

ASSEMBLING, AMPLIFYING, AND ASCENDING: RECENT TRENDS AMONG WOMEN IN CONGRESS, 1977–2006

LESSON PLAN FOUR



RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL: Grades 7 to 12



OVERVIEW

This activity is designed to accompany the contextual essay “Assembling, Amplifying, and Ascending: Recent Trends Among Women in Congress, 1977–2006,” 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 1977 to 2006. 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, Women’s Rights Movement, Civil Rights Movement



OBJECTIVES

1. Students should be able to identify some of the women who served in Congress from 1977 to 2006.
2. Students should be able to recognize the ways in which women won national elective office from 1977 to 2006.
3. Students should be able to identify important issues and trends surrounding the women who served in Congress from 1977 to 2006.



LESSON PLAN

1. To help introduce students to the upcoming activity, lead a brief discussion using the questions below:
 - a. What have been some of the important issues and events in America from 1977 to present?
 - 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 “Assembling, Amplifying, and Ascending: Recent Trends Among Women in Congress, 1977–2006,” 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. In what year did Congresswomen form the Women’s Caucus? Why did this mark an important milestone?
2. When and what was the “Year of the Woman”?
3. Who and when was the first African-American woman elected to the Senate? What role did minority women—African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-Pacific American—play during this period?
4. What role did the “widow’s mandate” play for women seeking congressional office during this era? What background did women of this period have in state and local politics?
5. What were some of the major legislative issues affecting women Members during this era?
6. How did women fare in achieving leadership positions in this era? Provide several examples.
7. Name one or two factors that contributed to the rapid rise in the number of women in Congress during this period?
8. Describe one instance in which Congresswomen differed over a bill or major national issue debated in Congress.



CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS DIGGING DEEPER

1. How do you think the women’s rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s contributed to changing the role of women in politics in the late 20th century?
2. Why was the creation of the Women’s Caucus controversial among women Members of Congress? What were some of the significant political issues that divided women during this era?
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. Compare and contrast the congressional careers of any two women who served during this period. (Make sure to discuss tenure, legislation, committees, and basic background such as the district or the state in which each woman served.)
5. What do you think was the single most important advancement for women in Congress during this period? Explain your answer.
6. Discuss and explain some of the long-term trends and short-term factors that contributed to women candidates’ success during the 1992 elections.
7. As late as the first session of the 95th Congress, which convened in January 1977, there were no women serving in the U.S. Senate. Why do you think women’s participation in the Senate lagged behind that of women in the House?
8. Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder of Colorado once summed up women’s attainment of power and influence on Capitol Hill by noting that change is “not revolutionary, it’s evolutionary.” Do you agree with Schroeder’s assessment? Explain your answer.



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 are a Congresswoman with two young children (under the age of 7). Explain some of the challenges that you face in meeting your role as a representative for your constituents and as a mother. Based on what you've read about some real mothers in Congress, explain how you might seek to balance these roles.
2. You are a Congresswoman during the 1970s at the height of the debate over ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Take one of the two following positions:
 - a. You support ERA. Write a 5-minute floor speech in which you try to persuade your colleagues to support ERA and to encourage its passage in the state legislatures.
 - b. You oppose ERA. Write a 5-minute floor speech in which you set out the reasons you oppose the measure and ask your colleagues to join you in opposition.
3. You are a woman candidate for Congress, campaigning in the early 1990s. Develop a list of specific women's issues that you will incorporate into your campaign platform (i.e. education, workplace concerns, health care). Beyond these issues, explain to voters why you feel having a "woman's voice" in Congress is important.



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 website for a woman candidate for Congress during this period
5. Draft language for a resolution sponsored by a Congresswoman in the 1970s through 1990s on one of three fictional topics:
 - a. Creating a commemorative event or holiday to mark the expanding role of women in national politics since Jeannette Rankin was first elected to Congress in 1917
 - b. Lowering the cost of college tuition
 - c. Promoting more family-friendly policies in the workplace



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