

Did women win the vote?



AIMS

Aim to understand:

- the difference between a suffragette and a suffragist;
- why women won the vote after 1919.

Look at **Source A** carefully. This poster appeared in 1900 and demonstrates how many men felt about the idea of giving women the right to vote. What is the poster trying to say about a woman's mind?

Source A ▼ A woman's mind magnified.



In 1900, no woman in Britain had the right to vote. Men ruled the nation from Parliament and women were expected to keep out of the way. It was widely believed (by men of course) that a woman's place was in the home, looking after her children and husband. If any woman had a job, it would always be lower paid than a man's ... and women were restricted to jobs as teachers, nannies, cleaners, nurses and factory workers.

Votes for women

By 1900, many people were beginning to think that the lowly status of women in British society was wrong. Increasingly, it was felt that the way to improve their status was to get women to vote. If they could vote, they might be able to elect politicians who promised to improve their lives and get them equal pay to men (for example – see **Source B**).

As early as 1867, an MP named John Stuart Mill tried to introduce a law allowing women to vote. He was defeated, but similar bills were introduced nearly every year after that ... and each time they were defeated!

Several groups even started campaigning to get women the vote. They were called suffrage groups because suffrage means the right to vote.

The suffragists

By 1900, the largest suffrage group was the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) led by Millicent Fawcett, who joined up 500 local suffrage groups. They were nicknamed the **suffragists** and used peaceful tactics to try to secure the vote. They organised petitions, held meetings, published posters and wrote letters to politicians (see **Source B**). At their most popular, they had 100 000 members, made up mostly of middle-class women who either had jobs or were wealthy. They didn't make much progress but they certainly turned women's suffrage into a hot political issue.

Source B ▼ A postcard from 1912 produced by the NUWSS.





Source C ▲ The arguments for and against votes for women.

Source E ▼ A suffragette being arrested after chaining herself to the railings.

The suffragettes

In 1903, a member of a suffrage group in Manchester got fed up at the lack of progress made by the suffragists. Her name was Emmeline Pankhurst and along with her daughters, Sylvia and Christable, they decided to change tactics. They felt that the only way to gain the country's attention was to get violent and become a nuisance. If enough people are annoyed, they thought, then Parliament might give in and give women the vote. Officially, the new **militant** (warlike) group was known as the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) - but they were more commonly known as the **suffragettes** ... and their tough new motto was 'deeds [action], not words' (see **Source D**).

Source D ▼ A cartoon of a suffragette in her typical outfit, surrounded by the 'tools of her trade'.



The suffragettes did all they could to get public attention. They smashed shop windows, threw eggs at politicians and chained themselves to the railings outside Buckingham Palace. They even sent themselves through the post to the houses of well-known politicians! Their slogan, 'Votes for women', was found everywhere - on dolls, clothes, badges, flags, banners and belts. Their magazine had over 40 000 readers and even the Prime Minister, Henry Campbell Bannerman, encouraged them 'to go on pestering'.

Source F ▾ Millicent Fawcett, leader of the suffragists.

"In my opinion, far from having injured the movement, the suffragettes have done more during the last 12 months to bring women the vote than we have been able to accomplish in the same number of years."

The violence increases

Despite all the publicity, women were still not given the vote. Politicians who supported the idea of votes for women introduced bills in Parliament in 1907, 1908 and twice in 1910 – but they were all defeated.

The suffragettes' response to these setbacks was to get more violent. In April 1913, alone, they set fire to several schools, a lighthouse, dozens of post boxes, two churches, eight houses and three sports grounds. They let off four bombs and slashed famous paintings with knives. Someone even threw an axe at the Prime Minister. Most famously of all, suffragette Emily Davison was killed when she ran out in front of the King's horse at the Derby. Inside the dead woman's coat was sewn the suffragette colours of green, white and purple.

Source G ▾ The front page of the Daily Sketch, published the day after Emily Davison threw herself in front of the King's horse.



Source H ▸ A poster commenting on the suffragette campaign. Do you think the cartoonist supported the suffragettes or not?

The suffragettes believed the increase in violence worked – after all, they got loads of publicity. However, some believed the violence worked against their cause. It was argued that the suffragette violence made the government even more stubborn – they didn't want to be seen to give in to violence. If they did, perhaps other groups would use violence to get their way!

