



# WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN CANADA

## EDUCATION GUIDE



A project of



HISTORICA  
CANADA

with support from





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message to Teachers	2
Introduction	3
Timeline	4
Discussion Questions	6
“Separate Spheres” and Gender Inequality	7
The Road to Democracy	8
Feminist Activists	9
Activism In Action	9
Opposition to the Movement	10
Considering Political Exclusions	11
Gender Equality Today	12

### NOTE TO EDUCATORS:

Accommodations for Special Education, ELL and ESL students are included under the appropriate sections, and identified as “modifications.”

#### SUFFRAGE/FRANCHISE:

The right to vote in political elections.

#### ENFRANCHISE:

To give someone the legal right to vote.

#### TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT:

A social movement that promoted abstinence from alcohol to address social ills.

**SUFFRAGIST:** A member of the women’s suffrage movement, male or female. Often associated with activists who used peaceful methods of protest, including petitions and mock parliaments.

**SUFFRAGETTE:** A woman seeking the right to vote through militant protest. Commonly associated with British activists, who used illegal methods to fight for the vote. Often used as a derogatory term by opponents.

**ANTI-SUFFRAGIST:** Commonly known as “antis,” these men and women felt deeply threatened by the prospect of equality, which would unbalance the status quo.

Key Terms are noted **IN YELLOW** throughout the Guide.

## MESSAGE TO TEACHERS

To mark the centennial of the first achievements of women’s **suffrage** in Canada, Historica Canada (the country’s largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada’s history and citizenship) has created this Education Guide.

Developed in line with the concepts created by Dr. Peter Seixas and the Historical Thinking Project, this Guide complements Canadian middle-school and high-school curricula. It invites students to deepen their understanding of gender equality and democracy through research and analysis, engaging discussion questions, and group activities. It asks students to examine issues of identity, equity, activism and justice in historical and contemporary contexts.

This Guide does not focus on the suffrage movement’s links to ideologies such as socialism, imperialism, racism and classism, though teachers may want to address these intersections. In particular, many suffragists did not (initially, at least) embrace a political democracy explicitly inclusive of Indigenous peoples, workers, and racialized minorities. The reputation of some activists also suffers from their later support for eugenics, although this was not an issue at the time. The Guide invites teachers and students to consider suffragists, their campaigns and their opponents as expressions of a diverse range of perspectives on human potential in the 19th and 20th centuries. Women’s suffrage constituted the single greatest expansion in the Canadian electorate and thus in the potential of democracy itself. This is not a side note to our nation’s history. It is central to Canada’s evolution.

This Guide was produced with the generous support of the Government of Canada. Additional free, bilingual educational activities and resources are available on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (TCE). We hope the Guide will help you teach this important topic in Canadian history in your classroom.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Recommended articles and resources can be accessed by visiting the **Women’s Suffrage Collection** at [SuffrageCollection.ca](http://SuffrageCollection.ca). The articles, timelines and exhibits featured in the Guide (**in bold**) are located in the **Women’s Suffrage Collection**. You can also search for articles by title by visiting *The Canadian Encyclopedia* at [TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca](http://TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca).

Several activities in this Guide have accompanying worksheets. The **Worksheets Package** can be downloaded from the **Women’s Suffrage Collection**.

The following resources contain additional information about the women’s suffrage movement in Canada and are referenced throughout this Guide:

The Dictionary of Canadian Biography: Winning the Right to Vote  
[biographi.ca/en/theme\\_women.html?p=2](http://biographi.ca/en/theme_women.html?p=2)

The Heritage Minutes  
[historicanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes](http://historicanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes)

The Begbie Contest Society Political Cartoons  
[begbiecontestsociety.org/WOMEN.htm](http://begbiecontestsociety.org/WOMEN.htm)

The Historica Canada Education Portal  
[education.historicanada.ca](http://education.historicanada.ca)

The Historical Thinking Project  
[historicalthinking.ca](http://historicalthinking.ca)

“Votes for Women” Contest  
[canadasuffrage.ca](http://canadasuffrage.ca)

“Women who are blazing the trail.”  
*Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 23 October 1915 (courtesy University of Manitoba Libraries Digital Collections).



### Cover Captions:

**Top row, from left:** Nellie McClung (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/PA-30212); Helena Gutteridge (courtesy City of Vancouver Archives/CVA 371-2693); Thérèse Casgrain (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/La Rose/C-068509); Flora MacDonald Denison (courtesy US Library of Congress/National Women’s Party Records). **Middle row:** Agnes MacPhail (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/ Yousuf Karsh/PA-165870); Lillian Beynon Thomas (courtesy Archives of Manitoba/N19359); Irene Parlyb (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Mrs. John H. Acheson/PA-057326); Idola Saint-Jean (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/ Garcia Studio/C-068508). **Bottom row:** Mary Ann Shadd Cary (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-029977); Eliza Ritchie (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/R12177-53); Louise McKinney (courtesy Glenbow Archives/NA-825-1); Emily Howard Stowe (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-9480).



## INTRODUCTION

Canada's earliest efforts to bring about women's suffrage were led by a diverse movement of women and men across the country. Beginning in the 1870s, Canadians campaigned for women's right to vote on equal terms as men, beginning with local government. They were met with determined opposition.

The first province to grant women the vote was Manitoba in 1916, followed by Alberta and Saskatchewan in the same year. British Columbia and Ontario gave women the vote in 1917, followed by the Yukon (1919), Atlantic Canada (1918-25), Québec (1940) and the Northwest Territories (1951). Women were granted the federal vote in 1918, marking a significant step toward Canada's acceptance of what is now considered a universal right. However, Asian women were excluded for decades, and Indigenous women waited still longer.



▲ "Votes for Women" pennant (courtesy Manitoba Museum/H9-38-198).

