Long-Form Teacher’s Guide for
The Voice That Won the Vote: How One Woman’s Words Made History
by Elisa Boxer and illustrated by Vivien Mildenberger

Book Synopsis

In August of 1920, women’s suffrage in America came down to the vote in Tennessee. If the Tennessee legislature approved the 19th amendment it would be ratified, giving all American women the right to vote. The historic moment came down to a single vote and the voter who tipped the scale toward equality did so because of a powerful letter his mother, Febb Burn, had written him urging him to "Vote for suffrage and don't forget to be a good boy." The Voice That Won the Vote is the story of Febb, her son Harry, and the letter that gave white American women a voice.

Historical Background

In August of 1920, the eyes of the nation were on Tennessee as the state legislature prepared to vote on the ratification of the 19th Amendment, also called the “Susan B. Anthony Amendment.” Thirty-five states had already voted in favor of the amendment, and Tennessee could potentially become the “Perfect 36” – the final state needed for ratification. The amendment sailed through the Senate, but the House of Representatives first voted to table the vote—a motion that, if passed, would delay, or even halt, the decision on the proposed amendment. The representatives, who had been lobbied by both the pro- and anti-suffrage factions, were closely split, and it was only the tying vote by Banks Turner of Gibson County that prevented the amendment from being tabled and cast aside. It appeared that the ratification vote would be a tie, but as the final vote began, another representative was reconsidering how he would respond. Harry T. Burn of McMinn County had in his possession a letter from his mother, Febb E. Burn, encouraging him to vote in favor of women’s suffrage. Conflicted by his duty to represent his constituents and his own beliefs, Burn decided that if he needed to be the deciding vote, he would vote in favor of women’s suffrage. So as the men proceeded to vote in alphabetical order, it became apparent to Harry that he may be the swing vote needed to ratify. As soon as Burn uttered his “Aye,” cheers were heard from the balcony, but it wasn’t until the vote concluded that it was clear that Banks Turner and Harry T. Burn had indeed turned the tide in favor of the suffragists. Back in McMinn County, Febb Burn, Harry’s mother, waited patiently to hear the outcome of the election. Only
days earlier, she had written her son a letter in which she wrote, “Hurrah and vote for Suffrage and don’t keep them in doubt...Don’t forget to be a good boy, and help Mrs. ‘Thomas Catt’ with her ‘Rats.’ Is she the one that put rat in ratification? Ha!” This ringing endorsement of women’s suffrage not only swayed Harry to vote in favor of the amendment but also allowed Febb, although unable to directly participate in the elective franchise, to use her voice (and pen) to champion the suffragette’s cause.

Tennessee Social Studies Standards and Practices

Standard 5.47. Identify Tennessee’s role in the passage of the 19th Amendment, including the impact of Anne Dallas Dudley and Harry Burn.

Standard 5.09. Analyze the major goals, struggles, and achievements of the Progressive Era, including: Prohibition (18th Amendment), women's suffrage (19th Amendment), and the lack of child labor laws.

Essential Questions: What were the major goals, struggles and achievements of the women’s suffrage movement? What did suffragists hope to achieve? What obstacles stood in their way? What are some milestones in the movement?

Sub Questions:
- What were some strategies and responses women received in 1920 as they fought for voting rights?
  - Strategies: Organized meetings, marched in parades, carried signs, made speeches, wore yellow roses etc. (Boxer, p. 3)
  - Responses: Silenced; “Troublemakers! Uncivilized! Female Voters will surely cause chaos! Women with a voice in politics? Nonsense! The only vote a woman needs is the vote to choose her husband!” (Boxer, p. 4)
- Who was Febb Burn? What did she do to progress women’s suffrage?
  - Febb Burn lived in McMinn County and was known as “smart and strong willed.” She attended college and became a teacher. (Boxer, p. 6) She was also the mother to state representative Harry Burn. She progressed the movement of women’s suffrage by writing a letter to her son to “vote for suffrage and don’t keep them in doubt” which caused Harry to ultimately vote “Aye” and make Tennessee the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment. (See: Burn, Febb. “Letter to Harry Burn from Mother.” C.M. McClung Historical Collection: https://cmdc.knoxlib.org/digital/collection/p265301coll8/id/699)
- Who was Harry Burn? How did his views change?
  - Harry Burn (son of Febb Burn) served as “the youngest lawmaker in Tennessee” (Boxer, p. 9). He had voted against women’s suffrage in the first round and proudly wore a red rose to signify “keeping women in the home, and out of the voting booth.” (Boxer, p. 13). However, Harry changed his vote to uphold the 19th amendment stating, “I know that a mother’s advice is always safest for a boy to follow” (Boxer, p. 19). When interviewed by newspapers, he stated that he had to, “follow my conscience. It kept telling me women are people.” (Boxer, p. 23). He also

