

Middle School Lesson

The 100th Anniversary of the Right to Vote for Women in New Jersey and the United States

Core Idea: Continuity and Change Over Time

World History Students: The information in the chart below on the first countries to give women the right to vote might be of interest to students studying world history. Students might also be interested in knowing that today all countries, except for Vatican City, have given women the right to vote. Consider having your students research the countries who have given women the right to vote since 2000.

Students can also discuss the limited legal status of women in ancient Greece and Rome and women who ruled in ancient Egypt.

First Countries to Give Women the right to vote:

1893	New Zealand
1902	Australia
1906	Finland
1913	Norway
1915	Denmark
1917	Canada
1918	Austria, Germany, Poland, Russia (Limited vote for women in Great Britain)
1919	Netherlands
1920	United States

The background information below is optional and the purpose is to provide a context for the legal and social status of women at different times in world history. You may want to discuss or review the status of women in East Asia, India, Middle East, West Africa, and the indigenous populations of the Americas. It is important for students to understand the barriers women faced from the ancient world through the first half of the 20th century in understanding the importance of the right to voting.

Women in Ancient Greece

In Classical Greece, young girls usually grew up in the care of a nurse and spent most of their time in the gynaikeion, the women's quarters of the house located on an upper floor. The gynaikeion was where mothers nursed their children and engaged in spinning thread and weaving. In addition to childbearing, the weaving of fabric and managing the household were the principal responsibilities of a Greek woman. Young women, however, had some mobility. For example, retrieving water from the local fountain house was considered not only a woman's task, but it also offered a woman the opportunity to socialize with other women outside of the house. It was also the responsibility of women to visit the tombs of family members. Women could attend public speeches and visit certain sanctuaries, such as those of Artemis at Brauron and the Sanctuary of the Nymph at the foot of the Akropolis. However, during any occasion outside of the house, a young woman was expected to be inconspicuous and to be covered around the head to obscure most of her face and neck.

Women of various ages also took part in specific religious festivals....Religious rituals reserved for young girls probably had the most significant impact on young unmarried women. For example, young girls between the ages of five and puberty were selected to serve the goddess Artemis in her sanctuary at Brauron. As "little bears," they acted out the role of untamed animals that eventually would be domesticated through marriage. Thus, the self-perception of a young girl in Classical Greece was

manipulated through behavioral instruction in the home, through the myths that reiterated social values, and through their participation in rituals that educated them in the values and mores of their community.

The culmination of a young woman's socialization was her marriage ([56.11.1](#)), which usually took place at the age of fourteen or fifteen. Marriage did not require a young bride's consent, as she was simply passed from the protection of her father to that of her husband. A young woman in Classical Athens lacked any rights of citizenship, and could only be described as the wife of an Athenian citizen. However, a bride brought to her marriage a dowry that was not available for the husband to spend. In fact, on the rare occasion that the marriage failed, the dowry was returned to the wife's father. The consummation of marriage signaled the end of a young woman's status as a *kore*, or young maiden, as she was then classified as a *nymphē*, or bride, until the birth of her first child, when she became a *gyne*, or woman. The life expectancy of the average woman was about forty years old.

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Hemingway, Colette. "Women in Classical Greece." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wmna/hd_wmna.htm (October 2004)

Women in Ancient Egypt

An exception to most other ancient societies, Egyptian women achieved parity with Egyptian men. They enjoyed the same legal and economic rights, at least in theory, and this concept can be found in Egyptian art and contemporary manuscripts. The disparities between people's legal rights were based on differences in social class and not on gender. Legal and economic rights were afforded to both men and women.

It is interesting that when the Greeks conquered Egypt in 332 B.C.E., Egyptian women were allowed more rights and privileges than Greek women, who were forced to live under the less equal Greek system.

Egyptian women's rights extended to all legally defined areas of Egyptian civilization. Women could manage, own, and sell private property, which included slaves, land, portable goods, servants, livestock, and money. Women could resolve legal settlements. Women could conclude any kind of legal settlement. Women could appear as a contracting partner in a marriage contract or a divorce contract; they could execute testaments; they could free slaves; women could make adoptions. Women were entitled to sue at law. This amount of freedom was at variance with that of the Greek women who required a designated male, called a *kourios*, to represent or stand for her in all legal contracts and proceedings. This male was her husband, father or brother.

An Egyptian woman could acquire possessions in many ways. She could receive it as gifts or as an inheritance from her parents or husband. Or she could receive it from purchases with goods which she earned either through employment, or which she borrowed. A woman had claims to up to one-third of all

the community property in her marriage. For example, the property which accrued to her husband and her only after they were married. When a woman brought her own private property to a marriage, (dowry), it remained hers, even though the husband often had the free use of it. In the event of a divorce her property had to be returned to her, in addition to any divorce settlement that might be stipulated in the original marriage contract.