To spread the idea of women's suffrage, **suffragists** built activist networks across Canada and internationally. These networks unified diverse interests and causes around women's suffrage, from those pushing for homestead rights to the **temperance movement's** attempts to ban the sale of alcohol. The campaigns engaged a complex cast of characters and organizations whose beliefs cannot be simply summed up, but most were liberals, and many were socialists.

Canada's diverse women's movements, which sought equality in matters from education to employment to politics, were often controversial. Many Canadians insisted that women's place (or "proper sphere") was behind the scenes, where they would support families and men's careers. Despite this, many women entered the paid workforce in the early 20th century. However, they still encountered economic, educational and legal restrictions. Political equality was vital for improving their lives. Suffragists persevered, confronting governments, writing articles, presenting petitions, organizing parades, facing down politicians and critics, and staging mock parliaments across the country. While these strategies brought early successes in Western Canada, the road to full enfranchisement was a long struggle.

The women's suffrage movement marks a critical chapter in human rights history in Canada. It contributed much to the redefinition of gender roles and reducing political inequality. Even then, opposition remained fierce for many decades. The centennial of the earliest achievements of women's suffrage offers Canadians an opportunity to examine the distance travelled towards equal rights and the formidable challenges that remain.

Canadian suffragists wear their sashes to the presidential inauguration in Washington, DC, *Toronto World*, 16 March 1913. ▼



*Bessie Elliott  
Mary Elliott  
Hettie Macmillan  
Jean C. Kurbach  
Clare Carey  
Edith Macmillan  
Edith Rogers  
Margaret W. Pe  
Gertrude N. Black  
Laura M. David*



▲ Front page of the 1915 petition delivered to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba (courtesy Manitoba Museum/Events 173/5).

▶ Suffragists Nellie McClung (left), Emily Murphy (right) and Alice Jamieson, March 1916 (courtesy City of Edmonton Archives).



## TIMELINE

### 1851 WOMEN ARE OFFICIALLY EXCLUDED FROM ALL LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN BRITISH NORTH AMERICA

Before 1851, some women with property qualifications could vote in British colonies in what is now Canada. PEI officially excludes women in 1836, New Brunswick in 1843, the Province of Canada (Ontario and Québec) in 1849, and Nova Scotia in 1851.



▲ Mary Ann Shadd Cary, c. 1845-55 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-029977).

Black abolitionist **Mary Ann Shadd Cary** edits the newspaper, which links the anti-slavery and women's rights campaigns. As Canada's pioneering suffragist, she reminds readers that gender and racial equality are both fundamental human rights.

### NOVEMBER 1876

#### THE FIRST SUFFRAGE ORGANIZATION IS FOUNDED IN CANADA

The Toronto Women's Literary Guild, founded by Dr. **Emily Stowe**, fights for women's rights, including access to higher education and the right to vote. In 1883, it becomes the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association.

### 1885 FEDERAL ELECTORAL FRANCHISE ACT

The Act defines those permitted to vote in federal elections as "male person[s]." Conservative Prime Minister **John A. Macdonald** raises the prospect of expanding the franchise to unmarried women and widows with property (and to property-holding Indigenous Canadians), but opposition ensures all his proposals are dropped. In 1896, PM **Wilfrid Laurier's** Liberal Government returns control of electoral lists to the provinces.

### 1885 THE VOTE FOR WOMEN FIRST PROPOSED IN THE ONTARIO LEGISLATURE

Liberal MPP John Waters introduces the first proposal to give women the provincial franchise.



MPP John Waters introduced annual suffrage bills from 1885-1893. Years later, Allan Studholme introduced a bill to grant women in Ontario the same rights as men to vote and hold public office, which he did each spring between 1910 and 1914. From the *Toronto World*, 6 March 1913.

### 1886 THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR URGE EQUAL CITIZENSHIP FOR WOMEN AND MEN

The Knights, a progressive labour federation, organizes men and women of diverse backgrounds (except Asian Canadians) and endorses equal citizenship in *The Palladium of Labor* newspaper. Suggesting that denying women the vote was "stupid and unreasonable," journalist and socialist Phillips Thompson insisted that male domination of women was nothing more than "a survival of savagery."

### 1892 - 1897 SUFFRAGE PETITIONS AND BILLS ENTER THE NOVA SCOTIA LEGISLATURE

The **Woman's Christian Temperance Union** (WCTU) and Halifax Local Council of Women lead the Nova Scotia suffrage cause. They organize 34 petitions and support six suffrage bills.

### 9 FEBRUARY 1893

#### FIRST MOCK PARLIAMENT HELD IN WINNIPEG

When a petition from pioneering doctor **Amelia Yeomans** and the Manitoba WCTU is ignored, they stage the nation's first mock parliament, with men appealing for the vote and women denying it to them. Other mock parliaments follow in Toronto in 1896 and in Victoria and Vancouver in 1910.

1893 Petition by Woman's Christian Temperance Union to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba (courtesy Archives ▲ of Manitoba/LA 0009 Sessional Papers/GR0247/32/G 7173).

### 8 MAY 1895

#### MOTION FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE FIRST PRESENTED IN FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Conservative Saskatchewan MP **Nicholas Flood Davin** introduces a motion to allow women the vote. Opponents insist that a woman's "proper sphere" is the home. His motion is defeated, 105 votes to 47.

### 1898

#### FOUNDING OF MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FREYJA BY MANITOBA'S ICELANDIC FEMINISTS

Published until 1910 by Sigfus and **Margret Benedictsson**, *Freyja* prints articles addressing the "progress and rights of women" in Europe, the US and Canada. Margret later founds the Icelandic Suffrage Association.