- **What effect did both Febb and Harry Burn have on the national women’s suffrage movement?**
  - Without Febb’s letter to Harry, the votes necessary to pass the 19th amendment would not have been possible. Harry’s vote of “Aye” gave Banks Turner—who had tied the vote in the first round—the majority vote for suffrage in the second round of voting. Also, by following his conscience and Febb’s advice, he showed courage enough to be re-elected and kept his seat in the Tennessee legislature where he continued to stand up for equal rights (Boxer, p. 27). (See: Bomboy, Scott. “The vote that led to the 19th Amendment.” National Constitution Center. https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote/)

- **Why is the state of Tennessee significant to the passage of the 19th amendment?**

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**Teaching with Primary and Secondary Source Documents**

*Mother Knows Best--Letter to Rep. Harry T. Burn from his Mother*

Tennessee House representative Harry T. Burn sported a red rose on his jacket on the day of the special session to support the 19th Amendment. A red rose meant he was anti-suffrage. But he received a letter from his mother as he sat in the chamber. His mother was a strong supporter of women’s suffrage. Harry read the letter, refolded it,
and put it in his coat pocket. It is hard to know what was going through his head as he heard his name called to vote. Personally, he favored giving women the right to vote, but he also knew most of his constituents did not support women’s suffrage. Ultimately, Burn voted yes (“aye”) with the final count recorded as 49 votes in favor of ratification with only 47 against. Look at the Letter to Rep. Harry T. Burn from his mother, August 1920, C.M. McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library, Knoxville, TN. [https://cmdc.knoxlib.org/digital/collection/p265301coll8/id/691/rec/2] This seven-page letter was written by Febb Burn to her son Harry, a member of the 1920 Tennessee House of Representatives. In it, Febb touches on local happenings and events in the town of Niota, but also uses her correspondence to urge Harry to vote in favor of woman suffrage. Ask students: What did Harry’s mother say for him to do? What do you think she meant when she said “Don’t forget to be a good boy and help Miss Catt?” Who was Miss Catt? [Carrie Chapman Catt played an integral role in lobbying for the 19th Amendment—she devised the “Winning Plan,” which carefully coordinated state suffrage campaigns with the drive for a constitutional amendment—a plan which helped ensure final victory. A savvy political strategist, Catt disagreed with the tactics used by younger suffragists like Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, who favored militant tactics and picketed the White House during World War I. With the vote won in 1920, Catt founded the League of Women Voters to educate women on political issues and served as the organization’s honorary president until her death in 1947.]

**How did Harry’s mother feel about his decision?**


This article was published only a few days after the historic vote that made Harry and Febb Burn famous. In an interview given from her Niota home, Hathburn, Febb downplays her role in the momentous vote and her knowledge of the Woman Suffrage Movement, choosing to instead focus on Harry and his career. Ask students: Why do you think Harry’s mother wanted to downplay her role in the vote and keep the focus on Harry?


In this interview with Mrs. Burn, it is apparent that she and her children were close and that Febb had a bit of a sense of humor about the hullabaloo her letter caused. She focuses on Harry in this article as well, but more of her own personality shines through at times.

**How did Harry feel about his decision?**

This article covers the statement that Harry Burn made in defense of his decision to vote in favor of ratification. After the vote, many of the anti-suffrage supporters accused Burn of corruption and taking bribes, charges that were later found to have no merit.

**The Traveling Trunk: Tennessee’s “Perfect 36”**

On August 24, 1920, Tennessee became the “Perfect 36.” That is, it became the final state needed to ratify the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote in America. The story of how Tennessee became the “Perfect 36” is re-told in *The Hope Chest* and also through the lessons and materials available in the “Traveling Trunk” project created by the Tennessee State Museum: [https://tnmuseum.org/understanding-womens-suffrage-tennessees-perfect-36](https://tnmuseum.org/understanding-womens-suffrage-tennessees-perfect-36)

Teachers can reserve/request the trunk and will receive:

- An exact replica of a pro-suffrage banner made in Tennessee
- Primary source political cartoons and photographs related to Tennessee’s suffrage movement
- A copy of the letter Febb Burn sent to her son Harry encouraging him to vote yes on suffrage
- 20 yellow and 20 red roses for students to wear in support or protest of suffrage
- Reproduction of a pro-suffrage sash

Using the items in this trunk, students will interact and learn from primary sources. These materials are exact replicas of materials used during the fight for women’s suffrage. Students will use these primary source materials to learn about this critical movement in our nation’s history and re-enact the events leading up to the critical vote on August 18, 1920. They will learn how Harry Burn, a young representative from Niota, Tennessee, changed his vote from “no” to “yes” which won women across America the right to vote. On that date, Tennessee delivered women’s suffrage and forever became known as the “Perfect 36.” Your students will hold suffrage and anti-suffrage rallies and recreate that critical vote. Teachers can reserve the trunk here: [https://tnmuseum.org/reserve-a-trunk](https://tnmuseum.org/reserve-a-trunk)

Teachers can also obtain lesson plans to use with items in the trunk here: [https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2588/tsm_suffrage_2018_digital.pdf](https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2588/tsm_suffrage_2018_digital.pdf)

**The War of the Roses--Colors and Flower Symbolism**

The color yellow was significant to the women’s suffrage movement. American suffrage colors--purple, white, and yellow/gold–stood for loyalty, purity, and hope and enlightenment, respectively. The sunflower--and yellow jonquils and roses--often appeared at suffrage events. (Suffragists believed the sunflower, always facing the sun, was a “righteous bloom,” and saw linking their movement to this image as a way to promote their own virtue). These flowers proved wildly successful as pro-suffrage emblems, so much so that anti suffragists adopted the red rose to counter their opponents. Anti-suffragettes had adopted the colors red, black, and white for the
American Beauty rose, steadfastness, and purity, respectively. In 1920, these two factions saw their own “war of the roses” play out in the Tennessee state legislature. A year earlier, Congress had voted in favor of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, but before it could be put into action, the amendment required ratification by 36 states. By the time Tennessee’s state legislature prepared to vote on the issue in August 1920, the amendment was only one state shy of ratification. With a dramatic debate and vote soon to ensue, suffragists and anti-suffragists swarmed Nashville, home to the state capitol. Anti-suffragists distributed red and pink roses to those opposing ratification while suffragists distributed yellow roses to those supporting the 19th Amendment. At the state house, legislators even got in the action and displayed their voting intentions by wearing roses in their lapels. On the day of the final vote, more red roses than yellow walked onto the floor of the Tennessee House of Representatives. Votes began, but it was deadlocked twice. On the third pass, Representative Harry T. Burn changed his vote, despite the red rose pinned to his lapel. (from Exploring Women’s Suffrage through 50 Historic Treasures, by Jessica D. Jenkins, 2020).

The 19th Amendment
Have students read the 19th Amendment:
In 1878, what would later become the 19th Amendment was introduced for the first time to Congress. Named for the legendary suffrage leader who had served as its author, the measure was first known as the “Susan B. Anthony Amendment” and aimed to prohibit the denial of voting rights based on sex. After its introduction into Congress, the proposal sat until 1887 when the Senate finally considered the measure and quickly rejected it. Over the next thirty-three years, suffragists turned their attention to working at the state and local levels while holding out hope that a federal amendment to the Constitution would be approved. By the time the 19th Amendment came up for its final vote in 1919, the Senate had rejected it four times in thirty-two years.
Ask students: Who introduced the 19th Amendment to Congress? When was the 19th Amendment ratified? Does the 19th Amendment actually state that women have the right to vote? Did the 19th Amendment grant all people the right to vote? Who was excluded?

**Juno Frankie Pierce: A Square Deal or No Deal**

Use another book in our lit kit, *Finish the Fight: The Brave and Revolutionary Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote* to learn more about Juno Frankie Pierce, an African American woman who was the President of the Nashville Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, a civil rights organization that she helped start in the early 1900s. Encourage students to learn more about Juno Frankie Pierce and how Black and white women like Catherine Talty Kenny joined together in Nashville in the fight for women’s suffrage (pp. 83-88, *Finish the Fight*).

**Exploring the Book**

Teachers might:

- Change the order
- Select steps you believe would be best for your students
- Add ones that you feel are important

1. Read and talk about the title of the book and illustration on the cover. What types of predictions can you make from reading the title? Notice the yellow rose and background color of the book cover. Also note that there is a red rose on the bottom left-hand corner. Ask students what that must signify. Connect the yellow theme from another book in this lit kit, *Around America to Win the Vote*, to this book. Revisit the front cover and ask students to predict why the envelope might be important in the story. Turn the book on the back side and read and discuss the excerpt from Febb Burn’s letter to her son. How does this quote tell us who the people are on the cover of the book? Tell students they can look forward to reading more about the letter in the story.