On the death of a husband the woman inherited two-thirds of their community property, but the other one-third was divided among their children, followed up by the brothers and sisters of the deceased. To circumvent this possibility and to enable his wife to receive either a larger part of the share, or to allow her to dispose of all the property, a husband could do several things:

In the Middle Kingdom, he could draw up an *imyt-pr*, a "house document," which was a legal unilateral deed for donating property. As a living will, it was made and perhaps executed while the husband was still alive. In this will, the husband would assign what he wished of his private property to his wife.

If there were no children, and the husband did not wish his brothers or sisters to receive two-thirds of the community property, he could legally adopt his wife as his child and heir and bequeath all the property to her. Even if he had other children, he could still adopt his wife, so that as one of his legal offspring, she would receive some of the two-thirds share, in addition to her normal one-third share of the community property.

A woman was free to bequeath property from her husband to her children or even to her own brothers and sisters (unless there was some stipulation against such in her husband's will). A woman could also freely disinherit children of her private property, i.e., the property she brought to her marriage or her share of the community property. She could selectively bequeath that property to certain children and not to others.

Marriage was a very important part of ancient Egyptian society. Some people say it was almost a duty to get married. Compared to today's world, Egyptian marriages were very different; husbands could marry more than one wife, and people of close relations (first cousins, brothers and sisters, etc.) could also wed one another. For the most part, however, incest was frowned upon, except in the royal family, where incest was used to safeguard the dynastic succession.

There was no age limit as to when people could be married, but generally a girl did not get married until she had begun to menstruate at about the age of 14. Some documents state that girls may have been married at the age of eight or nine, and a mummy of an eleven year-old wife has also been found.

Marriage required no religious or legal ceremony. There were no special bridal clothes, no exchange of rings, no change of names to indicate marriage, and no word meaning wedding.

A girl became universally acknowledged as a wife after she physically left the protection of her father's house and entered her new home. The new husband in no way became the new wife's legal guardian. The wife kept her independence, and still kept control her own assets. Although the husband usually controlled any joint property obtained during the marriage it was acknowledged that a share of this belonged to the wife; if and when the marriage ended, she could collect he share. If the husband died while married, the wife got one-third of her husband's property. Re-marriage after widowhood was very common, and some grave sites indicate three or four marriages between one person.

Divorce was a private matter, and for the most part, the government did not interfere, unless upon the request of the "divorcees". Almost any excuse could be used to end a marriage, and an alliance could be terminated at will. Anyone who had drawn up a marriage contract would have to honor those terms, and those who hadn't could, if they wished, could invest in a legal document. Legal cases, however, were very unusual; most marriages ended with the wife moving back to the matrimonial home, returning to her family, therefore setting both parties free to marry again.

Many people say the Egyptian time was a good time to live. It seems that it was, at least, a nice place for women to live. It was filled with equality for them, and gave them some basic rights that today's society is lacking.

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Women in Renaissance

https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/557647/Lamichhane_georgetown_0076M_11571.pdf;sequence=1

Women were also judged by the way they dressed. In a sermon given by Saint Bernardino, he recommended modesty in dress and noted that it was a woman's duty to "be and look chaste."⁹ In this sermon from 1427, Bernardino stated:

How does one recognize a good woman? From the way she is dressed. . . . The exterior shows what is inside. . . . So, woman, don't dress or walk so that you look like a prostitute, but rather wear suitable clothes which show you are good and chaste. . . .¹⁰

This view of women and this type of surveillance impaired a girl's education, as the only options for girls were an education in the home or in a convent.¹¹ And the teachings they received were not literary; instead, they were taught household skills.¹² In some cases girls were sent to a convent to safeguard their purity,¹³ as there was nothing more disgraceful than an immoral girl. An example of such belief is shown through the words of the

Florentine, Leon Battista Alberti, when he spoke of chastity to his young wife. He said:

You should know that in this respect nothing is so important for yourself, so acceptable to God, so precious to me, and so advantageous to our children as your chastity. . . . Absence of chastity angers God, and you know that God punishes nothing so severely in women as he does this lack. All their lives He makes them notorious and miserable.¹⁴

Women were also viewed as inferior to men legally and socially, as men were considered to be the center or base of the family. This was because it was through men that family names and legal entitlements were preserved.¹⁵ Women were seen as those who spelled the end of a family, as they married and moved away, then gave birth to children for their husband's family.¹⁶ In addition, women spelled financial hardship for their own families. This was due to the fact that a dowry, consisting of liquid assets such as cash,¹⁷ clothing, and other items was required for women to marry a suitable man and join a suitable family. Such extravagant dowries often created financial distress for many families.

9 Rogers and Tinagli, *Women in Italy 1350-1650*, 146.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*, 94.

12 *Ibid.*, 94-95.