January 1907 issue of *Freyja*, a monthly suffragist magazine (courtesy University of Manitoba Icelandic Collection, Elizabeth Dafeo Library).

### MAY 1902 FIRST WOMAN TO RUN AS CANDIDATE FOR PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE

Margaret Haile runs in North York as the candidate for the Ontario wing of the Canadian Socialist League. Formed in 1898 to campaign for cooperation, education and political change, the Canadian Socialist League had long endorsed women's suffrage.

### 1905 NEW PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

#### IMMEDIATELY RECEIVES DEMAND FOR SUFFRAGE

**Henrietta Muir Edwards** (on behalf of the WCTU) requests "advanced legislation as regards women's rights in property, a measure of women's suffrage, and the recognition of a mother's parental rights and the raising of the age of consent."

### 24 JUNE 1909

#### INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN HOLDS TORONTO MEETING

Hundreds of delegates arrive from North America, the UK, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and India. The Council resolves in favour of women's suffrage in every country with a representative government.

### 23 OCTOBER 1909

#### THE TORONTO WORLD ENDORSES WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

The newspaper urges Ontario to be the first province to extend the **franchise** to its female citizens. In the West, Winnipeg's *Grain Growers' Guide* and the *Vancouver World* actively support suffrage.

The *Toronto World* newspaper officially endorsed women's suffrage on 23 October 1909.

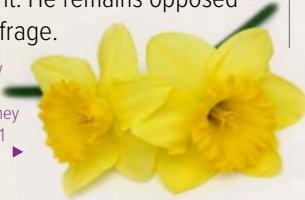
THE TIME HAS COME TO ENFRANCHISE THE WOMEN

**4 MARCH 1911**

**DELEGATION OF WOMEN MEETS ONTARIO PREMIER**

Hundreds of suffragists meet with Conservative Premier **James Whitney**, who listens to the women's request for enfranchisement. He remains opposed to women's suffrage.

Suffragists wore yellow daffodils when they met with Premier Whitney in Toronto, 4 March 1911 (Dreamstime.com/Tina Rencelj/149341).



**AUGUST 1912**

**THE FOUNDING OF THE CHAMPION, BC'S FIRST SUFFRAGE MONTHLY MAGAZINE**

Its motto was "The Woman's Cause is Man's."

*The Champion*, BC's first suffrage monthly magazine, was founded in August 1912. Its motto comes from the poet Tennyson. The first issue proclaimed "We stand to emphasize the fact that causes of individual cases of injustice can only be satisfactorily and finally dealt with by legislation in which women have a direct share." (Courtesy Veronica Strong-Boag.)

**23 DECEMBER 1912**

**PRIME MINISTER BORDEN MEETS WITH SUFFRAGISTS IN TORONTO**

Activists ask Conservative PM **Robert Borden** for federal voting legislation, hoping he will publicly state his position. Borden vaguely mentions future change but refuses endorsement.

**3 MARCH 1913**

**CANADIAN SUFFRAGISTS JOIN MARCH IN WASHINGTON, DC**

A Canadian delegation joins a suffrage parade with 5,000 marchers from American and international groups. Primarily male bystanders harass the women along the route. American leaders agree to a segregated march with African-Americans at the back.

Cover of the official program for the "woman suffrage procession" in Washington, DC, 3 March 1913 (courtesy Prints and Photographs Division, US Library of Congress/LC-USZC4-2996 DLC/LOT 5541/ LC-DIG-ppmsca-12512).



**27 JANUARY 1914**

**MANITOBA SUFFRAGISTS APPEAR BEFORE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

A delegation of suffragists gathers at the Assembly. **Nellie McClung** famously demands, "Give us our due!" Conservative Premier **Rodmond Roblin** replies that "most women don't want the vote."

**28 JANUARY 1914**

**NELLIE MCLLUNG HOSTS MOCK PARLIAMENT**

Suffragists hold a **mock parliament** in Winnipeg. Nellie McClung presents a devastating take-down of Premier Roblin, addressing men seeking the franchise in front of a packed, laughing audience. The event helps make women's suffrage more publicly acceptable.



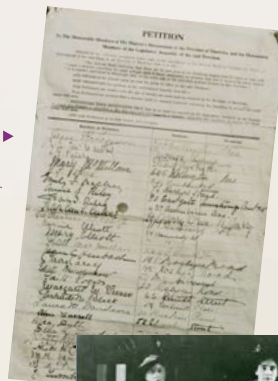
Newspaper clipping celebrating Nellie McClung as "The Heroine on the Campaign," 1914 (courtesy Archives of Manitoba/N8342).

Front page of the 1915 petition delivered to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba (courtesy Manitoba Museum/Events 173/5).

**23 DECEMBER 1915**

**MANITOBA POLITICAL EQUALITY LEAGUE PRESENTS PETITIONS TO LIBERAL PREMIER TOBIAS NORRIS**

The group of women and men presents nearly 40,000 signatures stating that there is no reason to keep women from voting.



The Political Equality League presents a petition for the enfranchisement of women, 23 December 1915 (courtesy Archives of Manitoba/Events 173/3/N9905).

**28 JANUARY 1916**

**MANITOBA WOMEN GET THE VOTE**

A map in the *Vancouver Daily Province*, 12 September 1916, criticizes BC as the last bastion against women's suffrage on the West Coast (courtesy Veronica Strong-Boag).

**14 MARCH 1916**

**SASKATCHEWAN WOMEN GET THE VOTE**

**19 APRIL 1916**

**ALBERTA WOMEN GET THE VOTE**

**5 APRIL 1917**

**BRITISH COLUMBIA WOMEN GET THE VOTE**

BC holds a provincial referendum in fall 1916. It passes with 43,619 in favour and 18,604 against.