2. Pull off the book jacket and notice that the hardcover of the book is different from the jacket. The front and back hard covers are filled with pictures of women campaigning for women’s right to vote. This is a reminder that it took many women’s voices to win the vote.

3. Introduce the author and illustrator. There is some information about their lives on the back flap of the book. This is Elisa Boxer’s first children’s book. Her hope is to inspire young readers “to give voice to what matters to them.” Illustrator Vivien Mildenberger lives on a farm in Tennessee. You may want to note that Mildenberger’s illustrations depict several African American women participating in the suffrage movement—marching in parades and wearing banners. However, African American women like Ida B. Wells were excluded from the movement, and were even asked to march “at the back of the line or not at all” in the famous “March of 1913,” when 8,000 women marched in Washington (see the book *Fight of the Century: Alice Paul Battles Woodrow Wilson for the Vote* in this lit kit). Ida B. Wells and other African American women didn’t do as they were told, and they did march with their state delegations in the parade. Ask students to
consider why Mildenberger may have included illustrations of African American women in the picture book. You may also want to refer to the book *Finish the Fight: The Brave and Revolutionary Women Who Fought for the Vote* in the lit kit to introduce students to Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Elizabeth Piper Ensley, Mary Church Terrell, and Ida B. Wells—all African American women integral to the suffrage movement. Another book in the lit kit, *Ida B. Wells: Let the Truth Be Told*, introduces this hero to young people, and *Lifting as We Climb* introduces Mary Church Terrell and other African American female suffragists to younger readers. A teacher’s guide for *Ida B. Wells* and *Fight of the Century* are available at the CCYAL website.

4. Share the endpapers of the picture book. Endpapers (sometimes called endpages) are pages glued inside the front and back covers of a book, and are thus the first parts of the interior of the book to be seen when the book is opened, as well as the last to be seen after the story has been read and the book is about to be closed. Ask students why the endpapers might be white (e.g., they are plain white like a sheet of blank writing paper).

5. Read aloud and/or picture-walk the story. (You might do both.) Be sensitive to your students’ needs and curiosities and briefly pause to address those areas. You might interject your thinking aloud to make sure everyone comprehends the story. However, do this sparingly because you want students to discover and enjoy the overall story for themselves. During the read aloud highlight how the folk-style watercolor illustrations strengthen the nonfiction narrative.

6. After the read aloud, entertain questions and mention two or three of the main points in the story. Emphasize that it was Tennessee House Representative Harry Burn’s tie-breaking vote that won the right for women to vote. More importantly it was his mother’s letter that made the difference. Hatred towards Harry Burn’s vote for suffrage was so intense that he had to have a bodyguard. Ask students if they have ever felt frightened while defending a person or a belief. What does that feel like after you have done so? Do you feel courageous? Scared? Why?

7. Review the author’s note at the end of the picture book for more information about the story. There is a helpful timeline at the bottom of the two-page spread. Follow this link [http://teachtnhistory.org/File/Harry_T._Burn.pdf](http://teachtnhistory.org/File/Harry_T._Burn.pdf) for more nonfiction information about the story along with photos of Febb Burn’s actual envelope and the seven-page letter she wrote to her son. This is a perfect primary source to add to this study.

8. If you are doing the “Timeline Activity” with your students, continue with entries for Febb and Harry Burn (see “Timeline Activity” at the CCYAL website and in the Appendix in the curriculum guide book). Assign Febb and Harry Burn’s timeline entries and have students write five facts about Febb and Harry inside each timeline entry and illustrate each timeline entry. Make sure that you have the ratification of the 19th Amendment (1920) on the timeline. Afterwards, place the entries on the timeline in chronological order according to birth year and event. You may want to review the timeline, discussing what happened in each life. Highlight the experiences the various people endured to win the vote. While having the timeline discussion, show each book to help students remember what happened in each of them. Encourage a lively discussion and connections. Ask students how these experiences are relevant to them today.
Interdisciplinary Activities

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English Language Arts/Writing

Creative Writing
1. **A Letter to Mother**
Pretend that you are Harry Burn. Even though you knew it would make a lot of people mad, you took your mother’s advice and voted “yes” for women to have the right to vote. Write a letter to your mother explaining why you voted the way you did even though you fear it might keep you from getting re-elected. Compare students’ letters to how Harry defended his decision (see the “Teaching with Primary and Secondary Sources” section).

