THE CONSTITUTION WITH CARL

Volume 25 - The Twenty-fourth Amendment - No Poll Tax

No Poll Tax

Central question: Should a person have to pay to vote?





For most of a century, in a group of Southern states, an American who wanted to vote first had to pay for the privilege: a tax of a dollar or a dollar and a half, charged year after year, paid months before election day, with a paper receipt to prove it. The amount sounds small. The design was not. A citizen who could not pay, or who had missed a year, or who had simply lost the receipt, could be turned away for want of proof, and thousands upon thousands of citizens, Black and white, poor farmers and laborers and their wives, stood outside the polling place of their own country for want of a dollar and a half.

In 1964 the Twenty-fourth Amendment barred the tax as a condition of voting in federal elections, the elections for President and Congress. Two years later the Supreme Court barred it in state elections too, in Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections, and federal trial courts struck the last holdout taxes down in the same season. This book reads the amendment's seventy two words closely, tells how the tax worked and how the long fight against it was won, and keeps the two halves of the victory labeled for what they are: one by amendment, one by the courts.

For ages 7 to 11. Level Up boxes reach to age 13.

START HERE

Meet Carl and the Four Strands

Carl the Cardinal is Free Vote Carl in this volume. He stands at the entrance of a polling place holding a blank ballot, and his pockets are turned out and plainly empty. The ballot is blank because Carl's books never tell a voter how to vote. The empty pockets are the point of the picture: nothing stands between this voter and the ballot box. No fee. No receipt. No tax unpaid. For the voters in this book's story, the pockets were the whole question: their states had made the contents of a voter's pocket a qualification for voting.

The four strands, kept separate

Strand	What it is
THE WORDS	The amendment itself, in ORIGINAL WORDS, plus a PLAIN LANGUAGE EXPLANATION set apart from it.
THE HISTORY	How the poll tax worked, why states built it, and the long fight in Congress and the states that ended it.
COURTS HAVE SAID	Named cases with years: Breedlove (1937), Harman (1965), and Harper (1966), labeled as interpretation.
STILL DEBATED	Real disputes that remain. Stated fairly, never as settled fact.

How to use this book

- Read the words aloud first. Then read the explanation.
- Write, draw, point, or dictate your answers. All of those count.
- The money exercises use the real tax amounts the court opinions record, a dollar in Georgia and a dollar and a half in Virginia.
- Keep three instruments straight: an amendment, a law, and a court holding. Page 13 sets them side by side.
- Family Talk is where the family viewpoint lives. It is never presented as a court holding.

CARL'S ONE DISTINCTION

Carl keeps one distinction in front of him from the first page to the last: **this amendment names federal elections, and only federal elections.** Its words list the offices, President, Vice President, electors, Senator, and Representative, and every one of them is a federal office. The state half of the victory, the governor's race and the mayor's race and the state legislature, arrived two years later by a different road, a Supreme Court holding under the Fourteenth Amendment, a different amendment from Book 15. Ask of every sentence in this book which half fell, and by whose hand.

MEET CARL BOX

Carl turns his pockets out with a smile, because the gesture that once shamed a poor man at the courthouse is, in his picture, a badge: nothing to pay, nothing to prove, a citizen walking in. He asks readers to picture the voters of the old system as neighbors first: parents and grandparents who worked hard, paid their other taxes, raised their families, and were kept from one duty of citizenship by a charge they could not spare. The rule was wrong; the people it kept out were never the problem.