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. 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.

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 Heritage Minutes historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes
- The Begbie Contest Society Political Cartoons begbiecontestsoociety.org/WOMEN.htm
- The Historica Canada Education Portal education.historicacanada.ca
- “Votes for Women” Contest canadasuffrage.ca
- “Women who are blazing the trail.” Winnipeg Evening Tribune, 23 October 1915 (courtesy University of Manitoba Libraries Digital Collections).
- The Canadian Encyclopedia (TCE) historicalthinking.ca

NOTE TO EDUCATORS:

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

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.
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.

1853 THE PROVINCIAL FREEMAN IS ESTABLISHED IN WINDSOR, ONTARIO, AND LATER MOVES TO TORONTO

Mary Ann Shadd Cary (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.

1886 THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR URG TO 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.”

1886-1897 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.

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.

1898 FOUNDOING 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.

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.”

FEDERAL ELECTIONS 1911 - 1917

The 1911 federal election marks the first time in Canadian history that women vote in federal elections. The 1917 election is the last federal election before the 1918 franchise extension.

JANUARY 1917 WIMPEY’S VICTORY

The Liberal-Conservative merger, known as the Lloydminster Agreement, is introduced by Conservative PM Robert Borden and Liberal leader Wilfrid Laurier. It is immediately defeated, 105 votes to 47.

JUNE 1917 THE VICTORY OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

The Liberal victory is the result of a split in the Conservative Party, as Laurier forms a “National” Conservative party. The Liberals win a majority government.

26 OCTOBER 1917 THE WORLD ENDS AFRICAN-AMERICAN FRANCHISE

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.

23 OCTOBER 1909
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 Rencel/JIG934).

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.


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 McCLUNG 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.

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 173/300020).

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).

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/Heiotype Co. Ltd./e000008202).

26 APRIL 1918

NOVA SCOTIA WOMEN GET THE 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.

24 MAY 1918

CANADIAN WOMEN GET THE FEDERAL VOTE

New Brunswick women get the vote

20 MAY 1919

YUKON WOMEN GET THE VOTE

17 APRIL 1919

NEW BRUNSWICK WOMEN GET THE VOTE

30 APRIL 1919

YUKON WOMEN GET THE VOTE

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 Quebec suffragist (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/Canada Post Corporation/e000008202).

9 FEBRUARY 1922

500 QUÉBEC SUFFRAGISTS CONFRONT PREMIER LOUIS-ALEXANDRE TASCHEAUX

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

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR WOMEN GET THE VOTE

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.

18 OCTOBER 1929

THE PERSONS CASE (EDWARDS V. CANADA)

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

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.”

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?

EIGHT WOMEN CHALLENGE THE CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP LAW

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).

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).

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).
“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.

**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.

**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?
[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

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.

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!

To access the Women’s Suffrage Collection, visit suffragecollection.ca.
**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. 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.

**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?

**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.

**ACTIVISM IN ACTION**

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.

**MODIFICATIONS:**

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).

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

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)


— 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?
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.

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.”
**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 inequality 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.

**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?