2. **Worth a Thousand Words**
A photograph of Febb Burn appears at the end of the picture book. Spend some time looking at the picture and then write a poem (at least six lines) describing her. You can describe her physical appearance, but also describe the type of person she seems to be based on her facial expression and body language as well as what you know about her from reading the book.

Academic Writing
1. **The Volunteer State Gets the Vote**
Visit the National Park Services website *Tennessee and the 19th Amendment*: [https://www.nps.gov/articles/tennessee-women-s-history.htm](https://www.nps.gov/articles/tennessee-women-s-history.htm)
Read the article on the page, but also click on Harry Burn’s name and the names of at least two other people who interest you. Then write one paragraph explaining what you learned about the special role Tennessee played in the passage of the 19th Amendment. How did the people you read about help in winning women the right to vote?

2. **Significant Suffrage Events**
The last two pages of the book show a timeline titled “Selected Significant Events in the Women’s Suffrage Movement.” Choose one event from the timeline and research it using various sources (including other books in the lit kit). Then write a paragraph explaining what you learned. Why was the event you chose important to the women’s suffrage movement?

Art/Media

1. **Symbol of the Movement**
The sunflower is a symbol of the suffrage movement. The sunflower is also the Kansas state flower. Suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony wore sunflower pins as they campaigned for the right to vote in Kansas in 1867. While the Kansas
referendum failed, yellow remained a color of the suffrage movement throughout the 20th century. You can make a sunflower to show your support for women’s suffrage!

Supplies needed:

- Yellow, green, and brown construction paper (You can color white paper yellow, green and brown with crayons or markers instead.)
- Popsicle sticks or pencils.
- Glue sticks or tape

Directions: 1) Take two pieces of yellow paper and fold them like an accordion or a fan. Use tape or a glue stick and press the two sides together so they form a complete circle. 2) Cut out a brown circle. Glue or tape the brown circle in the center of your flower. 3) Take the green construction paper, wrap it around the popsicle stick or pencil, and tape it together to make the stem.

2. Tennessee Woman Suffrage Memorial.
Show students pictures (or take a field trip or virtual tour to) the Tennessee Woman Suffrage Memorial, located on Market Square in Knoxville, TN. The life size bronze statue commemorates Lizzie Crozier French (Knoxville), Anne Dallas Dudley (Nashville), and Elizabeth Avery Meriwether (Memphis), Tennessee pioneering suffragists who fought for passage of the 19th amendment, giving women the right to vote in 1920. Have students research Anne Dallas Dudley, who served as president of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association. Ask students:

- What is the purpose of the memorial?
- Who is the memorial’s audience?
- Who will visit it and why?
- Who or what will be remembered, and for what reasons?
- Who was the sculptor? Why did he use bronze?
- Why is the memorial “life-size”?

3. The Burn Memorial.
Just steps from the Woman Suffrage Memorial, at the corner of Clinch Avenue and Market Square, in Knoxville, TN, sits the Burn Memorial. Erected in 2018, this memorial statue by Nashville sculptor Alan LeQuire depicts Rep. Harry Burn of Niota and his mother, Febb, and honors each of their roles in the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Have students take a virtual (web-based) tour of the memorial and consider some of the above questions. Also consider: what is in Febb’s hand? in Harry’s?

https://www.visitknoxville.com/listings/burn-memorial/1855/

4. Anne Dallas Dudley.
Anne Dallas Dudley was a national and state leader in the fight for women’s suffrage who worked tirelessly to secure the ratification of the 19th Amendment in Tennessee. She was from a prominent Nashville family, and married to one of the founders of the
Life and Casualty Insurance Company. Show students the photograph of Anne Dallas Dudley and her children reading, which can be found at: https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll27/id/69/

Explain to students that this picture of Dudley reading with her children, Trevania and Guilford, Jr., was used in women's suffrage publicity materials to counter the stereotypes of suffragists as mannish, childless radicals intent on destroying the American family. Define “stereotype” for students and discuss why anti-suffragists would want to circulate this stereotype about pro-suffragists. What were anti-suffragists’ arguments against women’s suffrage?

**If you are reading The Hope Chest to/with your students, this would make a great children's picture book pairing! A teacher’s guide for The Hope Chest is available at the CCYAL website and in the traveling lit kit.