**12 APRIL 1917** ONTARIO WOMEN GET THE VOTE

**20 SEPTEMBER 1917**

**WARTIME ELECTIONS ACT**

The federal vote is extended to women in the armed forces and to female relatives of military men, while disenfranchising citizens of "enemy alien" birth and conscientious objectors. It disenfranchises some women previously enfranchised by provinces, who would have otherwise been able to vote in the 1917 federal election.



"The Canadian Mother" poster encouraging people to vote for the union government, 1917 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Heliotype Co. Ltd./e010697158).

**26 APRIL 1918**

**NOVA SCOTIA WOMEN GET THE VOTE**

**24 MAY 1918**

**CANADIAN WOMEN GET THE FEDERAL VOTE**

Female citizens aged 21 and over, not excluded under racial or Indigenous prohibitions, become eligible to vote in federal elections regardless of whether they have yet attained the provincial franchise.

**17 APRIL 1919**

**NEW BRUNSWICK WOMEN GET THE VOTE**

**20 MAY 1919**

**YUKON WOMEN GET THE VOTE**

**JULY 1919**

**WOMEN GAIN RIGHT TO STAND FOR OFFICE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS**

**1 JULY 1920**

**DOMINION ELECTIONS ACT**

The Act enfranchises many who were disenfranchised during the First World War. However, anyone disenfranchised by provincial legislation because of race remains disenfranchised from the federal vote.

Postage stamp featuring Thérèse Casgrain, a leading Québec suffragist (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/©Canada Post Corporation/e00008202).

**9 FEBRUARY 1922**

**500 QUÉBEC SUFFRAGISTS CONFRONT PREMIER LOUIS-ALEXANDRE TASCHEREAU**

Liberal Premier Taschereau states that women will not get the provincial vote as long as he is in office. **Thérèse Casgrain** and **Idola Saint-Jean** emerge as key suffragist leaders for Québec.





## TIMELINE, CONTINUED

**3 MAY 1922** PEI WOMEN GET THE VOTE

**3 APRIL 1925** NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR WOMEN GET THE VOTE

**18 OCTOBER 1929**

### THE PERSONS CASE (EDWARDS V. CANADA)

The Imperial Privy Council of England rules that women are legally “persons,” reversing a Supreme Court of Canada ruling. Women can now hold seats in the Canadian Senate. The “Famous Five” who pursue this case to the highest court are all suffragists.



A model of the “Women Are Persons!” statue, honouring the contributions of the Famous Five (Nellie McClung, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney and Emily Murphy). The sculpture by Barbara Paterson was unveiled on Parliament Hill in 2000 (courtesy Famous 5 Foundation).

**1934** DOMINION FRANCHISE ACT

The Act explicitly disqualifies Inuit and Status Indians from voting in federal elections, but makes an exception for Status Indian veterans, who were previously enfranchised in 1924.

**25 APRIL 1940** QUÉBEC WOMEN GET THE VOTE

**1947** THE CITIZENSHIP ACT

The Act extends the right to vote federally and provincially to Chinese-Canadian and South Asian-Canadian men and women, but excludes Indigenous peoples and Japanese Canadians.

Eleanor Roosevelt holding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Lake Success, New York, 1949 (courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Archives).



**10 DECEMBER 1948**

### THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IS ISSUED

Article 21 of the Declaration states that elections “shall be by universal and equal suffrage.”

**1948** ELECTIONS ACT IS REVISED

The federal Act removes race as grounds for exclusion from voting in federal elections, but continues to exclude Indigenous peoples.

**12 JUNE 1951**

### NORTHWEST TERRITORIES WOMEN GET THE VOTE

Prior to 1951, men and women are able to vote federally, but elections are not held in the territory until 1951.

**1 JULY 1960**

### INDIGENOUS CANADIANS GRANTED THE RIGHT TO VOTE FEDERALLY

All Indigenous peoples in Canada are finally granted the right to vote in federal elections, though they are still excluded from some provincial franchises until 1969.

**17 APRIL 1982**

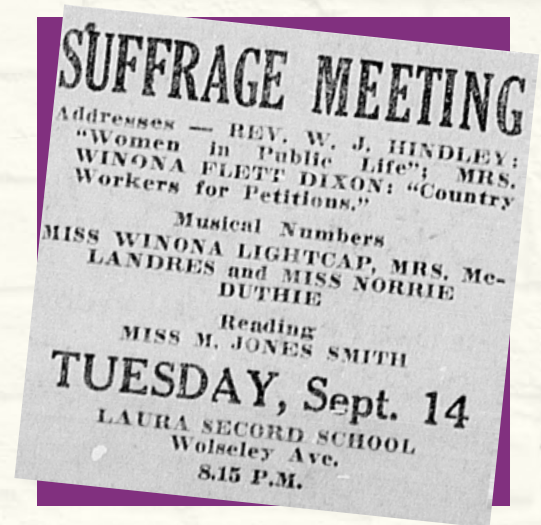
### THE CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS BECOMES LAW

The Charter guarantees the rights of Canadian citizens, including the right to vote.

## 1 TIMELINE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Using the timeline as a starting point, consider the following questions:

1. There were differing views within political parties on the issue of women’s suffrage. Why do you think that women’s suffrage (and women moving beyond the “private sphere”) found both opposition and support in the Conservative and Liberal parties?
2. What role did newspapers and magazines play in supporting and advancing the campaign for suffrage? Do you think news media were a significant force for change?
3. Many Canadian women won the right to vote in 1918, but it was 1969 before all Canadians obtained the franchise. Choose one moment from the timeline that you think marked the most important turning point for Canadian democracy. Explain why you think that moment (a year, event or legislation) was critical. Is there an event not listed on the timeline that you think is most significant?



▲ The *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 11 September 1915 (courtesy University of Manitoba Libraries Digital Collections).

