Politics are Personal:
Women’s Bodies and the Law

The Law at Work
By Jessie Ashley

Morality and Birth Control
By Margaret Sanger

As a Doctor Sees It

Letters from Women

THE NEW VOTER AT WORK
## Overview
Students explore laws and policies that have restricted women’s bodies on the topics of sterilization, illegalization of birth control, and natural hair discrimination. They then watch student testimony from a Portland Public Schools board meeting about school dress codes and consider present day policies that impact girls’ and women’s bodies.

## Learning Objectives
› Students understand that laws and policies can create restrictions on women’s bodies.
› Students learn that women of color have especially been targets of such restrictions.
› Students recognize that women have continually fought to gain social and political power.
› Students are able to examine and analyze examples of past and present policy within the context of women’s rights and equal rights.

## Guiding Questions
› How have laws and policies contributed to the systemic oppression of traditionally marginalized groups in Oregon and the United States? How have laws and policies also been used to combat the same systemic oppression?
› How can citizens take informed action to solve problems that impact their lives and bring change to their communities?

## Background Information
For background information on the three topics explored in this lesson, see the station documents linked in the “Materials Needed” section and the “Additional Educator Resources” section below.

Students in Portland, Oregon, supported by the Oregon branch of the National Organization for Women, worked with Portland Public Schools to create a gender neutral dress code. They argued that the previous dress code was unfair to girls/young women by unnecessarily sexualizing their bodies and deeming them a “distraction” to boys/young men. Due to subjective violations, female students were missing a disproportionate amount of instructional time in school, compared to their male counterparts. The new PPS dress code has become a model for other schools across the country and has been embraced by both students and parents for being “inclusive, progressive, and body-positive.”
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<tr>
<th>Delivery Time</th>
<th>Two or three 45-minute class periods</th>
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| **Remote Teaching Guide** | These documents are not meant to be a replacement for the lesson plan, but are intended to be used alongside it to guide delivery modifications.  
› [Politics are Personal Remote Learning Modification](#)  
› [General tips for promoting discussion and engagement online](#) |
| **Vocabulary** |  
› **Activist:** a person who campaigns to bring about political or social change  
› **Eugenics:** a movement to apply evolutionary science and genetics to solve social problems, in part by controlling the reproduction of “undesirable” individuals  
› **Legislation:** laws, considered collectively  
› **Natural Hair:** the hair that naturally comes out of a person’s head, in an unaltered state  
› **Primary Source:** information about an event or time in the past made by someone who lived during that time and learned about or participated in the event or time. Some examples include a letter, speech, or artifact, such as a basket or shoe, as long as they were made or used by the person at that time.  
› **Secondary Source:** information about an event or time in the past that was created after the fact by someone who did not experience it first-hand or participate in the events or time. Some examples include scholarly books and articles and reference books, such as encyclopedias.  
› **Statute:** a written law passed by a legislative body  
› **Sterilization:** surgery to make a person or animal unable to produce offspring  
› **Suffrage:** the right to vote in political elections |
| **Materials Needed** |  
› [Sterilization/Eugenics station documents](#)  
› [Natural hair station documents](#)  
› [Birth control station documents](#)  
› [Politics are personal note-taking sheet](#) (students will need three, one per station)  
› Blank copy paper  
› Colored pencils (optional) for response activity |
### Materials Needed (continued)

- Portland Public Schools, school board meeting, May 26, 2015 (9 minutes: start at 1:00:00 and ending at 1:09:00)
- Sample dress code sheet

### Step by Step Instructions

**Step One:**
Throughout American history, many laws and policies have been enacted to restrict and control women. Examples include laws that prohibited women from owning property or inheriting wealth, and the array of laws that restricted women from citizenship and voting rights. We will spend some time exploring three different topics specifically around laws that had/have to do with women’s bodies.

**Step Two:**
Set up three stations in different parts of your classroom: one for eugenics, one for natural hair, and one for birth control. In each station, place the documents for that topic (see links above for the document folders). Students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to rotate through the stations and investigate all of the documents. Each student/pair/small group will need a Politics are personal note-taking sheet for each station: three total.

**Step Three:**
When students are finished exploring the stations, have them review their note-taking sheets and then use a blank piece of paper to create a response to what they learned. The response could include drawings, words, symbols, any type of graphics. Responses can also include questions, facts, and emotions.

**Step Four:**
Students post their response pieces and do a gallery walk to observe other people’s responses.

**Step Five:**
Next, ask students if they can think of other policies that control women’s bodies now. Pair share. You could have some students share their ideas with the class. If no one mentions it, ask, “What about school dress codes?” If you are in a public school, you can point out that public schools are a part of government, and therefore dress codes are public policy.

**Step Six:**
Watch the nine-minute clip (start at 1:00:00 and ending at 1:09:00) of the May 26, 2015, PPS school board meeting. Discussion questions:
### Step by Step Instructions (continued)

› What arguments did you hear students make for changing the school dress code? Do you agree? Why or why not?
› What connections can you make between the concerns raised by these students and issues you learned about in your station? What are the similarities? What are the differences?

