

Be A Good Boy

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Introduction

“Be a Good Boy” was written by John Micklos Jr., illustrated by JooHee Yoon and reprinted in the fall 2016 issue of Teaching Tolerance magazine. It originally appeared in the fall 2012 issue.

August 18, 1920. Harry Burn fidgeted in his seat in the Tennessee House of Representatives. He touched the red rose on his lapel. Wearing that rose showed that he was against giving women the right to vote. Supporters of women’s voting rights—or suffrage—wore yellow roses. In Tennessee, the struggle for women’s suffrage became known as the War of the Roses.

Burn reached inside his jacket and touched the letter he had just received from his mother urging her son to “be a good boy” and “vote for suffrage.” What should he do?

Many states had already passed the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women across the country the right to vote. Only one more state was needed to ratify the amendment. Tennessee became the final battleground.

The Tennessee Senate quickly approved the 19th Amendment, and it was up to the House to vote yes or no. No one knew what would happen: 48 members of the House were for the amendment and 48 were opposed. A tie vote was a no. People from across the nation—both for and against women’s suffrage—filled the room. They waited silently as each representative called out his vote. Sweat poured down Burn’s face. At age 24, he was the state’s youngest representative. Yet soon his vote might affect the entire nation.

Thoughts raced through his head: *Many people don’t think women should vote, but women work as hard as men. Why shouldn’t they have the same rights? My mother knows more about politics than most men. She should be allowed to vote. I know I should support women’s suffrage. But what will other people think?*

Burn’s name was called. The moment had come. Burn paused for just an instant. His mother’s words ran through his mind: “Be a good boy; vote for suffrage.” Burn raised his hand. “Yea,” he said. The amendment now had enough votes to pass. Women had won the right to vote!

Supporters cheered. Opponents of women’s suffrage were angry. Why had Burn changed his vote? Afraid, Burn ran from the room. He thought the angry anti-suffragists might hurt him. He climbed up into the attic of the state Capitol and waited for people to calm down.

The next day, Burn addressed the legislature. He calmly defended his decision to change his vote. He said it was his chance “to free 17 million women from political slavery” and that “a mother’s

advice is always safest for a boy to follow.” He will always be known as the person who cast the deciding vote for women’s suffrage.

Source

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TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

Why was the women’s suffrage movement referred to as the War of the Roses in Tennessee?

Reread the sentence that begins, “Burn reached inside his jacket.” What does “urging” mean?

The author shows us Burn’s thoughts just before he votes. Burn goes through the reasons why it makes sense for women to have the right to vote. What is the one thing stopping him?

Why did the author show us his thoughts instead of just telling us how he voted?

What did Burns mean when he described women as being in “political slavery”?

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TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: Why was the women's suffrage movement referred to as the War of the Roses in Tennessee?

Answer: Those in support of the movement wore yellow roses and those opposed wore red roses.

Question: Reread the sentence that begins, "Burn reached inside his jacket." What does "urging" mean?

Answer: "Urging" means to press, push, implore, entreat to do something.

Question: The author shows us Burn's thoughts just before he votes. Burn goes through the reasons why it makes sense for women to have the right to vote. What is the one thing stopping him? Why did the author show us his thoughts instead of just telling us how he voted?

Answer: He is worried about what other people will think. By showing us Burn's thoughts, the author is able to show us the dilemma he goes through and the reasoning he follows to make his decision. It plainly shows the reader what he thinks, but also the emotional side of what he worries about.

Question: What did Burns mean when he described women as being in "political slavery"?

Answer: When women did not have the right to vote, their political ideas and desires were kept captive. By giving them the right to vote, they were freed from this bondage.