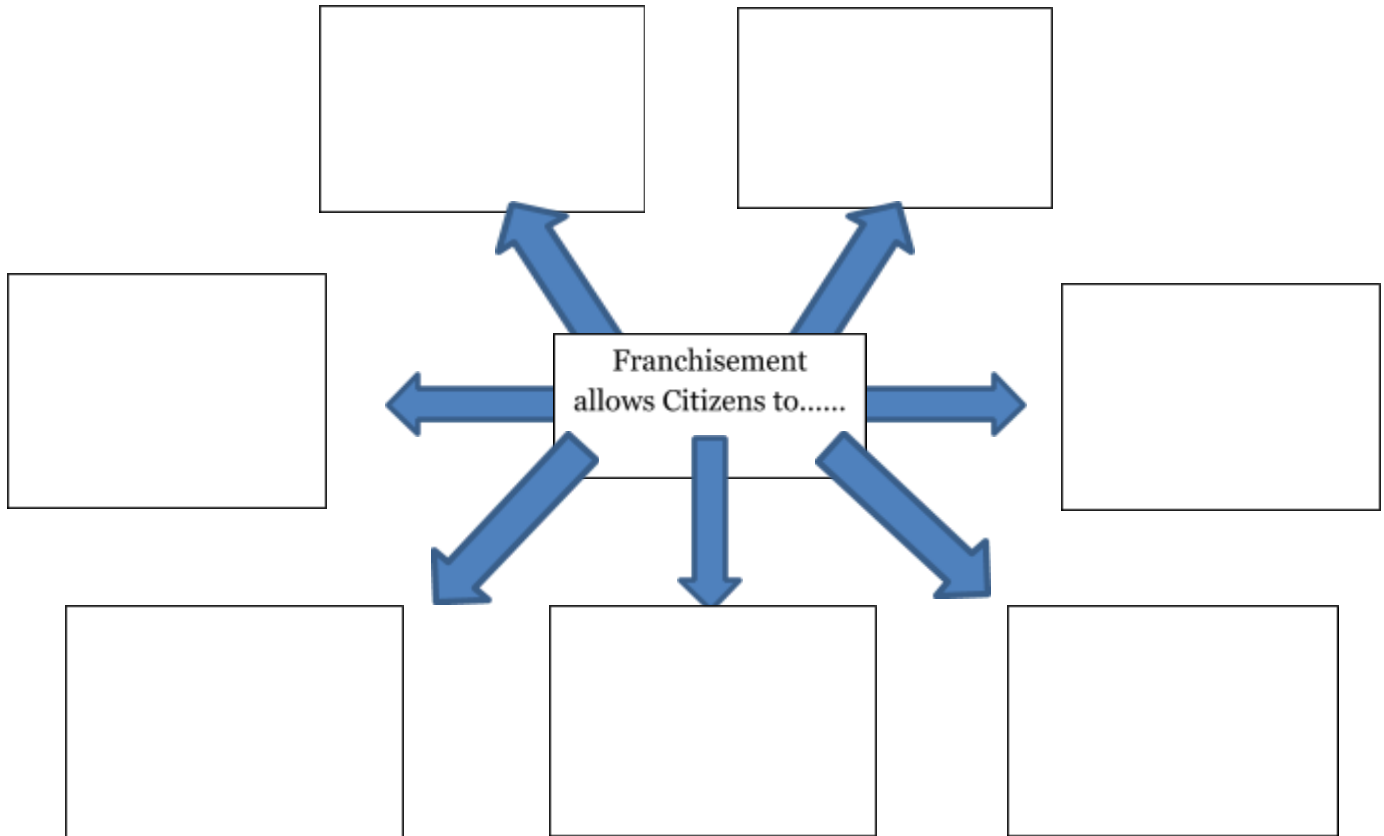


Access to the Right to Vote

Why is the right to vote so important?

Voting is a way for citizens to exercise their right to have a say in how government operates. It allows them to elect representatives that embody their beliefs and to also hold their representatives accountable for their actions.

Listen to the first five minutes of Martin Luther King Jr's *Give Us the Ballot* speech. Identify all the ways that King sees the power to vote being as being a powerful way to create change for African Americans in the mid-1900s. Record these things in the boxes below. All boxes should be full when finished.



PART 2:

Read the “Background Information” provided with your source binder. Use the background information to respond to the questions below:

1. What negative impact could barriers to voting have on those experiencing their effects?

2. Are these barriers impossible to overcome? Provide an example in which this has happened.

3. What are some ways citizens of color can/have push[ed] back against policies that have an adverse effect on their demographic population?

An excerpt from “Give Us the Ballot,”

by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished platform associates, fellow Americans. Three years ago the Supreme Court of this nation rendered in simple, eloquent, and unequivocal language a decision which will long be stenciled on the mental sheets of succeeding generations.

For all men of goodwill, this May seventeenth decision came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of human captivity. It came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of disinherited people throughout the world who had dared only to dream of freedom.

Unfortunately, this noble and sublime decision has not gone without opposition. This opposition has often risen to ominous proportions. Many states have risen up in open defiance. The legislative halls of the South ring loud with such words as “interposition” and “nullification.”

But even more, all types of conniving methods are still being used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters. The denial of this sacred right is a tragic betrayal of the highest mandates of our democratic tradition. And so our most urgent request to the president of the United States and every member of Congress is to give us the right to vote. [Audience:] (Yes)

Give us the ballot, and we will no longer have to worry the federal government about our basic rights.

Give us the ballot (Yes), and we will no longer plead to the federal government for passage of an anti-lynching law; we will by the power of our vote write the law on the statute books of the South (All right) and bring an end to the dastardly acts of the hooded perpetrators of violence.

Give us the ballot (Give us the ballot), and we will transform the salient misdeeds of bloodthirsty mobs (Yeah) into the calculated good deeds of orderly citizens.

Give us the ballot (Give us the ballot), and we will fill our legislative halls with men of goodwill (All right now) and send to the sacred halls of Congress men who will not sign a “Southern Manifesto” because of their devotion to the manifesto of justice. (Tell ’em about it)

Give us the ballot (Yeah), and we will place judges on the benches of the South who will do justly and love mercy (Yeah), and we will place at the head of the southern states governors who will, who have felt not only the tang of the human, but the glow of the Divine.

Give us the ballot (Yes), and we will quietly and nonviolently, without rancor or bitterness, implement the Supreme Court’s decision of May seventeenth, 1954. (That’s right)