



Year 6
The Suffragettes
Reading Booklet

Lesson Series:

- 1. Democracy in the 19th Century**
- 2. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies**
- 3. Emmeline Pankhurst and the WSPU**
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Name: _____

Class: _____

Lesson 1 - Democracy in the 19th Century

Before 1832, the great majority of the British public had no say in politics. At this time, only 3% of the country could vote (only men, and usually the wealthiest). The Great Reform Act 1832, passed by Earl Grey, extended the vote to anyone who lived in a property worth more than £10.

Read this

Under increasing pressure from the people in the 1840s, 50s and 60s, the government extended the vote to around 2.5 million men through the Second Reform Act in 1867. The most important change was granting the vote to men who rented properties rather than just property owners. However, it was still only the wealthy middle and upper classes involved in politics, and the working classes were still denied the right to vote.

At the time, John Stuart Mill suggested that the vote should be extended to some women, but he failed to convince his fellow MPs.



Lesson 2 - The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

Read this

By the late 19th century, some women (and men) began to campaign for women's rights to vote. Queen Victoria called the fight for women's rights a, 'mad, wicked folly'. By the 1890s, seventeen individual groups were advocating women's suffrage. This included the London Society for Women's Suffrage, Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage, Liberal Women's Suffrage Society and the Central Committee for Women's Suffrage.

On 14th October 1897, these groups joined together to form the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). Millicent Fawcett was elected as president. They campaigned for votes for middle-class, property-owning women and believed in peaceful protest. Millicent thought that if they abided the law and behaved respectfully, parliament would eventually grant them the vote. The NUWSS held public meetings, organised petitions, wrote letters to politicians, published newspapers and distributed free literature.

The main demand was for the vote on the same terms "as it is, or may be" granted to men. Members of the NUWSS are sometimes referred to as the 'suffragists'.



Lesson 3 - Emmeline Pankhurst and the WSPU

Read this

Emmeline Pankhurst was a member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. However, she grew tired of their peaceful approach and in 1903, she formed her own society-the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) - with her two daughters Sylvia and Christabel.

The society was more inclusive and included working-class women. The WSPU became known as the 'radical party'. They sometimes used extreme methods, including violence. The members of the WSPU were the first women to be known as 'Suffragettes': a name given to them by the Daily Mail journalist Charles E Hands. Their motto was, 'Deeds not Words'. Many protesting Suffragettes were arrested for law-breaking, and many went to prison.

In 1913, Suffragette Emily Wilding Davison stepped out in front of the King's racehorse during a race at Epsom and died. Emily's death and the cruel police treatment of the Suffragettes made people angry and helped gain sympathy.



Emmeline Pankhurst

Lesson 4 - The Anti-Suffrage Campaign

Read this

While the campaigns for women's suffrage led by the NUWSS and the WSPU gained lots of support, during the 19th and early 20th century, there was widespread support for anti-suffragism. Some historians, as well as some prominent suffragists/suffragettes at the time including Millicent Fawcett, dismissed the anti-suffragists as misogynistic men. However, many educated women also supported the anti-suffrage leagues. Many men and women were concerned about how gender equality would impact on the nation and Empire, as well as traditional family life.

The Women's National Anti-Suffrage League was created in 1908 with the intention of proving that not all women supported women's suffrage. In 1910, the Men's National League for Opposing Women's Franchise merged with the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League to form the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. It published the *Anti-Suffrage Review*, which said that women were not fit for government and that Suffragettes neglected their families.



Lesson 5 - World War I and the Representation of the People Act



By 1914, women had not won the right to vote. Many bills had been presented to Parliament, and they had all been rejected.

Despite the support from some, there were still many people against the women's suffrage movement. When World War I broke out in August 1914, Emmeline Pankhurst stopped the campaign and encouraged women to support the war effort instead. In response, the government released all WSPU prisoners. During the war, many women took on the role of traditionally male jobs.

When the war ended in 1918, the Representation of the People Act finally gave some women the right to vote. The Representation of the People Act gave all men over 21 and women over 30 who were house owners or married to house owners, the right to vote. In 1928, women over the age of 21 were given the same voting rights as men.