◀ “Some of the things women are allowed to do by men who say that to permit them to vote would destroy their sweet womanhood.” Cartoon showing women doing household drudgery, *Grain Growers’ Guide*, 26 May 1915 (courtesy Glenbow Archives/NA-3818-15).



## 2 "SEPARATE SPHERES" AND GENDER INEQUALITY

The belief that women will impart their tenderness and purity to politics is surely somewhat simple. They are tender and pure because their sphere has hitherto been the home, which is the abode of tenderness and purity. Thrown into the arena of political strife, the "angels," if experience may be trusted, instead of imparting the angelic character to the male combatants, would be in danger of losing it themselves.

— Goldwin Smith, a prominent anti-suffragist, in *Woman's Place in the State* (1890)

The ideology of "separate spheres" was a socially constructed belief that defined a woman's "proper" role as wife, mother and guardian of the home. Men were seen to be equipped for a public life and women for a private one. Although women were increasingly engaged in the public sphere through employment and social organizations, inequalities remained. Suffragists saw the vote as a means of improving women's lives. In the late 19th century, female activists increasingly focused on the issue of temperance, in the hopes that curtailing the consumption of alcohol would reduce domestic violence. The world of private relations was quite different from the protected sphere dominated by "angels in the home" imagined by anti-suffragists like Goldwin Smith.



◀ A woman with twins, c. 1900 (Dreamstime.com/Lawcain/8275994).

The National Council of Women at Rideau Hall, Ottawa, ON, October 1898 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Tople Studio/PA-028033). ▶

### IMAGINING YOURSELF IN THE TIME: REPRESENTING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

Explore the expectations and challenges faced by women in the early 1900s by reading **Early Women's Movements in Canada: 1867-1960** and **The Status of Women** in the **Women's Suffrage Collection**. Consider what your perspective would have been at the time, remembering that social class, marital status, location and/or race would have all affected everyday experiences. Consider how you could represent these experiences in one small object. Each student should bring in an object they feel represents Canadian women's reality at the time. The item might be something literal (e.g., a toy doll that represents the emphasis on motherhood) or symbolic (e.g., a pen representing equal access to education). How would you represent domestic violence, temperance or equal property rights? Each student should offer a rationale for selecting their item.

### WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

See **Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor** in the **Worksheets Package** on the **Women's Suffrage Collection**.

Organizations such as the **Women's Christian Temperance Union**, the **National Council of Women of Canada**, Toronto Women's Literary Guild/Canadian Women's Suffrage Association and the **Canadian Women's Press Club** publicized issues of concern to Canadian women. Members identified suffrage as a powerful tool for change and campaigned for the vote by writing letters to newspapers and managing "women's pages," as did **Francis Marion Beynon** in the *Grain Growers' Guide*.

1. Research one of the organizations listed above on the **Women's Suffrage Collection** and elsewhere online, focusing on its primary goals and key accomplishments in the early 1900s. Review **How to Find a Reliable Online Source** in the **Worksheets Package** on the **Women's Suffrage Collection**. Remember to keep a detailed record of your sources.
2. Now imagine you are an active member of the organization. Why would your organization choose to support women's suffrage?
3. Write a letter to the editor of a national or local newspaper of the time. Make three arguments to support your cause. End with a call to action, outlining what you would like to see happen.



### MODIFICATIONS:

Create a T-chart, with one side including a list of issues that were important to one of the above organizations, and the other side listing issues important to suffragists. What do these issues have in common? From this, make a list answering the question "Why did your organization support suffrage?"

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY:** Write a half-page summary of the sources used to write your letter. Where did you get your information from? Which sites and facts are better than others, and why?

To access the **Women's Suffrage Collection**, visit [suffragecollection.ca](http://suffragecollection.ca).



### 3 THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

[T]he following persons shall not be entitled to be registered as electors... Lunatics, idiots and persons of unsound mind.

— 1888 Manitoba Elections Act

[T]he women of Manitoba are now citizens, persons, human beings, who have stepped politically out of the class of criminals, children, idiots and lunatics.

— Suffragist Lillian Beynon Thomas, after the vote was won in 1916

As activists worked for social change, it became increasingly clear that their influence was limited by their lack of political power. Consequently, the campaign for women's suffrage was launched in earnest.

#### WRITING THE TEXTBOOK

The Ayre sisters, important members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Women's Franchise League (courtesy Archives and Special Collections, Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University/Janet (Miller) Ayre Murray Collection/Coll-158).



Different groups won the vote at different times across Canada. Imagine that you are writing the section in your textbook exploring these regional differences.

1. Form a group of four.
2. Each student in the group will explore the road to suffrage in one region: Western Canada, Ontario, Québec or Atlantic Canada.
3. Explore articles in your chosen region and in the "Organizations" section in the **Women's Suffrage Collection**. Write down five to seven important facts about suffrage in your region. Include one suffrage organization in your region to highlight. In three to five sentences, briefly describe the focus of the group and provide two examples of its impact.
4. Come back together as a small group and share what you have learned. Take notes, answering the following questions:
  - Why was progress so slow in achieving universal suffrage?
  - Why were the suffrage campaigns in Québec so different from the rest of Canada?
  - What were some of the difficulties faced by the organizations?
  - Who was excluded from the suffrage campaigns?
5. As a class, discuss possible reasons for regional differences in women achieving the right to vote.

Canadian Nursing Sisters vote in France in the 1917 election. The *War-time Election Act* enfranchised women serving in the military, as well as those with a father, brother, or son overseas (courtesy Canadian War Museum/George Metcalfe Archival Collection/19930013-578).

Political Equality League petition rolls, containing 39,584 signatures, 23 December 1915 (courtesy Archives of Manitoba/Events 173/4/N9906).



