

Alice Paul's Self-Sacrifice

- **Compelling Question**
 - How can you sacrifice your own needs to help others?
- **Virtue:** Self-Sacrifice
- **Definition** – Self-sacrifice is purposeful action exchanging personal loss for the good of others.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, students will read about Alice Paul's self-sacrifice while fighting for women's suffrage and they will think about ways in which they can put the needs of others before their own.
- **Objectives**
 - Students will understand the significance of Alice Paul's actions during the suffrage movement.
 - Students will analyze Paul's self-sacrificing actions.
 - Students will apply their understanding in situations where they sacrifice their own needs to improve experiences for others.
- **Background**
 - After completing graduate school in the early 1900s, suffragist Alice Paul sailed to Great Britain and began to take part in the women's rights movement. She joined the Women's Social and Political Union in Britain and was arrested and imprisoned several times after pro-suffrage demonstrations. Paul even went on a hunger strike while she was in prison in Britain to show her determination and willingness to sacrifice herself for her cause.

Alice Paul returned from fighting for suffrage and equal rights in Great Britain to turn her attention to her home country's struggles in 1910. In 1913, Paul and other members of the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) organized a parade to call attention to women's suffrage the day before President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. Paul and her colleagues lobbied for a constitutional amendment barring voting discrimination based on sex.

Believing NAWSA was too conservative, Paul formed the National Women's Party that picketed in front of the White House and demanded that President Wilson take action on women's suffrage. In 1917, Paul and other women participating in the protests were arrested and sent to prison. Paul went on a hunger strike while in jail and was force-fed.

Because of Paul's own self-sacrifice, Wilson and other leaders in Washington began to take notice. After many years of fighting for the right to vote, female American citizens' suffrage was upheld by the Nineteenth Amendment passed in 1920. Paul continued to fight for women's rights throughout her life and even wrote the Equal Rights Amendment that was passed by Congress in 1972, but was never ratified by the states.

- **Vocabulary**
 - Suffrage
 - Hunger strike
 - National American Women's Suffrage Association
 - National Women's Party
 - Nineteenth Amendment
 - Equal Rights Amendment
 - Restrained
 - Infirmary
 - Unkempt
 - Unwavering
 - Utmost
 - Impassive
 - Nasogastric feeding
 - Wits
 - Obstructing
 - Deprived
 - Convictions

- Conscience
- Gestured
- **Introduce Text**
 - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.
- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
 - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?
- **Observation Questions**
 - What was Alice Paul’s role in the suffrage and women’s rights movements?
 - What was Alice Paul’s purpose in going to jail and refusing to eat?
- **Discussion Questions**
 - Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
- **Additional Resources**
 - Adams, Katherine H. and Michael L. Keene. *Alice Paul and the American Woman Suffrage Campaign*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
 - Alice Paul Institute, <http://www.alicepaul.org/>
 - Walton, Mary. *A Woman’s Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
 - Zahniser, J.D. and Amelia R. Fry. *Alice Paul: Claiming Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Handout A: Alice Paul's Self-Sacrifice

Background

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Narrative

"I have an important decision to make, Miss Paul," said Doctor Fallon, sitting in a chair by the metal bed to which his patient was restrained. "The doctors and nurses on the ward here tell me you have not eaten in over two weeks." His patient, one Miss Alice Paul, was a small woman who took up barely half of the infirmary bed. He had seen the photos of her when she was first brought into Occoquan Workhouse, and they had shown a proud face with round cheeks, the very picture of health.

But now, those cheeks were sunken and dark, her skin waxy and pale. Her hair was unkempt and knotted, and her lips cracked. Deep hollows surround her eyes, but from within those depths they burned with a fierce spirit and unwavering determination and willingness to sacrifice her own health for what she believed.

According to her file, she was arrested during some sort of protest, another suffragette group clamoring for women to have the right to vote. He himself had no opinions on the subject and was unconcerned with the movement or with politics in general. Only his patients here at the prison concerned him.

Doctor Fallon continued. "I'm sure you must realize that our patients' health is of the utmost importance to us. We simply cannot have patients harming themselves in this manner, you understand?" Alice simply smiled politely.

"Well, the doctors who have seen you want me to have you force-fed. I shall really have no choice but to do so. You see?" She remained impassive, and Doctor Fallon had begun to become uncomfortable. He did not like having to justify his actions, and it was starting to annoy him. "You do understand what I mean, correct?" She nodded to show she was listening but made no comment.

"Miss Paul, I do not think you grasp the seriousness of what I am talking about. The process is called nasogastric feeding, and it will not be very pleasant, I'm afraid. You see, they will insert—"

"I'm quite aware of the process, Doctor Fallon."

He was taken aback and said nothing for several seconds. "You are?"

“Yes. A rubber tube is inserted through the nostril and down the back of the throat into the stomach. Liquid food, eggs I believe are standard, are then poured through a funnel into the tube and directly into the stomach itself. I was subjected to this ... procedure when I was in England.”

Doctor Fallon was again silent for a few moments as he gathered his wits. “Then you will understand how unpleasant it can be. Surely you will wish to avoid this? If you will simply start eating again...”

Alice shook her head. “Do you know why I am here, Doctor?”

“You were arrested for disturbing the peace by protesting outside of the White House. Obstructing traffic, I believe was the charge.”

“No. Our protest has been going on for years, and they never bothered to arrest us. It was the same many years ago when I was with the National American Woman’s Suffrage Association. I was imprisoned for refusing to give up.”

Alice was willing to put her health and her life in danger for her cause.

Doctor Fallon gave a confused look, and Alice continued. “For years President Wilson and the rest turned a blind eye to us, laughed at us for fools. But no one actually bothered with us.

“But when the war broke out, everyone assumed we would just give up, that our sense of patriotism would move us to abandon our quest for equality. When we did not, they harassed us, arrested us for minor charges, locked us up in jail for brief periods of time. Anything they could to force us to quit and go away, return to our lives as non-citizens.

“But we would not surrender. Finally, they sent us here. While here, we have been beaten, deprived of sleep, placed in freezing rooms, and fed spoiled food full of worms. And do you know why they have done this?”

Doctor Fallon shifted in his seat uncomfortably and simply shook his head.

“They believe that their actions are stronger than our beliefs. They oppose a woman’s right to vote, and they are willing to use the power they have to fight against us. But we do not have any such power beyond ourselves. And in the end, our convictions will prove stronger than their authority.

“History will be the final judge of us all, Doctor, so do as your conscience dictates, and so shall I.” She put her head back down on the bed and said no more.

Doctor Fallon was silent for a few moments. Finally he stood. “I cannot speak as to your treatment here at the workhouse, Miss Paul. And it is not for me to determine a woman’s right to vote.” He opened the door and gestured to the staff waiting outside to wheel in the cart with the equipment for the nasogastric feeding. “I am merely a doctor, and I heal bodies and strive to keep them healthy. And that is what I shall do.”

“I understand, Doctor. And I will continue to strive to heal the country’s soul.”