PARTICIPANT GUIDE · CHAPTER 1

Voter Disenfranchisement & Threats to Democracy

Use this guide with the Every Chapter Counts Group Study Curriculum. Choose the modules that fit your group; add your own activities and follow-up questions.

A Read & connect

ECC resources

The Voting Rights Act: A Hard-Won Victory

Modern Voter Suppression: New Barriers, Old Tactics

Modern Voter Restrictions: What's New, What's Old, What's Repackaged

Interactive voting-rights timeline

Think about

1. Which voting barriers repeat across time?
2. What changed after major voting-rights victories — and what did not?

B Watch or read

The 1619 Project, Episode 1: "Democracy" (Hulu). View selected segments, grouped below:

Introduction and Project Thesis (00:00–02:15)	
Voting and Disenfranchisement	(08:08–14:25)
Interlude: Perfectors of Democracy	(14:25–15:20)

The Civil Rights Era and the SNCC (31:12–40:11)	
The Modern Restrictive Voting Laws	(40:35–49:14)
Interlude: Black Freedom Struggle as Foundational	(49:14–50:27)
Threats to Democracy in Modern Politics	(50:27–56:24)
Hope for the Future of Democracy	(56:24–58:15)

Reading alternative

Instead of or in addition to the documentary, read Chapter 1, "Democracy," by Nikole Hannah-Jones in *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*.

Think about

1. What past-to-present connection stands out?
2. Where do you see power shaping ballot access?

C Discuss & role play

1. Who should vote?

Consider what makes a “qualified” voter. Then listen to Fannie Lou Hamer describe trying to register.

Watch Fannie Lou Hamer’s speech

New reflection prompts

1. Did you know Hamer’s story before this study? What might explain whose stories are familiar?
2. How might race and gender shape which contributions appear in mainstream histories?

2. How can voting rights be restricted?

Consider how rules and administration can make voting harder for some groups.

3. Who Gets to Vote? Role Mixer

Compare profiles from different eras. Use a phone to open individual profiles and print them if needed.

Open 30 role profiles

Think about

1. How do voting rights expand and contract?
2. Which restrictions affect groups differently?
3. How would you answer “Who should vote?”
4. What reactions did you have to the biographies and portrayals in the role play?

D Add local context

Ras Smith

Waterloo, Iowa, native and former Iowa state representative, with experience in youth services, education, community engagement and advocacy.

Watch his talk:
https://youtu.be/jYGwZWDgPXk

Think about

1. What does a lived perspective add to the history?
2. What feels specific to place, and what feels broader?
3. What do you want to learn next?

Keep learning

ELCA Election Engagement Toolkit
1619 Project Educational Materials

Program feedback

Use the short feedback form on the Every Chapter Counts curriculum page.

Carry this with you

Voting rights have been expanded, restricted, defended and contested. Identify one question you would like to explore further.