

Historica Canada Education Portal

Emily Murphy

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the [Heritage Minute, "Emily Murphy,"](#) which recounts how Murphy challenged the laws and secured the rights of women as persons throughout the Commonwealth.

Aims

Students will consider the contributions that individuals can make to society, and generate a list of people who should be recognized for their contributions. After learning that, historically, women were not recognized for their contributions, students will write biographies for women they believe should be recognized.

The "Emily Murphy" Heritage Minute will provide students with a variety of topics to pursue in greater depth. Students will research the role of women in Murphy's time, and current issues that are important to women. They will also explore the relationship between social change and the law.

Activities

1. Making a contribution

Emily Murphy made an important contribution to Canadian society by helping to change the laws and people's attitudes. There are many ways that individuals contribute to our society.

- Conduct a brainstorming activity to identify the ways in which individuals contribute to making our society better. Look at the present, as well as the past. Break the list that grows from the brainstorm into categories, such as government, public service, business, education, religion, arts, etc. Ask students to identify individual people (from their own community, nationally, or internationally) for the different categories. Encourage students to look at less famous contributions that "ordinary" citizens make.

- Discuss the reasons why a list like this would have been filled with men's names in the past, but that more women are recognized as contributors today. Look at the list again to come up with women's names, both contemporary and historical, for many of the categories.

- In cooperation with the school librarian and other local resources, have students collect more women's names for the categories.

- Have each student create a mini-biography of one of the women. Collect them into a class portfolio, complete with illustrations and/or photocopied portraits. You may also create a mural from the students' research.

2. The proper standards

Emily Murphy grew up in a time when women and men generally

accepted very different standards of behaviour. In the middle class atmosphere of Murphy's society, men were breadwinners, while women tended the home and raised the children. Men and women lived by different "rules."

- Until recently, there were a number of male-only institutions, from taverns to law courts. Before the First World War, what were the roles of men and women in business, churches, the medical and legal professions, schools, and government?

- When Murphy and a group of women attended a trial of prostitutes, they were escorted out of the courtroom on the grounds that the testimony would be too shocking to the sensitive ladies' ears. Why did the judge think this? Gather some arguments that a gentleman of the time might make for protecting women from the coarse facts of life. Role-play a discussion between the judge and Emily Murphy about whether the women needed special treatment.

- Being recognized as legal "persons" was an important issue in Murphy's time. What are some of the issues that are important to women today, and why? Do students have opinions about these issues, and are their opinions divided along gender lines?

- As the realities of women's lives become the subject of public discussion, and as women take more prominent places in society, laws concerning women also change. New laws are introduced for their protection, to guarantee their rights, and to recognize their special concerns. What are some of the laws that especially concern women? Consider issues of family violence and "stalking," abortion and genetic research, affirmative action, and gender equity. Do laws reflect social changes, or can they actually create changes in public attitudes?

- [Heritage Minute: Agnes Macphail](#)

- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: Emily Murphy](#)
- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: The Famous Five](#)