

# Women’s History Month: Lesson Plan for grades 5–8

*Average class time: 35 minutes*

**Perspective and background:** Recently, lots of attention has been paid to the growing number of women running for office in local, state, and national politics. During Women’s History Month, we’ll examine the role and representation of women in governmental office and their impact on policy and society.

**Objective:** The goal of this lesson is to

- provide resources and ideas that will alter young people’s image of U.S. politics as a historically male profession and how that is changing.
- learn the importance of having women be widely represented in leadership roles.
- highlight the benefits of increased female representation in government office.
- learn more about an Illinois female role model through the life of Judy Baar Topinka.

**Outcome:** By studying the life of Judy Baar Topinka, students should be able to identify the challenges women face in participating in government and why underrepresentation is a problem for democracy, society, and the political process. Learning about a female leader who may otherwise receive little attention in school will help to normalize the image of ordinary women who rose to powerful positions so that: 1) The underrepresentation of women is more evident to students. 2) Students are inspired to understand and become active citizens.

**Prep and content:** To meet these goals, read *Just Judy: Citizen and Leader for Illinois* chapters 3-4-5 for homework.

**Class discussion questions:**

- 1. What do you think are the most important traits (e.g. friendly, smart) and skills (e.g. public speaking, experience) for a leading female politician?**
  - a) Do you think that any of those traits or skills are more common among men or women? Explain. *(Answers will vary. Encourage students to support their answers with examples from society and their world.)*
  - b) Are people born with these traits and skills, or do they learn them? Can a person develop the qualities necessary to be a leading citizen? Citing *Just Judy*, how did Judy Baar Topinka develop the qualities to become a leader? What traits did she exemplify? *(Persistence, openness to new opportunities, positivity, courageous.)*
  - c) What traits do you identify within yourself that you share with her? *(Answers will vary.)*
- 2. How did Judy Baar Topinka overcome obstacles to become a journalist, a state senator and later state comptroller? Why do you think she faced these obstacles?**
  - a) What are the challenges facing someone (male or female) who decides to run for office? What – if any – challenges are different for men or women running for office? How did Judy Baar Topinka proactively handle discrimination? *(Behaviors. Her senate button, “Don’t call me honey, baby, lady, or girl. Call me Senator.” Use Meghan’s 5 Points here.)*
- 3. Who in your life (family, friends, etc.) is an active citizen? Do you think they could be a good member in our local or state senate? Why? (Probe on gender if responses are skewed by gender.)**
- 4. Would you ever consider running for office? Why or why not? (Answers will vary.)**

**IF TIME ALLOWS: Enrichment Activities**

- a) If a student ran for office, what would their campaign button say? Have students create the button and explain the meaning of their slogan.
- b) Have students work in groups to come up with ways they could get involved in their community. Share ideas as a class and encourage them to make an activity come to fruition. Report back.
- c) Research recent newspaper articles about the increase in number of women running for office. Why and how are more female candidates getting involved?

# Women's History Month: Lesson Plan for grades 5–8

## *State Standards addressed*

### **ELA STANDARDS**

6–12 RH and RI 1–3: Key ideas and details

6–12 RH and RI 7–9: Integration of knowledge and ideas;

5 Speaking and Listening 1: Collaborative conversations

5 Speaking and Listening 4–6: Presentation of knowledge and ideas. Produce and share information.

### **SOCIAL SCIENCE STANDARDS**

SS.IS.8.6–8.LC: Explain how a democracy relies on people's responsible participation, and draw implications for how individuals should participate.; Analyze how a problem can manifest itself and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address it.

SS.IS.8.6–8.MdC: Assess individual and collective capacities to take action to address problems and identify potential outcomes. Identify core civic virtues (such as honesty, mutual respect, cooperation, and attentiveness to multiple perspectives) and democratic principles (such as equality, freedom, liberty, and respect for individual rights) that guide our State and nation

SS.H.1.6–8.MC: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

SS.H.3.9–12: Evaluate the methods or characteristics utilized by people and institutions to promote change.

SS.H.7.9–12: Identify the role of individuals or groups in people's struggle for safety, freedom, equality, and justice.