

A CHANGING OF THE GUARD: TRADITIONALISTS, FEMINISTS, AND THE NEW FACE OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS, 1955–1976

LESSON PLAN THREE



RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL: Grades 7 to 12



OVERVIEW

This activity is designed to accompany the contextual essay “A Changing of the Guard: Traditionalist, Feminist, and the New Face of Women in Congress, 1955–1976,” from the *Women in Congress* website, history.house.gov/exhibition-and-publications/wic/women-in-congress/. Students have the opportunity to learn more about the women who served in Congress from 1955 to 1976. Students are encouraged to analyze the role women Representatives and Senators played in Congress during this era, as well as the ways in which they may have changed the institution.



CURRICULUM CONNECTION

- U.S. History, American Government, Social Studies, Women’s History
- Cold War, Vietnam War, Women’s Rights Movement, Civil Rights Movement



OBJECTIVES

1. Students should be able to identify the women who served in Congress from 1955 to 1976.
2. Students should be able to recognize the ways in which women won national elective office from 1955 to 1976.
3. Students should be able to identify important issues and trends surrounding the women who served in Congress from 1955 to 1976.



LESSON PLAN

1. To help introduce students to the upcoming activity, lead a brief discussion using the questions below:
 - a. What were some of the important issues and events in America from 1955 to 1976?
 - b. If asked to describe an average Member of Congress (House or Senate) during this time period, how would you answer?
 - c. Have there been many women who have served in Congress? (Ask students to compile a quick list.)
2. Ask students to read the contextual essay “A Changing of the Guard: Traditionalists, Feminists, and the New Face of Women in Congress, 1955–1976,” either independently or in groups. Encourage students to take notes and to write down any unanswered questions they encounter during the reading.
3. Once students have completed the reading, have them answer the **Comprehension Questions**. Review the answers as a class.
4. After reviewing the answers to the **Comprehension Questions**, have students answer the **Critical Thinking Questions**. Review the answers as a class.
5. Choose one of the options listed under the category **Main Exercise** (Cooperative or Hypothetical). If necessary, students can use the online resources listed at the end of the activity to complete the **Main Exercise**.
6. Time permitting, conduct one of the **Suggested Extended Activities**.



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS ON THE SURFACE

1. Who was the first Asian-American woman elected to Congress? In what years did she serve?
2. Who was the first African-American woman elected to Congress? In what years did she serve?
3. Describe how the racial, educational, and employment profiles of many women Members of this era differed from earlier periods of congressional representation.
4. What role did the widow's mandate play for women seeking congressional office during this era?
5. What were some of the significant social and political movements of the era? How did these movements impact women's involvement in politics?
6. What were some of the major legislative issues affecting women Members during this era?
7. Describe one instance in which Congresswomen differed over a bill or major national issue debated in Congress.



CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS DIGGING DEEPER

1. How did women Members play an increasingly public role in the workings of Congress during this era? Provide at least one example.
2. How did societal expectations of women impact the careers of Congresswomen during this period? Compare and contrast the examples of Representatives Coya Knutson of Minnesota and Pat Schroeder of Colorado.
3. Did women Members of this era typically work within the prescribed traditions of Congress or did they challenge the system? Use evidence to support your answer.
4. What were some of the important similarities between the women who served during this period? What were some of the major differences?
5. What were some of the symbolic achievements for Congresswomen during this era? How did women Members use these achievements to their advantage?
6. In what ways did the pre-congressional careers of many women Members from this period prepare them for their work on the Capitol Hill? Provide several examples.
7. How did the discord among Congresswomen concerning the creation of a women's caucus highlight the generational rift of the era?
8. Congresswoman Patsy Mink of Hawaii once remarked, "I had a special burden to bear to speak for [all women], because they didn't have people who could express their concerns for them adequately. So, I always felt that we were serving a dual role in Congress, representing our own districts and, at the same time, having to voice the concerns of the total population of women in the country." What does this statement reveal about the unique role women Members played during this era? Do you think that other Congresswomen shared Mink's sentiment or was this an exceptional sentiment?



MAIN EXERCISE OPTION 1: COOPERATIVE

Students will be working in groups of 2–4 (depending upon class size). Each group will choose or be assigned a Congresswoman for the activity.

- a. Read the profile for the Congresswoman.
- b. Write down any important notes.
- c. Scenario: Students have been assigned the task of designing a museum exhibit to describe the life of Congresswoman _____. The exhibit will include information on all aspects of her life, but will focus on her congressional service.

What should be included:

- Original title of exhibit that helps explain her legacy
- 50-word exhibit label that summarizes congressional career
- Three artifacts chosen by you that best represent her legacy
- A creative teaching tool for museum visitors that covers the highlights of her career in Congress (committees, key legislation, state or district she represented, etc.)

OPTION 2: HYPOTHETICAL

1. You recently became the first woman elected to Congress from your state. How will you balance the needs of your rural congressional district with those of the women residing in other areas of the state? What committee assignments will you seek to assist you in your dual representation? What issues will you focus on during your first term to represent both your district and the women of your state?
2. You are a Congresswoman from the 1960s up for re-election in one year. Your district is urban and includes many working families. What issues will you likely address in Congress to gain the support of your working-class constituents? What programs might you back to help workers who are struggling to care for their families? What campaign slogan will you devise to attract attention and to get your message across to voters?
3. You are a Congresswoman in the 1970s who has been asked by the congressional leadership to give a five-minute floor speech in which you must make a case for greater economic equality for women. What points will you address to garner local and national support for this issue? Draft a speech and deliver it to your class.

11

SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Design a timeline of significant events for the women of Congress who served during this era.
2. Track voting records of women Members on key issues of the period.
3. Write a 100-word obituary for one of the women Members.
4. Design a campaign bumper sticker for a woman candidate for Congress during this period.
5. Draft language for a resolution sponsored by a Congresswoman in the 1950s through the 1970s on one of three fictional topics:
 - a. Creating a historic marker dedicated to an early woman Member of Congress
 - b. Lowering the cost of lunch in the school cafeteria
 - c. Increasing awareness of women's political achievements at the local and national level



ONLINE RESOURCES

History, Art & Archives | U.S. House of Representatives

A collaborative project between the Office of the Historian and the Clerk of the House's Office of Art and Archives. Together, the offices serve as the House's institutional memory, and a resource for Members, staff, and the general public.

history.house.gov

Online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*

Searchable database that contains biographical information on every person who served in Congress.

bioguide.congress.gov

Senate Historical Office

Includes information on the history and art of the U.S. Senate such as facts and milestones, historical statistics, featured biographies, and a photographic collection.

senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Senate_Historical_Office.htm

Congress.gov | Library of Congress

Searchable database of congressional legislation from 1973 to present (bill text and roll call votes are available from 1989 to present).

congress.gov

GPO Federal Digital System

Includes links for searchable databases of the *Congressional Record* and *House Journal* (1994 to present) as well as information on how to find the nearest federal depository library.

gpo.gov/fdsys