



Women and the Vote

I Could Do That: Esther Morris Gets Women the Vote

by Linda Arms White

As the 2020 Presidential Election nears and the importance of voting rises to the forefront, we are reminded that many groups of people had to fight very hard to secure the right to vote. Their willingness to struggle for years and years should reinforce the fact that every United States citizen should register to vote at eighteen, and should always go to the polls to vote on every election day. Voting is the single most important way each of us uses our voice.

Esther Morris was born in 1812, a time in our history when women did not have the right to vote. It took over 100 years for women to get the right to vote. The 19th Amendment that gave all women the right to vote was passed eighteen years after Esther Morris died. However, her commitment to the Suffragette Movement, the Social and Political Union that worked tirelessly for women's right to vote, helped the suffragettes move ever closer to their goal of having all women have the right to vote.

Reading or *listening to (*Check YouTube for a read-aloud of *I Could Do That*) Esther Morris' story, the reader learns about the skills that helped her become a leader in the movement that won the vote for women of the Wyoming Territory as early as 1869. Wyoming Territory was the first territory to give women the right to vote, and Esther was the first woman to be approved to hold a public office.

This story helps the reader understand how important our forefathers and mothers felt about the significance of voting. In addition, we learn that, from a very early age, we can accomplish anything we put their minds to. After listening to the story, think about the things you can do as a young citizen to make the world a better place. Then read and share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. From the beginning of the story, we learn that Esther wants to learn how to do things that the older girls do. It was clear that Esther wanted to learn how to do those things that would make life easier for her mother and father. Do you think that was a sign that Esther Morris was going to become a leader? What kinds of things do you want to learn to do that will help you to become a leader in your home, school, and/or community? Be prepared to share.

2. Esther Morris opened a hat shop when she was only 19 years old. Even though she could run her own business, Esther was not able to vote. Today all citizens can register to vote when they become 18 years of age. However, until March of 1971, an individual had to be 21 in order to be able to register to vote. It was not that long ago, therefore, that an individual could own a business at 19, but could not register to vote until 21. Do you think 18 is the right age for an individual in today's world to be able to register to vote? Why or why not? Would you think the age to vote should be higher or lower than 18? Be prepared to support your opinion.

3. *In spite of all of her "firsts," Esther Morris never got to vote for president.* As we learned from reading/listening to ***I Could Do That***, trying to make change takes a lot of time, energy and patience. In Esther Morris' case, she did not get what she had fought so hard for. Do you think the time and energy Esther Morris spent working for securing women's right to vote was worth her effort? Why or why not?