#### BEAR PIT DEBATE

A bear pit debate is a multi-sided debate that encourages students to explore complex questions. It allows debaters to move to a different side if swayed by the arguments.

This debate asks: "What contributed the most to women achieving the right to vote in Canada?"

Divide the class into five small groups. Have each group begin by reading **Women's Suffrage in Canada** and then investigate their chosen argument further in the **Women's Suffrage Collection**, gathering evidence and taking notes.

- The role of women in the First World War
  - Individual suffragists
  - Activist organizations
  - Political forces and politicians
  - Strategies for change
1. Arrange the classroom into six different areas: one for each of the causes listed above, plus a neutral/undecided area.
  2. Each side has two minutes to introduce key arguments.
  3. After each side has shared their opening statements and supporting evidence, the debate may continue with individuals contributing as they see fit.
  4. Individuals convinced by an opposing argument can switch sides as many times as they like. Entire sides may fold and — possibly — a new side not originally featured may emerge!
  5. Any individual who needs time to re-evaluate may move briefly to the neutral area before deciding which side to join.
  6. You will likely be left with two sides battling it out, but you never know in a bear pit debate!

#### MODIFICATIONS:

Explore one side, taking point-form notes. Share ideas as a round robin discussion, and collectively decide what contributed most to women achieving the right to vote.

To access the **Women's Suffrage Collection**, visit [suffragecollection.ca](http://suffragecollection.ca).



## 4 FEMINIST ACTIVISTS

### SOCIAL MEDIA: SPOTLIGHT ON SUFFRAGISTS

**Nellie McClung** is one of the most famous suffragists in Canada, and is widely viewed as a national heroine. But she was not the only woman fighting for equal rights. Many leaders helped win the right to vote, and they too deserve recognition for their efforts.



1. Suffragist Lillian Beynon Thomas (courtesy Archives of Manitoba/N19359), 2. Louise McKinney was an appellant in the Persons Case and one of the first women elected to a legislature in Canada (courtesy Glenbow Archives/NA-825-1), 3. Nellie Letitia McClung (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/PA-30212), 4. Idola Saint-Jean, c. 1940-45, a pioneer of the suffrage movement (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Garcia Studio/C-068508), 5. Thérèse Casgrain, leader of the campaign for women's suffrage in Québec (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/La Rose/C-068509).

1. Research the contributions of Canadian suffragists using the **Women's Suffrage Collection** (see the "Suffragists" category in the Collection) and *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Each student should choose an individual suffragist to study.
2. Based on your research about this individual, what would the suffragist's Facebook profile page look like?
3. Using the **Facebook Profile Page** template, located in the **Worksheets Package** on the **Women's Suffrage Collection**, students should create a personal profile for their chosen suffragist.
4. The "About Me" section should introduce the suffragist in two to three sentences. The "Occupation" section should describe their work and/or memberships. Select four "Friends" that the suffragist might have known. Choose four "Page Likes" for the suffragist — a group, organization, interest, cause, hobby, etc. Now, write four "Wall Posts" that reflect the suffragist's significance to the history of democracy in Canada. If possible, find a profile picture of your suffragist.
5. When you have completed the Facebook profile, "network" with your class to find more "Friends." Move around the classroom, asking one another questions. Build your network by expanding your group as you find other suffragists who have something in common.

The Political Equality League presents a petition for the enfranchisement of women, 23 December 1915. Clockwise from top left: Lillian Beynon Thomas, Mrs. F.J. Dixon, Mrs. Amelia Burritt, Dr. Mary Crawford (courtesy Archives of Manitoba/Events 173/3/N9905).



### FEMINISM IN ACTION

To defend their activism and suffrage efforts, suffragists developed two sometimes overlapping arguments for why women deserved the vote: "equal rights" feminism and "maternal/social" feminism. Many suffragists did not hold firmly to one or the other, but used the argument that worked best with the audience they were addressing. Equal rights feminism was based on the idea that women are equal to men and therefore deserve the same rights. Maternal/social feminism focused on how women's unique experience caring for families would improve society if they were allowed to vote.

Do you think the suffragist you researched (above) would have argued for equal rights or maternal feminism?

### MODIFICATIONS:

Write a list of adjectives that describe the women in the photo, and what you think they represent.

### PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS: EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

Examine the photo above. Who is represented? Who is excluded? Consider the gender, age, race and class of the people in the photo. What can this tell us about the suffrage movement in the early 20th century?

## 5 ACTIVISM IN ACTION

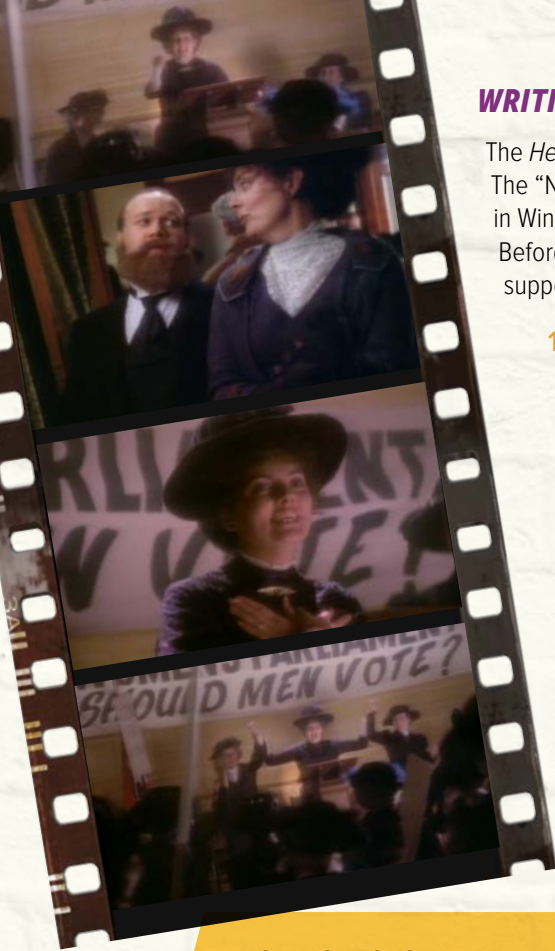
Inside the Walker Theatre (where Nellie McClung staged Canada's most famous mock parliament in 1914), Winnipeg, MB, 1907 (courtesy Provincial Archives of Manitoba/N13272).

