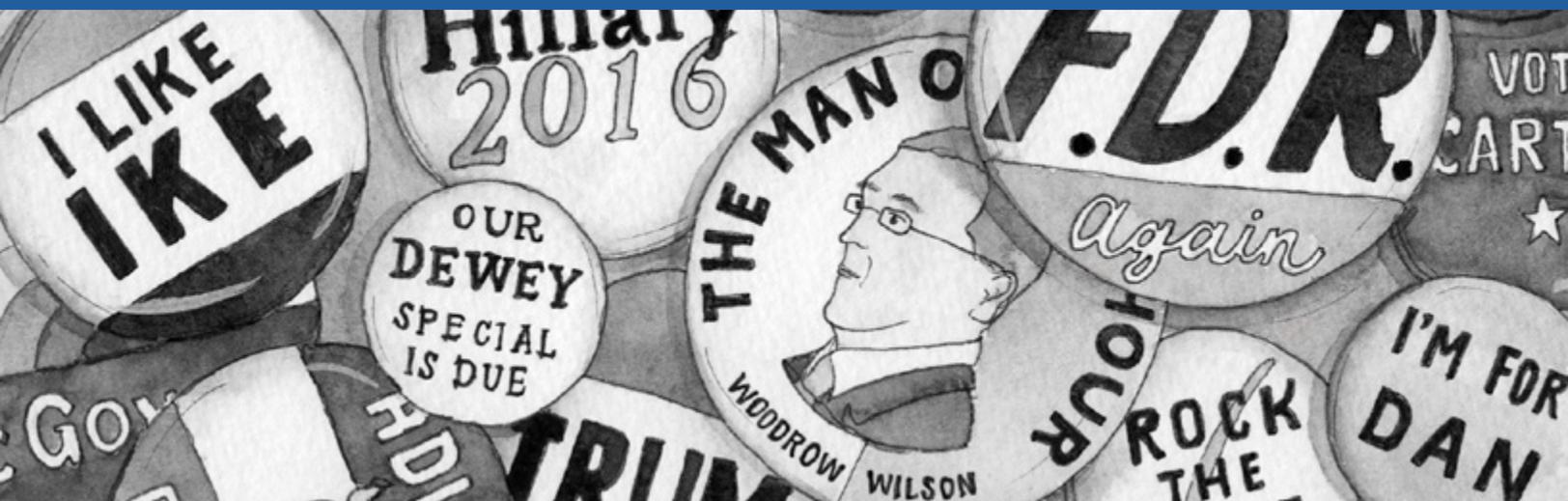


Ages  
7-12

# United States ELECTIONS AND THE VOTER

A chapter preview from History Quest® United States

Written by  
Lindsey Sodano



© 2022 Pandia Press

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or used in any form by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems—without written permission from the publisher.

**\*Printing note: Pages may be printed by parents and teachers for family and classroom use. For best results, print on a duplex printer with “Print on both sides of the paper ” selected.**

Written by Lindsey Sodano

Illustrated by Candace Rardon

Edited by Carrie Lofty

History Quest is a trademark of Pandia Press, Inc.

Mount Dora, FL  
[www.pandiapress.com](http://www.pandiapress.com)



## Introduction

---

Every year on the third Monday in January, our nation celebrates the life and labor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King used peaceful protest and soaring oratory to pull our country closer to its ideal of “liberty and justice for all.” One cause that was especially important to Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement was voting rights. Guaranteeing free and fair elections and the right to vote for all eligible citizens remains a major challenge even to this day. We at Pandia Press want to do our part to help educate young citizens—and future voters—about the workings of American government. To help you introduce the topic of elections and voting rights to young learners, we would like to offer our community the resources you will find in this chapter reading.

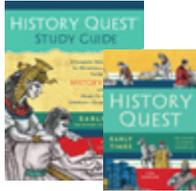
This chapter reading is an excerpt from the upcoming *History Quest: United States* chapter book and study guide. The *History Quest* series takes children on a journey to the past to experience the rise and fall of civilizations, empires, and cultures around the world. *History Quest* presents an immersive study of history in an engaging and memorable format.

