



The Right to Vote

Granddaddy's Gift by Margaree King Mitchell

Most American citizens who are 18 and older are entitled to vote. Unfortunately, there are still eligible voters who choose not to exercise their right to vote. In the 2016 election, 61.4 percent of the U.S. voting-age population voted. That means that 38.6 percent did not vote at all; that is, they did not choose to have their voices heard.

Because our Constitution did not say who could vote, white landowners were originally the only people who were eligible to vote. Women were denied the right to vote until 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment. The 24th Amendment allowed Black men to vote without facing poll taxes, literacy tests and more. However, there was and still is ongoing attempts to suppress the voices of those in our minority communities.

Why is there so much attention paid to voting? Voting is one of the most important ways to demonstrate that we are active, engaged citizens. It is a way to show our commitment to our democracy. Although the person for whom we vote does not always win, it is our civic responsibility to register to vote and have our voices heard.

In the book *Granddaddy's Gift*, we learn that, although the 15th amendment granted African American men the right to vote in 1870, exercising that right was an incredible challenge. It was, however, so important for Granddaddy to become the first black man in his small town in Mississippi to register to vote, that he gathered the courage and persevered so he could overcome the face of prejudice. Voting was and still is the most important thing an American citizen can do.

Now...read or *listen to *Granddaddy's Gift* (Check out YouTube for a read-aloud for this book), and then think about and discuss the following questions:

1. Granddaddy fought very hard to be able to register to vote with the intention of being able to vote as well. Today, there is a lot of concern over the fact that many citizens choose not to vote. Some people say they do not like either candidate and, therefore, do not think it is important to vote. Some people say that going to the polls is inconvenient and, therefore, do not go to vote. There are many excuses that people give for not voting. What do you think you might say to someone who does not plan to vote that might encourage them to do so?
2. On the other hand, there continues to be attempts to keep people who want to vote from being able to easily do so. Polling places located close to black communities have been relocated so that voters have to drive much further and wait in much longer lines in order to vote. Although you are too young to vote, what do you think you could do to help those in your community who see voting as too challenging and are considering not voting? What could you do to call attention to this practice of voter suppression so that it doesn't happen in the next election? Be prepared to share your ideas.
3. Granddaddy told his grandchildren how *segregation laws had been passed in the South to keep black people from having the same rights as white people, like the right to vote. He said, it was important to vote, it was a way for our voices to be heard.* Do you think it is important for every voice to be heard? Why or why not?
4. When Granddaddy went to the courthouse to register to vote, he was told that he would have to take and pass a test on the Mississippi Constitution before he was allowed to register. How is this an example of "voter suppression"? Why do you think Granddaddy was willing to take the test?
5. When Granddaddy told his grandchildren about voting, none of them were old enough to vote. Why do think he thought it was important to talk about voting with the young children in his family? Do you think it is important today to talk about voting with young people like yourselves? Why or why not?
6. Thinking about what Granddaddy did when he volunteered to be the first Black person in his small town in Mississippi to register to vote, would you describe him as a leader, a hero, both or neither? Be prepared to support your answer. Why do you think many people were angry at Granddaddy for volunteering to try to register to vote? Why do you think people didn't want their children to play with Joe Morgan because of what her Granddaddy was trying to do?