Women's rights activists used a variety of approaches to campaign for the vote, which included confronting governments, delivering petitions, editing newspapers, and holding mock parliaments. These peaceful strategies contrasted with the more violent methods used by British **suffragettes**, who were known in Canada for breaking windows, setting fires and risking their lives for the cause. Public perceptions of the Canadian suffrage movement were largely based on the actions of British suffragettes, which were covered extensively in the Canadian press.



**MOCK PARLIAMENTS** Canadian suffragists often used mock parliaments to further their cause. These theatrical events employed humour and performance to make an argument. Read about **Mock Parliaments** on the **Women's Suffrage Collection**. Were they an effective method to achieve the vote? Why or why not?





## WRITING A HERITAGE MINUTE

The *Heritage Minutes* are 60-second short films about significant moments in Canadian history. The “Nellie McClung” *Heritage Minute* immortalizes the 1914 mock parliament held at the **Walker Theatre** in Winnipeg. Imagine that you have been asked to create a new *Minute* focused on suffrage in Canada. Before writing the script, create a synopsis that summarizes the story you plan to tell. Using research to support your work, write a proposal outlining the story your *Minute* will tell.

1. Watch the “Nellie McClung” *Heritage Minute*. Find the *Minute* on the **Women’s Suffrage Collection**. Think about how to construct an interesting storyline. What elements of the *Minute* stand out? How is emotion used? What are the facts in the story, and which aspects are more imaginative? Using this as a starting point, plan your own *Minute*.
2. Review the Timeline at the front of this Guide and identify an important or exciting aspect of women’s suffrage in Canada. You can focus on an individual, a group of people or an event. Use *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and the **Women’s Suffrage Collection** to research ideas and take notes on details to include in your *Minute*.
3. Write a one-page synopsis of your *Minute*. It can include historical characters, events or settings. Consider the story plot and structure. Remember, historical accuracy is paramount but creativity is also important!
4. Once you have completed your synopsis, work in a pair and “pitch” your *Minute* to your partner. Describe why you believe it deserves to be made into a short film. As a pair, discuss ideas about how to bring each of your *Minutes* to life (including props, actors and settings).

◀ Stills from the mock parliament in the “Nellie McClung” *Heritage Minute*.

### MODIFICATIONS:

Create a storyboard (by hand or using an online cartoon generator) and/or explain your pitch in point form.

A woman painted “Vote for Women” on the side of her house to show support for the movement. When her husband saw it, he painted the word “No” over top of it, leaving it reading “No Vote for Women” (courtesy Ian Wishart and Manitoba Museum).

## 6 OPPOSITION TO THE MOVEMENT

**Now you forget all this nonsense about women voting... You’re a fine, smart young woman. I can see that. And take it from me, nice women don’t want the vote.**

— Conservative Manitoba Premier Rodmond Roblin, who opposed women’s suffrage, in conversation with Nellie McClung, from *The Stream Runs Fast* (1945)

**[W]omen risk becoming “public women,” veritable women-men, hybrids that would destroy women-mothers and women-women.**

— Henri Bourassa, anti-suffragist, politician, and founder of *Le Devoir*



### POLITICAL CARTOON ANALYSIS

At the turn of the 20th century, newspapers and magazines were the main news source for Canadians and often included political cartoons. These cartoons were intended to make a strong, often humorous, comment about current issues. They used exaggeration, symbolism, stereotypes and caricature (comically exaggerated representation) to make a point and provide insight into the key issues of the moment.

Using the **Worksheets Package** found in the **Women’s Suffrage Collection**, students will select one of the political cartoons. As a pair, complete the **Decoding Political Cartoons Chart**. You may choose to complete the 5Ws Overview and/or the In-Depth Analysis. Students will answer the following questions in either paragraph or point form.

1. Do you think the cartoon was intended to reflect public opinion or challenge viewers’ beliefs?
2. What does the cartoon suggest about perceptions of gender roles at this time? How are women portrayed, and how are men portrayed? Why did the thought of changing gender roles worry people?
3. Based on your observations and what you can infer from them, what is the main message of the cartoon? Is the message pro- or anti-suffrage?

Premier Thomas Walter Scott of Saskatchewan stated that he was in favour of extending the franchise to women but did not care to enact the necessary legislation until the women asked for it. *Grain Growers’ Guide*, ▼ 26 February 1913 (courtesy Glenbow Archives/NA-3818-13).





## 7 CONSIDERING POLITICAL EXCLUSIONS

Ballot Box, Minnedosa, MB  
(courtesy Manitoba Museum/H9-21-72). ▼

While most people remember 1918 as the year in which Canadian women won the right to vote in federal elections, the vote was not granted to everyone. Inequalities continued, with the right to vote restricted based on race and colonial relationships. Some groups of women and men were excluded from the franchise for decades: Chinese and South Asian Canadians were not given the right to vote until 1947, Japanese Canadians were excluded until 1948, and it was 1960 before all Indigenous Canadians obtained the right to vote in federal elections (and 1969 provincially).