Here are a few notes to help you get started:

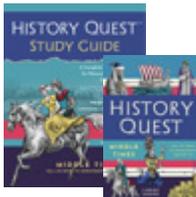
- ✧ In addition to covering U.S. history, *History Quest: United States* contains seven chapters about civics, and this chapter on elections and voting rights is the seventh. As such it assumes readers already know a bit about U.S. government. When reading, you may need to briefly explain institutions such as the House of Representatives and Senate to younger students.
- ✧ As one of the final chapters in the book, it contains a few minor references to historical figures who were introduced in earlier chapters, such as Deborah Sampson, Cornelia Hancock, and Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins. Feel free to do an internet search for the names mentioned, or if you want to avoid spoilers, you can wait to read all about them in *History Quest: United States* when it is available later this year.
- ✧ One of the included readings is a History Hop. For those who aren’t familiar with the *History Quest* format, each chapter includes a History Hop time-travel experience that transports the reader back in time to meet a real or imagined person from that era.
- ✧ Are you registered to vote? Do you know your district and precinct information? Do you know when the next election will take place and how/where you can vote? It might be a good idea to look up this information online with your child.
- ✧ Want to learn more about this topic? Here are a few children’s books you might enjoy reading together:
  - Vote!* by Eileen Christelow
  - Equality’s Call: The Story of Voting Rights in America* by Deborah Diesen
  - Lillian’s Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965* by Jonah Winter

We hope this chapter reading helps you approach the topic of elections and voting rights with your child in an age-appropriate manner. *History Quest: United States* and its accompanying study guide, both scheduled for release in 2022, cover United States history and civics. Please visit [www.pandiapress.com](http://www.pandiapress.com) for details and updates.

## History Quest® A complete elementary history curriculum that uses storytelling and hands-on activities to capture your child's imagination.



Journey into the long-ago past with **History Quest: Early Times**, the first book in the *History Quest* series. Experience the rise and fall of ancient civilizations and visit faraway places to meet and learn from everyday folks, famous world leaders, and even a few mythological characters!



**History Quest: Middle Times** takes you on a journey through the Middle Ages—a time of knights and ninjas, princesses and sultans, great explorations and technological advances, exciting cities and fascinating figures.

**History Quest: United States** is coming in 2022. Visit [pandypress.com](http://pandypress.com) for details and updates.

### History Quest Teacher's Lounge

If you're looking to connect with other families using *History Quest*, please join our active, friendly Facebook Group, **History Quest Teacher's Lounge**. There you can find pro tips from parents, inspiration for extension projects, and helpful files such as crowdsourced lists of streaming service documentaries to pair with *History Quest*.



### Meet the Author

Lindsey Sodano is a writer, editor, and mom of three who lives in Mason, Ohio. She has degrees in English and education from Boston College, where she focused her studies on children's literature, feminist literary criticism, and alternative forms of education such as homeschooling. After several years in the business world, Lindsey began homeschooling her oldest child, JR, with a classically inspired eclectic approach.

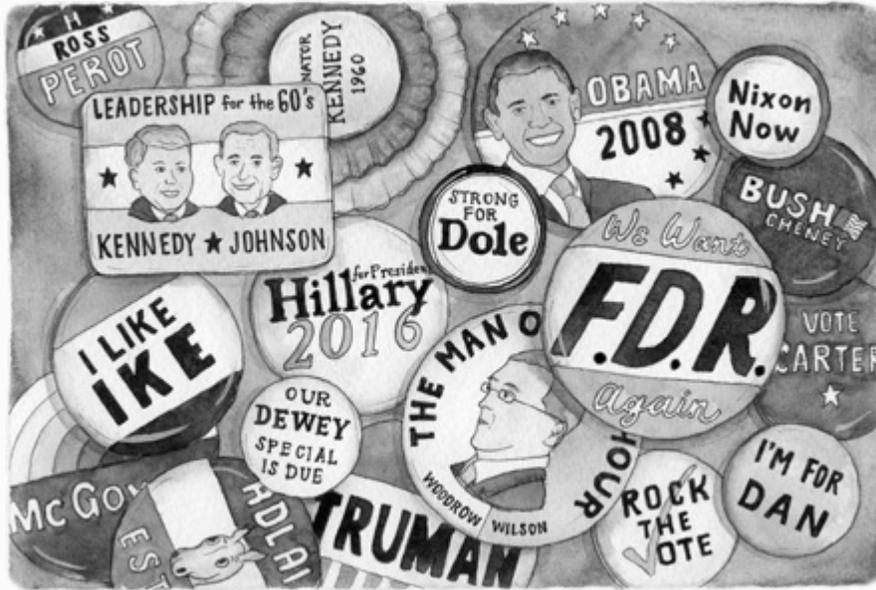
Lindsey is the author of *History Quest: Middle Times* and study guide, as well as the editor and co-author of *History Quest: Early Times*. She is currently writing *History Quest: United States* and study guide, scheduled for release in 2022.

