

A Path Forward: The Expansion of Voting Rights in Utah Readers Theater--Student Script

Cast of Historical Characters (In Order of Appearance)

1. Narrator #1
2. Narrator #2
3. Narrator #3
4. Narrator #4
5. Narrator #5
6. Narrator #6
7. Sarah Kimball
8. Stephen A. Mann
9. Seraph Young
10. Emmeline B. Wells
11. Lucy Heppler
12. Emily Richards
13. Franklin Richards
14. Elizabeth Taylor
15. Martha Hughes Cannon
16. Hannah Kaaepa
17. Lovern Robertson
18. Minnie Quay
19. Zitkala-Sa
20. Mae Timbimboo Parry
21. Alice Kasai
22. Mignon Barker Richmond
23. Alberta Henry
24. Edith Melendez

Notes on script:

- ❖ If any student wishes to speak of their historical character in the third person, simply replace the pronoun “I” with the name of the Utah woman. Subsequent use of the pronoun “I/me/we” can be replaced with the pronouns “she/her/they” respectively.
- ❖ For students reluctant to read out loud by themselves, there are several “All Students” parts that require choral reading of the script.

Narrator #1: The Constitution of the United States opens with the words “We the People.” Visionaries and **advocates** have been working since the founding of our country to make the United States a nation where *all people* can have their voices heard.

Narrator #2: Suffrage, the right to vote, is an important part of citizenship in the United States and is one way that we can make our voices heard. But not all people have been granted this right throughout our nation’s history. Women fought for the right to vote in order to open doors of opportunity for themselves, and for future generations.

Narrator # 3: As Utahns, we celebrate our rich legacy of women’s leadership. We remember the stories of those who have gone before us and helped to build foundations upon which we stand today. We honor the women who worked to ensure that “we the people” truly meant ALL the people.

Narrator #4: For a long time, only white male **citizens** of the United States were allowed to vote. Once the 15th **Amendment** was passed in 1870, all male citizens regardless of race were allowed to vote. But females could not.

Sarah Kimball: In January 1870, I organized a meeting of over 5,000 women to demand that women citizens in Utah were given the right to vote. We met in the Relief Society Hall in Salt Lake City.

Stephen A. Mann: I was the acting governor of Utah when I signed a bill on February 12, 1870 that recognized the rights of female citizens to vote in Utah territory.

Seraph Young: On February 14, 1870, I made history in Salt Lake City at Council Hall. I became the first woman in the United States to vote under an equal suffrage law. I was a young school teacher in Salt Lake and I voted on my way to work. Many other Utah women voted for the first time that day.

Narrator #5: The expansion of voting rights to include female citizens was controversial at the time. Because some Utahns practiced **polygamy**, many people believed that they should not be able to vote. A large group of Utah women fought to retain and then regain that right in the years after that first historic vote.

Emmeline B. Wells: Utah women citizens like me voted for 17 years. I was the editor of a newspaper called *the Woman’s Exponent*, where women in Utah read and wrote about equal rights. We wanted the nation to know that Utah women were smart and capable of participating in political affairs.

Narrator #6: When the United States Congress took voting rights away from Utah female citizens in 1887, a large group of women organized the Utah Woman **Suffrage** Association to get the right to vote back.

Lucy Heppler: I was the president of the Woman **Suffrage** Association in Glenwood Utah, a small town in Sevier County. Just like **suffrage** groups in other counties of Utah, we gave speeches, signed petitions, met with lawmakers, and held events and parades to **advocate** for women's right to vote.

Emily Richards: I was the territory president of the Utah Woman **Suffrage** Association. I traveled to Washington, D.C. to represent Utah women and testify to Congress about the positive effects of women voting.

Franklin Richards: I was part of the Utah territorial **legislature**. My wife Emily and I worked very hard to include women's equal voting rights in Utah's state constitution in 1895.

Narrator #1: When Utah became a state in 1896, the voting rights of women citizens were once again recognized. Women could also hold political office for the first time.

All Students: Hoorah! Hoorah! Hoorah!