#### Step Seven:

Tell students that as a result of this testimony and further action on the part of student activists and assistance from the Oregon branch of the National Organization for Women, Portland Public Schools changed their dress code. Pass out the [sample dress code sheet](#) which includes a copy of the PPS dress code and a copy of the type of dress code that many schools in the country have. Ask students to compare them. What differences do they notice? Why are many students, especially girls, calling the second dress code unfair? Is the PPS dress code more fair? How?

### Assessments

› Completed note-taking sheets
› Response graphics

### Teacher Notes

Depending on the age and background of your students, you may need to spend more time unpacking the topics addressed in this lesson. The topic of birth control may be controversial, but it can also be a good jumping off point for discussion. As the facilitator, think about how you can maintain a safe space for students to explore and share without judgement. Add your own questions to the discussion portions to best engage the students in your classroom.

Alternatively, if the birth control portion of this lesson feels too controversial for your classroom, consider leading the lesson with a focus on the other two topics.

Read this article, "How False Narratives of Margaret Sanger Are Being Used to Shame Black Women," by Imani Gandy to prepare for potential push back against Sanger.

### Support for All Students

› Limit or increase the number of documents in each station.
› Have students visit the stations in groups of three or four. Each student in the group can become an “expert” in one document and then share their notes with the others.
### Extensions
- Have students look at your school’s dress code and suggest changes. Students can use [this article](#) and other resources (see Additional Educator Resources below) to construct an argument for creating an updated dress code.
- “Good Hair: Exploring Identity and Questioning Expectations,” is a set of high school lessons from Oregon Humanities: “In these lessons, students will read and study the essay ‘Good Hair,’ and use it as an entry point for social critique and the exploration of past and present realities of identity, family, gender, race, and appearance.”
- Consider connecting this lesson to initiatives and standards in health. Reach out to the educator who teaches health in your building and talk about how you could collaborate.

### Additional Educator Resources
Learn more about the Oregon NOW campaign for Portland Public Schools to adopt a gender-neutral dress code. If you are not in PPS, consider your school’s or district’s dress code and how it compares.
- [NOW Oregon page](#) about their model dress code, including links to local and national articles about the new PPS dress code.
- The PPS dress code: [https://www.pps.net/Page/5888](https://www.pps.net/Page/5888)

For further resources on sterilization/eugenics, natural hair, and birth control, see [this document](#).

### Oregon Social Studies Standards
#### Middle School
- **8.4** Examine the evolution of political parties and interest groups and their effect on events, issues, and ideas.
- **8.9** Analyze the effect of historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.
- **8.10** Explain specific roles and responsibilities of citizens (such as voters, jurors, taxpayers, members of the armed forces, petitioners, protesters, and office-holders).
- **8.25** Evaluate the influence of the intersections of identity, including but not limited to gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, and class on the experiences of peoples, groups, and events.
› **8.28** Identify issues related to historical events to recognize power, authority, and governance as it relates to systemic oppression and its impact on ethnic and religious groups, as well as other historically persecuted individuals in the United States in the modern era (bias, injustice, discrimination, and stereotypes).

› **8.29** Use and interpret relevant primary and secondary sources pertaining to U.S. history from multiple perspectives.

› **8.30** Synthesize information and data to construct an account of historical events that includes multiple sources and varied perspectives.

› **8.31** Analyze intersecting identities and relationships within the living histories of ethnic groups such as individuals who are American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian or Americans of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicano, Latino, or Middle Eastern descent), religious groups, and other traditionally marginalized groups (women, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, and individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender) in the United States.

› **8.33** Analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.

**High School**

› **HS.5** Evaluate the relationships among governments at the local, state, tribal, national, and global levels.

› **HS.7** Analyze political parties, interest and community groups, and mass media and how they influence the beliefs and behaviors of individuals, and local, state, and national constituencies.

› **HS.10** Explain the roles and responsibilities of active members of a democracy and the role of individuals, social movements, and governments in various current events.

› **HS.11** Examine the pluralistic realities of society recognizing issues of equity and evaluating the need for change.

› **HS.61** Analyze and explain persistent historical, social, and political issues, conflicts, and compromises in regards to power, inequality and justice and their connections to current events and movements.

› **HS.62** Identify historical and current events, issues, and problems when national and/or global interests are/have been in conflict, and provide analysis from multiple perspectives.
Oregon Social Studies Standards (continued)

High School

› HS.65 Identify and analyze the nature of systemic oppression on ethnic and religious groups, as well as other traditionally marginalized groups, in the pursuit of justice and equality in Oregon, the United States, and the world.

› HS.73 Identify and analyze multiple and diverse perspectives as critical consumers of information.

› HS.74 Analyze an event, issue, problem, or phenomenon, critiquing and evaluating characteristics, influences, causes, and both short- and long-term effects.