The following reading is Chapter 25 in *History Quest: United States*.

---

## CHAPTER 25

---



# ELECTIONS

ALONG YOUR JOURNEY through United States history, you have come across many people—famous and not-so-famous—who cared about an issue and took action to bring about change. Some, like Deborah Sampson, Cornelia Hancock, and Daniel Inouye, served their country during wartime. Others, like author and speaker Frederick Douglass or attorney Thurgood Marshall, made a lifelong career of fighting for equality. Sometimes when citizens think the government is acting unfairly, they run for

public office, as did José Sarria. Others participate in acts of protest, just like Pete Seeger during his congressional testimony or Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins at the Capitol Crawl. These are all excellent ways to pitch in and help your country. But there is one thing that almost every citizen can do.

Vote!

We live in a democracy, and in a democracy, the people hold the power—not a monarch, not a pharaoh, not an emperor. We exercise this power through our vote. Voting is a way for groups to make decisions. When we vote, we examine two or more options and pick the one we think is best. The option that tallies the most votes is the winner.

In the United States, who has the power to vote? You learned that when the Constitution was ratified, only white men who owned land were allowed to vote. In those early days, the decision-making process left out women, men who were not white, and white men who were not property owners. The vast majority of people who lived in the country at the time were denied the right to participate in elections. Decisions were made by a small group of eligible voters. Over the centuries, activists fought long and hard to make sure more and more citizens would have the right to cast their ballots.

Nowadays, almost every American age 18 or older can legally vote in elections. There are a few exceptions. First, voters must be U.S. citizens. If a person from another country moves to the United States and wants to vote, they need to live here for several years, learn about U.S. history and government, and meet a few requirements in order to become a naturalized citizen of the United States. This citizenship would give them the right to help make civic decisions. Second, people who have been convicted

of serious crimes, called felonies, are often barred from voting. Some states allow these citizens to vote after serving their sentences, but many do not. And third, adults with certain types of disabilities may be kept from voting if they live under the guardianship of another adult. Many state laws say adults cannot vote if they need help taking care of themselves.

If you are a citizen who is at least 18 years old, have not been convicted of a felony crime, and do not have another adult as your legal guardian, you have the right—and the responsibility—to vote. Elections are only held every so often, so participation is important.

Imagine if instead of voting once in a while, citizens needed to vote all the time on every issue their city, state, or country needed to decide. We'd have to hold elections every week! All of our free time would be spent studying zoning laws, reading tax codes, and digging into complex issues we might not know much about. The form of government where all citizens vote on each decision, large or small, is called a direct democracy. In the United States, and in most democracies around the world, people do not have time to head down to city hall and weigh in on every little thing. Instead, we have a representative democracy, where voters elect leaders who best represent their ideas and interests. Then our representatives get to work researching, tackling complicated concerns, and making decisions.

By handing our power to representatives, we have no need to become experts on every issue in our society. However, we still have an important job to do. We need to keep an eye on the politicians we choose to represent us, from the president of the United States all the way down to our local city council members. Are these representatives making good decisions? Are they taking

their jobs seriously and doing what they truly believe is best for our city, state, or country? Are they listening to our concerns? If not, we might need to vote for another candidate during the next election.

When are elections, by the way? Election Day for United States federal elections is held every two years on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Wait . . . what? This is a little confusing. Instead of picking a fixed date such as, say, November 7, Election Day changes. It is always on a Tuesday, and it always falls on or between November 2 and November 8.

Every time you vote, you need to research the representatives who are going to be on the ballot. Each type of elected official serves for a different number of years. Members of the House of Representatives serve only two years at a time. This means we vote for our representatives every other year. U.S. senators serve six-year terms, and the president and vice president serve together for four years.

