

Historica Canada Education Portal

Nellie McClung

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the [Heritage Minute, "Nellie McClung,"](#) Nellie McClung was an important advocate of women's rights and suffrage. As a result of her campaigning, Manitoba became the first Canadian province to give women the vote in 1916.

Aims

Studying the life of Nellie McClung will provide students with an understanding of the concepts about "appropriate" gender roles that existed in her time and in ours. Students will also examine how McClung challenged these notions.

The "Nellie McClung" Heritage Minute will provide students with a starting point to conduct further research into McClung's life and career, as well as the suffrage movement in Canada. Students will stage a "mock parliament," similar to the one that McClung staged, and they will research when women and people with various ethnic origins were granted the right to vote in Canada.

Activities

1. A different world

Nellie McClung grew up in a time when most people accepted very different standards of male and female behaviour than we do today. McClung never accepted those rules.

- Look at McClung's memories of the community picnic she attended when she was nine years old. When Nellie asked why "it was not nice" for girls to show their legs, she did not receive an answer. What would have been the adults' responses? How did Nellie's experience help to shape her later views about the ways women were treated?
- When she was a schoolteacher, McClung allowed her students – male and female – to play football during recess. Students loved it but some parents complained. McClung finally convinced parents of her point of view. What arguments could McClung have used? What might the parents have said to her? If you wish, you might dramatize the encounter between McClung and parents (or the local school board).
- Fighting for votes for women was an even harder struggle. Why did men think that women should not have the vote? Make a list of arguments men might have made, based on what students know of the attitudes of the time. You might discuss the typical kind of life women lived in Canada before the First World War.
- What are some issues that are important to women today? Discuss the ideas and why they are of particular importance to women. Do students have opinions on these issues, and are the opinions divided along gender lines?

2. Writing the editor

Students can become a part of the 1914 debate on women's suffrage.

- Based upon what you have seen, read, and discussed on the mock parliament and the arguments for and against women's suffrage, take the role of a citizen of Manitoba in 1914 to write a letter to the editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press* about Nellie McClung and her ideas. Students may decide whether they want to support McClung or take the side of Premier Roblin.

3. Our Nell

Nellie McClung was a very colourful character who inspired both admiration and scorn in her time.

- Learn about McClung from biographies and from her own writings. Students may be interested in reading her novels and articles.
- What made her, in particular, an effective leader of the women's movement?
- In addition to the female suffrage, McClung was also a leader of the temperance movement. The combination was typical in the early 20th century. Why?

4. Mock parliament

One of Nellie McClung's most famous movements was her "mock parliament."

- Stage your own version of the mock parliament of 1914. The topic of the debate is "Men should be allowed to have the vote." Several males first give the case for male suffrage, then "Premier" McClung and her female ministers respond with their arguments against male voting.
- A more contemporary, and contentious, topic for debate is whether gender equity should be legislated for parliament. A debate topic might be "Resolved: 50% of all parliamentary seats should be reserved for women."

5. Voting in Canada

Manitoba women won the right to vote in 1916, but other Canadians had to wait.

- Chart the years that women won the right to vote in all of the Canadian provinces (1921 was the year of the first federal election in which women could vote).
- Expand the chart to include the years that these groups won the vote: Native people; Chinese Canadians; Japanese Canadians.
- How has the age requirement for voting changed over the years? Students may be interested in discussing whether the voting age should be raised to 21, as some urge, or lowered to 16 (or younger) as others advocate.

Resources

- [Heritage Minute: Nellie McClung](#)

- [Heritage Minute: Emily Murphy](#)

- [Heritage Minute: Agnes Macphail](#)

- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: Nellie Leitia McClung](#)
- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: The Famous Five](#)

Check out www.heroines.ca - a Guide to Women in Canadian History