Elizabeth Taylor: I lived in Salt Lake City when Utah became a state. I ran the Utah Plain Dealer with my husband William, an important newspaper for the African American community in Salt Lake. I worked with the Republican party to encourage black women like myself to register to vote and get involved in the community.

Martha Hughes Cannon: When I was elected to the Utah state senate in 1896, I became the first female state senator in the nation. I even defeated my husband in the primary election. I passed bills to create Utah's first State Board of Health, developing the state's sanitation laws.

Hannah Kaaepa: I was an **immigrant** to Utah from Hawaii. In 1899, I traveled to Washington, D.C., as a **delegate** to the National Council of Women. I **lobbied** for women's rights, and I spoke about the rights of Hawaiian women.

Narrator #2: Utah women continued to advocate for a women's **suffrage amendment** to the US constitution. This would make sure there was federal protection of their voting rights

Lovern Robertson: I was part of a group of women who protested outside the White House in 1917 to pressure the President of the United States to support the women's **suffrage amendment**.

Minnie Quay: I was part of that group too. We became known as the “Silent Sentinels” because we always marched and protested silently and non-violently. Our efforts helped bring public support for the **suffrage** movement.

Narrator #3: Women continued to lobby, petition, parade, and even protest, until the 19th **amendment** eventually became law on August 26, 1920. Now, voting rights for US citizens could not be denied because of their gender.

All Students: Hoorah! Hoorah! Hoorah!

Narrator #4: The **ratification** of the 19th Amendment was a huge step forward—it was the largest **enfranchisement** of new voters in U.S. history!

Narrator #5: But the 19th **Amendment** alone did not achieve **equity** in voting for all women. Many women (and men) were still denied access to voting because of racial **discrimination**. **Suffrage** work continued.

Narrator #6: Native American women and men and their allies continued to fight for their voices to be heard and their votes counted.

Zitkala-Sa: I am a Yankton Dakota woman and I lived in Utah for nearly 14 years. I advocated for the federal government to pass the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. This act conferred U.S. **citizenship** on all Native Americans. But many states still had laws that prevented people living on **reservations** from voting—Utah repealed its law in 1957.

Mae Timbimboo Parry: My people, the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, have lived in the region we know as Utah for centuries. I led my tribe, and **advocated** for indigenous rights on a national level. I believed that everyone has a story to tell and that it is important to listen to the stories of others.

Narrator #1: People of Asian descent also had to advocate for their right to vote. Laws restricted many of these immigrants from becoming **citizens**. Because they were not **citizens**, they were not allowed to vote.

Alice Kasai: I led the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) during World War II. I fought against racial **discrimination** and built bridges of peace and understanding in Utah. I advocated for the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. This act allowed people who were born in Japan, like my husband Henry, to become US **citizens**.

Narrator #2: As more restrictions on **citizenship** were lifted, more people had access to voting. But even some **citizens** of the United States were still denied voting rights as a result of racial **discrimination**.

Mignon Barker Richmond: I worked with the NAACP here in Utah to help advocate for equal treatment for African Americans in housing, employment and public services. I also started the first free school lunch program in the state.

Alberta Henry: Mignon was a friend of mine and helped mentor me. I also worked with the NAACP to combat racial **discrimination** here in Utah, and served as the president of the Salt Lake Chapter for 12 years. I worked very hard to ensure that Utah students had equal access to education regardless of their race.

Narrator #3: The Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965. This act made practices like **poll taxes** and **literacy tests** illegal in determining who was eligible to vote.

Edith Melendez: I worked to expand voting rights for the Latino community in Salt Lake City. I helped establish a civil rights organization known as SOCIO. I was an advocate for the Spanish speaking community in Utah.

Narrator #4: An extension of the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1975, and it prohibited **discrimination** in voting due to language barriers. Now voting information and materials could be translated into languages other than English.

All Students: Hoorah! Hoorah! Hoorah!

Narrator #5: The story of how voting rights expanded over time is still important to us in our day. These women of the past provided the foundation for our voting rights today. Utah women truly do make history.

Narrator #6: Even though we can't vote yet, we can learn from their examples and do our best to work to create strong communities in our homes and schools and neighborhoods. We can listen to others and work together to make sure all voices are heard.

All Students: Utah women make history!