Presidential elections work differently than elections for other positions. Most elections are decided by popular vote—a simple system where the person who gets the most votes wins. When writing the Constitution, however, the framers worried whether average citizens would be able to elect a qualified president. What if the candidate who earned the most votes was unfit for office? What if the winner behaved like a king and tried to take over the government or made foolish decisions that put the country in danger? The framers thought decisions about the presidency were too important to leave to voters alone. For presidential elections, the Constitution outlines an extra step called the Electoral College.

Here's how it works. Every state chooses a certain number of electors, who are the people who *actually* pick the president. The number of electors is based on the size of the state's representation in Congress. For example, Utah has two senators and contributes four members to the House of Representatives. This means Utah has a total of six presidential electors. On Election Day, citizens of Utah cast their ballots for president. The candidate that receives the most votes earns all six of Utah's electors. States with large populations may have dozens of electors, while states with smaller populations have only a few. In total there are 538 electors. To win the presidency, a candidate needs a majority—at least 270 electoral votes.

When we cast a ballot for president, we are telling our state's electors who to choose. In December, a few weeks after the election, the electors hold a meeting in their state capitals and officially cast their votes for president. Finally, on January 6, Congress meets to certify the election results. The current vice president opens the electoral votes from each state. After members of Congress read and record the votes, the vice president finally announces the official results.

Voters perk up and pay attention to politics in presidential election years. The president has many responsibilities and takes on very important jobs, so citizens want to make a smart choice. However, millions of Americans choose not to cast a vote! Even during presidential elections, only about 60 percent of eligible voters actually head to the polls. For midterm elections between presidential years, roughly 40 percent cast a ballot.

During odd-numbered years when no federal elections are held, local governments may still conduct elections for mayors, judges, members of city councils, and other positions. Even fewer

citizens tend to turn out for these local elections. This makes *your* vote even more important. Sometimes local elections are decided by just a handful of ballots. You never know—your lone vote might be the difference between your candidate winning or losing!

How do you choose which candidate should earn your vote? One way to decide is to learn as much as you can about the politicians and the issues. Townhall meetings, televised debates, and candidates' websites can all be helpful. However, you need to be careful when you research the people up for election and the concerns they address. Sometimes political contests can get a bit . . . ugly. Candidates or their supporters can air mean-spirited commercials or post misleading information on social media. Always do your best to use reputable sources to verify information about a candidate.

Voters might also support candidates through membership in a political party. A political party is a group of citizens and their representatives who share similar goals and beliefs. They work together to influence our government and promote candidates with similar opinions. Several political parties exist in the United States, and they have changed over time, but the largest two are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Candidates from these two parties hold the vast majority of public offices. A few famous Democratic presidents include Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Barack Obama. Notable Republican presidents include Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

When Election Day comes around, members of the Democratic Party tend to vote for Democratic candidates, while Republican voters often support Republican candidates. But not always.

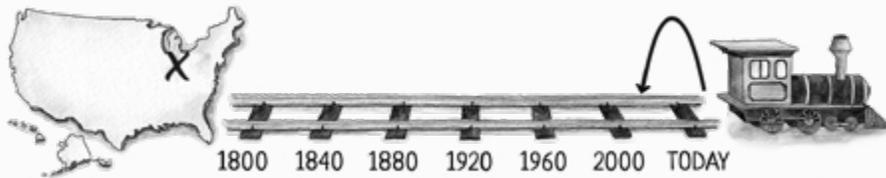
In 1936, large numbers of Republicans turned out to support Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt for reelection because they agreed with how he was handling the Great Depression. In 1980, many Democrats voted for Ronald Reagan, a Republican, because they thought our country was on the wrong track and needed a change.

These two political parties wield an enormous amount of power, working hard to promote their candidates and policies. Democrats and Republicans often disagree about the best way to solve problems in our country. But not all choices are “Democrat vs. Republican” issues. In your next History Hop, you’ll spend time with small-town voters as they grapple with a big decision.

---

*Note: Maine and Nebraska do not use a winner-take-all system for presidential electors. Electors are won based on candidates’ performances in each congressional district.*

## HISTORY HOP! THE VOTER



A CRISP AUTUMN breeze rustles the branches of a large elm tree. Golden leaves rain down, scattering across the parking lot of a small public library. You zip up your fleece jacket to keep out the wind and head toward the entrance. People of all ages are queuing up outside the library's double doors, waiting for a chance to go inside. Maybe this is a town that really likes reading!

