



The Taxing Case of the Cows: A True Story About Suffrage

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Book Description

Elementary | Nonfiction

Abby and Julia Smith fight taxation without representation. Since women did not have the vote, the Smith Sisters refused to pay a property tax—a tax on their cows—because they had no say in this tax law. They decide to fight this unfair law—and draw attention to women’s suffrage—through creative means.

Discussion Questions

- The Smith sisters were against “taxation without representation.” What does that mean? What did they do to try to change things?
- The leaders of Glastonbury were all men, and they decided that women should pay higher taxes. Have you ever noticed men and women (or boys and girls) being treated differently? How does it make you feel? Why do you think this happens? What can be done to change this?
- When the city took the sisters’ cows in place of the tax payment, how did the townsfolk support Abby and Julia? How have you seen people in your community support others?
- What important things would you like to do or change? What’s the first step you can take to start working on them today?

Utah Connection

Cows were the motivation for the Smith sisters to become politically active in their community, and cows were the motivation for five women in Kanab, Utah, to also get involved in local politics. In the early 1900s, women in Kanab were frustrated by the mess being caused by cows and other farm animals running loose around the city. It was dirty, smelly and made it difficult to walk down the street or drive a wagon on the road. Men had always been in charge of running the town, but they weren’t doing anything about the problems in Kanab. So women in Kanab decided to run for office to make changes, and they won they mayorship and all four town commissioner seats! The women took their new leadership roles seriously. They passed laws to punish animal owners who didn’t keep their animals fenced in and did many other things to clean up their town. Like the Smith sisters, the Kanab women weren’t afraid to stand up and make a difference.

Utah women also were not happy about being taxed without the right to vote. Taxation without representation was one of the main arguments given by pro-suffragists for including equal suffrage in the Utah State Constitution in 1895.



In 1911, Kanab elected to the City Council Mary Woolley Chamberlain, Luella Atkin McAllister, Tamar Stewart Hamblin, Blanche Robinson Hamblin, and Vinnie Farnsworth Jepson. Jepson resigned shortly after being elected but was quickly replaced by Ada Pratt Seegmiller.