and other citizens living overseas are permitted to vote.



LEARN MORE

1. Read about voting and elections in the newspaper. Why are these elections important? Why is it important that everyone have the right to vote?
2. Currently, someone must be 18 to vote? Do you think the voting age should be lowered?
3. Take the literacy test. Do you think it is unfair? www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons_plans/constitution-day-the-1965-alabama-literacy-test
4. Listen to President Lyndon Johnson's speech to Congress on March 15, 1965, about the Voting Rights Act. <http://digital.lbjlibrary.org/record/VID-MP506>

Missouri Learning Standards: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10