"Pistachio . . . Piper . . . Pistachio . . . Piper . . ." A young woman is muttering to herself next to a park bench near the entrance to the library.

You turn away from the double doors and walk over to meet her. Her brown hair flows over a thick, knitted scarf looped around her neck. She's sitting in a wheelchair parked next to the bench. A golden retriever in a red service dog vest sits at rest beside her.

"Pistachio . . . Piper . . .," she continues. It looks like she's trying to make up her mind between these two "P" words.

"Good morning," you say. "May I join you?"

"Oh, hi!" she says, snapping out of her deep thought. "It's a chilly morning!" She clutches a paper coffee cup to warm her

hands. Long tendrils of steam escape from the lid. “Have a seat. My name is Mariana, and this is my dog, Piper.”

You know that you should never try to pet a service dog while it’s working, so you give Piper a friendly nod instead. After peeling a few damp, golden elm leaves off the park bench, you plop down. “Are all these people waiting in line to check out a new book?”

Mariana shakes her head. “The new *Hunger Games* book came out a couple of months ago, and I was right at the front of that line for sure. But today is Election Day. Instead of choosing books, we are here to choose how to use a plot of land near our town square. It’s either going to become a dog park or a small commercial zone with plans to build an ice cream parlor.”

“Is that why you were whispering about pistachios and Piper?”

“Yes,” answers Mariana with a shrug. “I can’t decide which option to pick. On the one hand, Piper would love a new place to blow off some steam when she’s off duty. On the other hand, I really like Goodman Brothers brand of pistachio ice cream!”

“This looks like a decent turnout of voters,” you say, surveying the line. “Are you sure you’re not voting for president too? I learned that many people only vote during presidential elections.”

“That’s true,” says Mariana. “We elected a new president last year. This is 2009, an off year. Normally, people might not make a big effort to vote locally, but everyone here cares about how our town square will look and feel. In fact, it’s such an important issue that our city council decided to send the question directly to the voters. When citizens vote directly to decide an issue, that’s called a referendum.”

Mariana nervously taps her stylish black boot against her wheelchair’s footplate. “I just turned eighteen a couple of months ago. This is my very first chance to vote. I always promised myself



that when I got old enough, I would never miss an election, even if it's an off year when we're only voting for city comptroller or whatever."

"What does a comptroller do?"

"Maybe . . . 'comptrolls' stuff?" She offers a wink and a grin. "I'm not certain, but I'd be sure to find out if I needed to vote for one! If any candidates were running today, I would research their ideas in order to choose the person I agree with most. But choosing between dogs and ice cream—well, that's almost impossible! I decided to park myself here for a few minutes until I figure things out."

“Good morning, Mariana!” A jolly voice calls out from among the voters as the line moves slowly toward the library.

“Oh, hey, Mr. Goodman,” Mariana calls back, addressing an older gentleman with a wide grin and rosy cheeks. “I guess I know how you’ll be voting today!” She leans closer to you. “Mr. Goodman is the owner of Goodman Brothers Old-Fashioned Ice Cream. He runs ice cream parlors all over nearby cities and wants to open one here in our town.” Mariana takes a sip of her coffee and smiles. “This is what’s great about democracy.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, Mr. Goodman is a well-known, wealthy man. He has sold a lot of pistachio over the years! But look,” she says, gesturing toward Mr. Goodman. “He still has to stand in line with everyone else. And he only gets one vote, just like every other citizen.”

Mariana is right, but that has not always been the case. When the United States was founded, the only people who could vote were white male landowners like Mr. Goodman. Fewer than 10 percent of all U.S. residents were legally allowed to vote when the Constitution was ratified. That small group made all of the decisions for everyone else.

The line inches forward again as more voters enter the building. Mariana perks up as she notices a familiar face. “Hey, Brady!”

A red-haired man in a blue denim jacket looks up from his phone. “Oh, hi, Mariana. Sorry I didn’t notice you there. I just got one of these new phones. I can surf the World Wide Web while waiting in line!”

