

# Day 4 ELA II Sessions

Susan B. Anthony: An Advocate for Women's Rights

P-5

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## Susan B. Anthony: An Advocate for Women's Rights

Susan B. Anthony was born a very long time ago in Massachusetts, in the year 1820. When she was a little girl, she did not know that she would grow up to become so influential. But that was to be her destiny. Her family certainly helped to shape the person she was to become.

Susan's family was different from many other families. They were Quakers. Susan's family did not judge people based on color or whether they were male or female. In their eyes, everyone was equal. But a long time ago, when Susan was a young girl, not everyone thought that way. For one thing, many people thought that it was more important for boys to be educated than it was for girls or people of color. How would you have felt about that? How would you feel if only boys could go to school? Susan was lucky because her parents did not agree with this view. They wanted their daughter to receive a good education.

When Susan was six years old, she went to school. One day, a teacher at the school refused to teach Susan a difficult math problem because she was a girl. As a result, her parents decided that Susan should be educated at home. Later, Susan attended a Quaker boarding school near Philadelphia. When her parents struggled to pay the fees, however, she left school and finished her education at home. Later, Susan became a teacher. Susan eventually became a headmistress, or the person in charge of a school. Susan worked hard to help her family financially. Susan quickly discovered, though, that female teachers earned less money than male teachers for doing the very same job.

When Susan was twenty-nine years old, she left the world of education and settled in her family home. Susan's family was now living near Rochester in New York. It was during this time that she met some very brave people who were trying to abolish, or end, slavery in the United States. These people were called abolitionists. Secret meetings were held late at night in her family home. Susan became involved, too. Her heart began to tell her that it was important that she try to make the world a fairer place, so Susan decided that she would join the fight to abolish slavery. A long and difficult journey had begun.

In the early days of the Civil War, Susan helped to organize women's groups to speak out about slavery. This was not an easy thing to do. Back then, people did not have computers or cell phones. Susan and her supporters had to travel in horse-drawn carriages and communicate by letter. Newspapers printed many articles that criticized her views and called her a troublemaker. Susan did not care. She was fearless.

While the Civil War raged in January, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln took an important step toward ending slavery when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. This proclamation, or statement, announced that the government intended to free all slaves in the United States. This meant that former slaves could make decisions about their own lives and that they could receive money for the work they did. In December 1865, after the Civil War, slavery was abolished, or ended, completely. In the next few years after the Civil War, the law was changed

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so that former slaves became citizens, and male slaves were given the right to vote. Susan was very happy that former male slaves had gained these rights. She was extremely unhappy that women did not have the same rights. The next fight was about to begin.

It might be difficult to believe now, but when Susan was alive, women had very few rights. As you have discovered, back then many people did not think that it was important to educate girls. Women had very limited roles, or small jobs, in their communities. They could attend meetings but were not allowed to speak in public, hold of office, or vote. Women were not allowed to become doctors or lawyers. Few girls stayed in school beyond the eighth grade. Married women could not own property. If they did own property before they got married, they had to turn it over to their husbands after they got married.

Susan had hoped that former abolitionists would now support women's rights. She was disappointed to discover that many men who had helped to abolish slavery did not believe that women should have suffrage, or the right to vote. Susan was determined to change this view. Susan joined forces with two women named Amelia Bloomer and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Together they began to fight for women's rights. Women like Susan who campaigned against these laws became known as suffragettes, or people who fought for women's suffrage.

Susan became secretary of the American Equal Rights Association. She traveled all over the country by wagon, carriage, and train, speaking for women's suffrage. She organized petitions and clubs, and she wrote newspaper articles. Susan also became publisher of *The Revolution*, a newspaper dedicated to women's issues. Printed on the front page of this newspaper were the words, "Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less." Susan invested her own money in the newspaper. Continuing the fight for women's rights, Susan also helped to found, or start, the National Suffrage Association. When Susan ran out of money, she gave up her position at the newspaper and had to find another way to make money. She began to tour the country, speaking to groups that paid to hear her speak.

Susan was in her fifties when she took her campaign one step further. She tried to cast her vote for president. She and several other women marched into a New York barbershop where male voters were voting. The women held a protest. They demanded the right to vote. The men in charge were unsure of what to do. They were unable to stop the women, so the women finally voted in the election. And so, in 1872, about fifty years before it was legal to do so, Susan and the other women cast their ballots for president of the United States.

Two weeks later, Susan was arrested and charged with illegal voting. Her arrest caused a national uproar. Susan was not afraid. She asked the general public to consider: "Is it a crime for a United States citizen to vote?" The judge in the trial did not think women should have the right to vote. He decided against Susan before the trial even started. He did not let her talk. He ordered the jury to find her guilty. He then asked Susan if she had anything to say.

"I have many things to say; for in your ordered verdict of guilty, you have trampled underfoot every vital

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principle of our government. My natural rights, my civil rights, my political rights, my judicial rights, are all alike ignored.” The judge tried to quiet Susan, but she continued to speak. He sentenced her to pay a fine of \$100. Susan’s response was to say, “I shall never pay a dollar of your unjust penalty.” She never did.

By the end of the nineteenth century, people’s views about Susan B. Anthony began to change. She had become a national heroine.

Susan continued to travel the country speaking for women’s voting rights. Now, people couldn’t wait to hear her speak. She became president of the National American Women Suffrage Association, a job she held until the age of eighty, when she retired. Six years later, on March 13, 1906, Susan B. Anthony died in Rochester, New York. She had worked for more than fifty years, a half a century, for women’s rights. Although she did not live to see women get the right to vote when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution passed in 1920, she had helped to make it happen.

Susan B. Anthony was quite an amazing woman. She was prepared to stand up and fought for what she believed was right. Do you think you would have enough courage to do the same?

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