The discrimination these groups faced varied and changed over time. Racial exclusions and designations were sometimes based on external political and social conditions, such as excluding “enemy aliens” during the First World War. The denial of voting rights to Indigenous peoples was complicated by a long history of colonial relationships. Suffrage was based on a policy of assimilation (in which an individual or group adopts the customs of another culture) that aimed to eliminate Indigenous culture and society by pushing Indigenous peoples to give up traditional ways. The *Gradual Civilization Act* (1857) gave Status Indians the option to voluntarily give up their status in a process called **enfranchisement**, which allowed them to vote but stripped them of status, treaty rights, tax exemptions and cultural affiliation. Refer to the **“Treaties in Canada” Education Guide** on the **Historica Canada Education Portal** for more information.

Indigenous women faced racial and gender discrimination. For decades, their right to vote came at the cost of other rights. Revisions to the *Indian Act* in 1951 permitted women to vote and hold office in First Nations elections for the first time, but tightened control over the “marrying-out” policy: Indigenous women with Indian Status who married non-Status men were automatically enfranchised and lost their rights and privileges as band members, as did their children. This meant that women could not hold or inherit property on the reserve, nor could they access services available to band members.

In 1960, the federal franchise was extended to Status Indians without having to give up Status.



### NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Some historical terms used in this Guide are no longer in common use. First Nations peoples in Canada were initially called “Indians” by colonial Europeans. We no longer use this term, though “Status Indian” is still a legal definition. This definition of “Indian” did not and does not include all Indigenous peoples.

### INDIGENOUS SUFFRAGE IN CANADA

Have a class discussion about the complicated road to Indigenous suffrage. Investigate the history of **Indigenous suffrage** on the **Women’s Suffrage Collection**.

1. Divide the class into small groups.  
Have each group research one of the following:
  - a. Why were Status Indians subject to different voting restrictions than other groups? What effect did government policies of assimilation have on Indigenous suffrage?
  - b. Why might some “Indians” have been resistant to having the right to vote? How did the idea of enfranchisement affect Indigenous voter turnout?
  - c. How did provincial voting restrictions affect the federal vote? Where did these policies have the greatest effect?
  - d. How were Inuit, Métis and Status Indians treated differently by the government in terms of voting rights? Why? Can we discuss “Indigenous suffrage” as if it were a single process?
  - e. How did “Indian” women face a double disadvantage in their fight for suffrage?
2. Have each group take notes, discuss findings, and prepare a brief presentation for the class.
3. Come together as a class, have each group present their research, and discuss the findings.



31 October 1960: The first votes cast since the right to vote was extended to all Status Indians were by the Rice Lake Band near Peterborough, ON, in Hiawatha Council Hall (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Nick Nickels/PA-123915).

To access the **Women’s Suffrage Collection**, visit [suffragecollection.ca](http://suffragecollection.ca).

**EXTENSION:** Together, using research from the **Women’s Suffrage Collection**, discuss some of the tougher issues of Indigenous suffrage. Think about the impact of colonial discrimination on Indigenous voting rights, including policies of assimilation, voluntary/involuntary enfranchisement and “marrying out.”



## 8 GENDER EQUALITY TODAY

### TUG OF WAR

The fight for equal rights in Canada did not end with the vote. The struggle for equality of all people continues in our nation and around the world. To consider the question of gender equality in Canadian society today, have an “intellectual tug of war.”

1. Working in pairs, create a T-chart by drawing a line lengthwise down a large piece of paper.
2. On one side, write “Gender equality in Canada today,” and write “Gender *ine*quality in Canada today” on the other.
3. Based on previous research, knowledge of current news and personal experiences, write down evidence to support either side of the argument. Consider social, political, economic and legal issues. These points will be your “tugs” for the tug of war. Write each “tug” on an individual sticky note.
4. Come back together as a class. Draw a “rope” lengthwise across the board in your classroom. At the right end of the rope, write “We have achieved gender equality in Canadian society today.” At the left end, write “We have not achieved gender equality.”
5. Each group should take a turn to share a “tug,” which the teacher will place along the “rope.” As with a real tug of war, place arguments with the greatest strength at the ends and weaker ones toward the middle. When groups have run out of arguments (skip duplicates), determine which side has won based on the strength of the “tugs” on each side.
6. As a class, have a discussion about different interpretations about issues, as well as the overall sentiments about our journey toward gender equality in Canada. To finish this activity, students should write an individual reflection: “When considering gender equality in Canadian society today, I used to think... and now I think...” Note that your thinking might not have changed but rather been affirmed through this tug of war.



“Women are Persons” monument, Parliament Hill, Ottawa, ON (Dreamstime.com/Confidential Information/71867054).

#### SIDE NOTE FOR TEACHERS:

Many students might have questions about the social construction of gender, and the difference between “gender” and “sex.” This activity may be used as a way to prompt classroom discussion on the meaning of these terms.

**EXTENSION:** While all Canadian women have had the right to vote in federal elections for over 50 years, organizations are still working toward gender equality in other facets of our society. Learn more by visiting the websites of groups such as the **National Council of Women of Canada** (yes, the same one founded in 1893), the Canadian Women’s Foundation, or Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF). Alternately, find out what women’s organizations are at work in your area and invite a guest speaker to talk about gender (in)equality today. Find out why and what inequalities they are working to resolve.

#### FINAL REFLECTION

Feminism and the fight for gender equality have evolved since the suffragists’ time. How do you think the term “feminism” has changed over time? **How is feminism today different than feminism 100 years ago?**



▲ Election reminder on a Toronto sidewalk, 2011 (Dreamstime.com/Valentino Visentini/19196845).



▲ Equal pay for equal work? Women are still often paid less than men for the same work. (Dreamstime.com/breakstock/46096429.)

▲ November 25th is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, reminding us that gender equality is not a reality all over the world (Dreamstime.com/Safa Sami/54521184).