“That was an awesome Halloween party you threw last weekend,” says Mariana. “I feel like our whole building was there!”

I love how you dressed up your dog as a jack-o'-lantern. So cute!" Mariana turns to you. "Brady has the most adorable Pomeranian puffball."

"Did you vote already?" Brady asks, pocketing his phone.

"Nah," says Mariana. "I can't make up my mind. I guess you'll be voting for the dog park, right?"

"No way," Brady says with a laugh. "Sadie does *not* play well with others. It's the ice cream parlor all the way."

"Wait a sec," you say. "Your name's Brady and your dog's name is Sadie?"

"That's right" says Brady proudly. "That pooch is my baby, but I'm about to cast my vote for ice cream."

"But aren't you a vegan?" Mariana asks.

The line moves forward again, sweeping Brady toward the double doors. Just as he enters the building, he calls back, "Two words, Mariana: raspberry sorbet!"

Mariana's neighbor Brady is a renter in her apartment building. If he had lived at the time of our country's founding, he would not have been permitted to vote because he isn't a landowner. Over time, more and more states expanded voting rights to include white men who owned no land. By the mid-1800s, all white men, whether they owned land or not, could vote in most states, extending eligibility to just under half of the U.S. adult population. But there was still a long way to go to expand voting rights.

"That makes two people I know who plan to vote for ice cream," says Mariana, knitting her brow. "I wonder if I should go along with them or throw the dogs a bone." Scanning the line of voters, she seems to spot another familiar face. "Hi, Mr. Nelson!" She waves at a tall senior citizen who wears a cozy cable-knit sweater.

“Hello, Mariana,” he says with a friendly smile. “How’d you get old enough to vote? Wasn’t it just yesterday that you were rolling up to catch my ice cream truck before it zoomed out of your neighborhood?”

Mariana laughs. “I guess time flies! I registered the day I turned eighteen. I suppose you’ll be voting for the dog park, huh? Having a Goodman Brothers parlor in town might make it tough for your ice cream truck business.”

“Nonsense,” scoffs Mr. Nelson. “Who’s afraid of a little healthy competition? Besides, old Richard Goodman can’t hold a candle to my peanut butter ripple. I’m voting for the ice cream parlor!”

“Wow, I’m surprised,” says Mariana.

Mr. Nelson leans a little closer without giving up his spot in line. “My wife owns a construction business. She’d like to bid on the Goodman Brothers job. If she wins the bid, she might make enough profit for us to retire.”

“Sweet,” says Mariana. “Good luck!”

The line moves again, and Mr. Nelson shuffles forward through the double doors. Black men such as Mr. Nelson gained the right to vote in 1870 with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. But many people, especially in southern states, used nasty tactics—from unfair literacy tests to outright threats and violence—to make sure as few Black men as possible voted. For example, by 1892, only six percent of Black men in Mississippi were registered to vote, and fewer still were able to cast their votes.

The high-pitched sound of rowdy young voices grabs your attention. Two kids chase each other, weaving in and out of the line chanting, “I scream! You scream! We all scream for ice cream!” Their mom is chatting with another woman, who doesn’t seem to notice that the baby balanced on her hip is chewing on

her ponytail. A little boy stands close to her legs, using a chubby pencil to scrawl in a tiny notebook.

Women fought long and hard for the right to vote, which is guaranteed by the Nineteenth Amendment. The ratification of the amendment in 1920 was the largest expansion of voting rights in U.S. history. For the first time, the vast majority of U.S. adults were eligible to cast their ballots.

A middle-aged woman dressed in running clothes comes huffing and puffing up to you and Mariana. She pulls off her headphones and bends over to catch her breath.

“Hi, Mayor Traynor,” says Mariana. “What’s up?”

“Just enjoying our city’s fine running trail on this glorious morning,” says the mayor. “And I’ll admit I’m also enjoying that I don’t have to campaign this year.”

“Are you here to vote?” you ask.

“Sure am,” says the mayor, retying her long, dark hair into a loose bun. “Voting is one of my favorite civic duties. And I have a lot of them—not only because I’m the mayor. I’m also a citizen of both the United States and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. I serve this community as mayor, but I also serve my people by advising Tribal leadership on business matters.”

“Speaking of business matters,” says Mariana, “are you in support of the ice cream parlor or the dog park?”