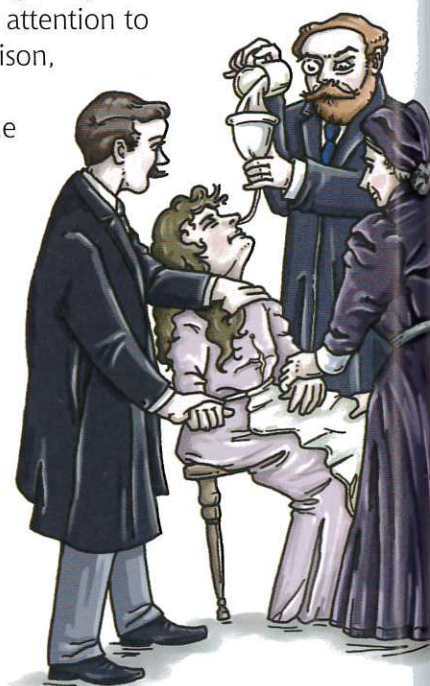
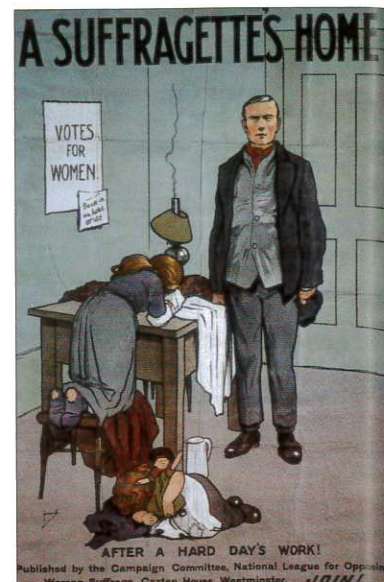
Source I ▾ Millicent Fawcett speaking about the suffragettes in 1913.

"I think they would rather lose women's suffrage rather than give up their own way of demonstrating."

Hunger strikes

The suffragettes didn't mind getting arrested and imprisoned because it drew attention to their campaign. When in prison, they often went on hunger strike and refused to eat. The government reacted by ordering all hunger strikers to be force fed by pouring soup through a tube up their nose and down their throat.

In 1913, Parliament passed a new law – nicknamed the Cat and Mouse Act – which released weak hunger strikers until they were feeling better ... then rearrested them and sent them back to jail.



WISE UP WORDS

- militant suffragettes suffragists munitions

Source J ▼ A popular song from the early 1900s.

"Put me on an island where the girls
are few,
Put me with the most ferocious lions
in the zoo,
Put me on a treadmill, and I'll never
fret,
But for pity's sake, don't put me with
a suffragette."

Women and war

In 1914, the Great War started and the suffragettes stopped their campaign of violence. Instead, they put their full support behind helping Britain to win the war. But the war brought women an unexpected opportunity. With more and more men leaving their jobs to become soldiers, women got the chance to do jobs they had never done before. They became bus drivers, milk deliverers, police officers, railway ticket collectors and car mechanics. Thousands worked in **munitions** factories (which were very unhealthy and dangerous), or became nurses or ambulance drivers near the front lines in France.

Source K ▶

A photograph of women mending a road during the Great War.



Source L ▼ Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, speaking in August 1916. What do you think he means by women's 'special claim'?

"It is true that women cannot fight with rifles, but they have aided in the most effective way in the war. What is more, when the war comes to an end, don't women have a special claim to be heard on the many questions which affect their interests? I cannot deny that claim."

Source M ▼ A comparison of the quality and output in factories of men and women in 1918.

Quantity

Metal – women's production equal to men's

Aircraft woodwork – women's production equal to men's

Bullet making – women's production equal to men's; in some cases, women produce 20% more than men

Shell making – women's production behind men

By the end of the war, many people felt that women had earned the right to vote – and many MPs didn't want the suffragettes to start their violent campaign again. In 1918, Parliament changed the voting laws and gave all men over 21 and all women over 30 the right to vote (as long as they owned their own house or were married to a man who did). Ten years later, Parliament reduced the voting age for women to 21, regardless of whether they owned a house or were married or not.

Source N ▼ Men and women's wages in 1900.

OCCUPATION	MEN'S PAY (per week)	WOMEN'S PAY (per week)
Carpet weaver	35 shillings	20 shillings
Clothing machinist	22 shillings	11 shillings
Typist	£3	£1

WORK

Look at **Source A**.

- What is the message of the cartoon?
 - Draw your own version of the cartoon to show how you feel women are considered in society today.
- Who were the suffragists?
 - Study **Source B**. What is the message of the cartoon?
 - Give four differences between a suffragist and a suffragette. Consider their tactics, attitude and behaviour in your answer.
 - Why do you think women wanted the right to vote? Give three reasons and explain your answers.
- Read pages 13 and 14. Imagine you are a news reporter shadowing a passionate suffragette. You spend a week with her and were there when Emily Davison was killed. Write a news article describing the typical life of a suffragette and her efforts to raise awareness of 'votes for women'.
- Read **Source J**. Do you think this song was written by a supporter of 'votes for women' or not?
- What impact did the Great War have on the suffragette movement?