The Women’s Suffrage Movement: Women Fight for their Rights

(1) In the early 1800s, women had few choices in life. Most women's lives were based around marriage, taking care of the home, and raising families. Housework and child care were seen as the only acceptable activities for married women. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, about one out of ten single white women worked outside of the home (in factories, for example), but women only earned half the pay that men did for doing the same job. The money that they earned usually had to be handed over to their fathers as well.

Women could not vote or sit on juries even though they paid taxes. Usually, women lost any rights to property or money to their husbands once they were married. If a marriage ended in divorce, fathers almost always received custody.

(2) The fight for women’s rights began in the mid-1800s. This movement is known as the suffrage movement, and its supporters believed that women were being deprived of their basic rights. The suffrage movement demanded equal rights for women. Many women saw similarities between the lack of rights that slaves had and the lack of rights that women had. Some women argued that their lack of rights made them almost the same as slaves.

The suffrage movement formally began with the meeting known as the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. It was called this because it was held in Seneca Falls, New York. This was the first big women’s rights meeting in the United States. The meeting was organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. Both women wrote an agenda and a detailed list of complaints about women's lack of rights. This document is called the Declaration of Sentiments and is based on the Declaration of Independence (tomorrow we will be reading and discussing this document in class!). Taken straight from the Declaration of Independence, the Declaration of Sentiments states that “all men and women are created equal.”

(Sources: Text adapted from Holt & McDougal’s The Americans textbook, p. 254-258, and Prentice Hall’s United States History textbook, p. 286-291)
The Women’s Suffrage Movement: Women Fight for their Rights

Key players in the women’s suffrage movement:

- Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art)
- Lucretia Mott (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)
- Sojourner Truth (Photo: National Portrait Gallery)
- Susan B. Anthony (Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art)
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony (Photo: Library of Congress)

Not everyone wanted women to be equal with men...
Interactive Reading Guide for Women’s Suffrage

Directions: Please follow the different directions below to answer the questions. For some questions, you will be working alone. For other questions, you will be working with your partner. Facing the board, the partner on the left will be Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the partner on the right will be Sojourner Truth. Be sure to let your partner finish reading before you answer each question.

1. Partners: Read section 1 to yourselves and decide on an answer to the following question together:
   a) What surprised you about women’s lack of rights in the early 1800s?

2. Partners: Read the section 2 to yourselves and decide on an answer to the following questions together:
   a) What was the Seneca Falls Convention and what was the document called that was written there?
   b) What famous declaration was this document based on?

★ NOW MOVE ON TO THE DOCUMENT ON SOJOURNER TRUTH...

3. Stanton: Read section 3 aloud to Truth.
   Truth: Listen to Stanton and decide how to answer the following question:
   a) What did Sojourner Truth do before she traveled around the country speaking out against slavery?
The Women’s Suffrage Movement: Women Fight for their Rights

4. Partners: Read section 4 to yourselves and decide on an answer to the following question together:
   a) What did Sojourner Truth demand in her 1851 speech?

★ NOW MOVE ON TO THE DOCUMENT ON ELIZABETH Cady STANTON & SUSAN B. ANTHONY...

5. Truth: Read paragraph 5 aloud to Stanton.

   Stanton: Listen to Truth and decide how to answer the following question:
   a) What family loss motivated Elizabeth Cady Stanton to do many activities that were traditionally for men?

6. Partners: Read section 6 on your own.
   a) What right does the document say was most important for women to gain so that they could change the laws that oppressed them?

7. Stanton: Read section 7 aloud to Truth.
   a) What did Anthony and Stanton want to persuade New York lawmakers to do?
8. **Partners:** Read section 8 to yourselves and try to answer the following question:
   a) Did Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton achieve the goal that you discussed in section 7?