“I think either one would be a terrific addition to the town square, but we *did* just repave our running trails last year. I’m not sure the city can afford another expensive project. The ice cream shop would create more jobs than the dog park, and folks could sure use some jobs right now. So I’m voting for the commercial zoning for the ice cream parlor.” Mayor Traynor eyes the growing line of voters. “I had better go find my place. Happy voting!”

The 1924 Indian Citizenship Act granted U.S. citizenship to Native Americans, but—as was the case with Black voters—officials in many states tried to stop Native Americans from casting their ballots. Activists battled state by state for full voting rights. In 1962, Utah became the final state to guarantee suffrage to Native American citizens.

When Mariana takes another sip of coffee, she makes a disgusted face. “Ew, this is getting cold,” she says. “I need to hurry and make up my mind.”

“Maybe we should go get in line,” you say. “I’m sure you’ll make a decision by the time you reach the entrance. Just think—a few minutes from now, you’ll be leaving the building with one of those ‘I Voted!’ stickers.”

Piper leads the way as you and Mariana head to the back of the line, which is now snaking around the side of the building.

“Everyone seems to be voting for ice cream,” says Mariana. “Maybe I should too.”

“You do what you think is best,” says a woman in a plum-colored wool coat who turns to talk to Mariana.

“Which choice are you voting for, if you don’t mind me asking,” says Mariana.

“I don’t mind you asking,” smiles the woman, “as long as you don’t mind me not answering. I make it a policy to never share how I voted.”

“Your vote is your voice and it’s your right to keep it private,” says the young man beside the woman in the plum coat. “You know, Black voters like us didn’t truly get the right to vote until the mid-twentieth century. The Twenty-fourth Amendment was ratified in 1964, making poll taxes illegal. The Voting Rights Act

of 1965 extended voting protections even further and eliminated literacy tests and other dirty tricks.”

“Not everywhere,” says the woman in plum. “At first, those laws only applied to federal elections. Officials could still make it nearly impossible for Black voters to cast ballots in state and local elections until the Supreme Court ruled otherwise in 1966.”

“And that’s why I never miss an election,” says the man with determination and pride. “So many Americans worked hard to help me have a voice, and I use it.”

Mariana nods enthusiastically “Me too. People like me were among the last to earn the right to vote. For one thing, I’m eighteen. Up until the Twenty-sixth Amendment in 1971, citizens had to be twenty-one to vote.”

“Really?” you ask. “That’s around the same time as the Vietnam War. Does that mean young men were drafted to go to war but weren’t allowed to vote for the leaders who sent them there?”

“That’s correct,” says Mariana. “When lawmakers realized it was unfair, they proposed the amendment to lower the voting age. But if I lived back then, I still might have had a tough time voting. It wasn’t until 1975 that the protections of the Voting Rights Act were extended to several other racial groups. My family is originally from Colombia. The protections benefited Latinos, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and Indigenous people from Hawaii and Alaska. Also, voting became more accessible for Americans wishing to cast their ballots in languages other than English.”

Mariana looks down fondly at Piper, who sits at her side. “But even after that,” she says, “I *still* might not have been able to vote back in the ‘70s or early ‘80s.”

“Why not?” you ask.

Mariana taps on the armrest of her wheelchair. “Before the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984, polling locations didn’t need to be accessible. If there’d been a big, tall staircase leading up to the library today, I would’ve been out of luck. But thanks to that law—and later the Americans with Disabilities Act—polling locations must have parking spaces, ramps, and other accessibility features, or at least provide an alternative way for me to vote.”

“Wow,” you say, as the line moves forward again. You’re very close to the entrance to the library. “It’s been great meeting you and learning about how voting rights have expanded over the years. I just have one more question.”

“What’s that?” asks Mariana.

“Pistachio or Piper?”

Mariana sighs and looks down at her service dog. “It’s tough to say no to those beautiful brown eyes, but I liked what the mayor said about the ice cream shop bringing more jobs to our town. And that pistachio is *soooo goood!*”

Mariana triumphantly presses the automatic door button and rolls forward to cast her very first vote.

---

*Note: This History Hop moves symbolically through the history of voting rights, with each character entering the polling location in the order in which their demographic group won the right to vote.*