13 Kaborycha, *A Short History of Renaissance Italy*, 89.

14 Rogers and Tinagli, *Women in Italy 1350-1650*, 25.

15 Kuehn, *Law, Family & Women*, 221

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.* 31

Suffrage Movement in 19th Century Britain

Emmeline Goulden was born on 14 July 1858 in Manchester into a family with a tradition of radical politics. In 1879, she married Richard Pankhurst, a lawyer and supporter of the women's suffrage movement. He was the author of the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, which allowed women to keep earnings or property acquired before and after marriage. His death in 1898 was a great shock to Emmeline.

In 1889, Emmeline founded the Women's Franchise League, which fought to allow married women to vote in local elections. In October 1903, she helped found the more militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) - an organization that gained much notoriety for its activities and whose members were the first to be christened 'suffragettes'. Emmeline's daughters Christabel and Sylvia were both active in the cause. British politicians, press and public were astonished by the demonstrations, window smashing, arson and hunger strikes of the suffragettes. In 1913, WSPU member Emily Davison was killed when she threw herself under the king's horse at the Derby as a protest at the government's continued failure to grant women the right to vote. (underline is for emphasis)

Like many suffragettes, Emmeline was arrested on numerous occasions over the next few years and went on hunger strike herself, resulting in violent force-feeding. In 1913, in response to the wave of hunger strikes, the government passed what became known as the 'Cat and Mouse' Act. Hunger striking prisoners were released until they grew strong again, and then re-arrested.

This period of militancy was ended abruptly on the outbreak of war in 1914, when Emmeline turned her energies to supporting the war effort. In 1918, the Representation of the People Act gave voting rights to women over 30. Emmeline died on 14 June 1928, shortly after women were granted equal voting rights with men (at 21).

Document 1: VOTES FOR WOMEN

The Women's Social and Political Union

Mrs. Pankhurst, Hon. Treasurer OFFICE: LINCOLN'S INN HOUSE, KINGSWAY, W.C. Mrs. Mabel Tuke, Hon. Sec.

All communications, Auditors: Messrs. Sayers & Wesson unless marked "private" will be opened Chartered Accountants, 19, Hanover Square, W. by the Hon. Secretary Telegraphic Address-WOSPOLU, LONDON Telephone 2724 Holborn (three lines)

January 10th, 1913 Private and Confidential

Dear Friend,

The Prime Minister has announced that in the week beginning January 20th the Women's Amendments to the Manhood Suffrage Bill will be discussed and voted upon. This means that within a few short days the fate of these Amendments will be finally decided.

The W.S.P.U. has from the first declined to call any truce on the strength of the Prime Minister's so-called pledge, and has refused to depend upon the Amendments in question, because the Government have not accepted the responsibility of getting them carried. There are, however, some Suffragists-and there may be some even in the ranks of the W.S.P.U.- who hope against hope that in spite of the Government's intrigues an unofficial Amendment may be carried. Feeling as they do, these Suffragists are tempted to hold their hand as far as militancy is concerned, until after the fate of the Amendments is known.

But every member of the W.S.P.U. recognizes that the defeat of the Amendments will make militancy more a moral duty and more a political necessity than it has ever been before. We must prepare beforehand to deal with that situation!

There are degrees of militancy. Some women are able to go further than others in militant action and each woman is the judge of her own duty so far as that is concerned. To be militant in some way or other is, however, a moral obligation. It is a duty which every woman will owe to her own conscience and self-respect, to other women who are less fortunate than she herself is, and to all those who are to come after her.

If any woman refrains from militant protest against the injury done by the Government and the House of Commons to women and to the race, she will share the responsibility for the crime. Submission under such circumstances will be itself a crime.

I know that the defeat of the Amendments will prove to thousands of women that to rely only on peaceful, patient methods, is to court failure, and that militancy is inevitable.

We must, as I have said, prepare to meet the crisis before it arises. Will you therefore tell me (by letter, if it is not possible to do so by word of mouth), that you are ready to take your share in manifesting in a practical manner your indignation at the betrayal of our cause.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed) E. Pankhurst

Questions:

1. Do you agree with Emmeline Pankhurst's statement? ***"I know that the defeat of the Amendments will prove to thousands of women that to rely only on peaceful, patient methods, is to court failure, and that militancy is inevitable."***
2. Do you agree with Emmeline Pankhurst's statement? ***"To be militant in some way or other is, however, a moral obligation. It is a duty which every woman will owe to her own conscience and self-respect, to other women who are less fortunate than she herself is, and to all those who are to come after her."***

Document 2: BOMB AT ST. PAUL'S UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO WRECK CHANCEL SUPPOSED SUFFRAGETTE OUTRAGE

An explosive machine was found near the Bishop's Throne in the chancel of St. Paul's Cathedral yesterday morning a few minutes prior to the celebration of early Communion, and there is no doubt in the minds of the authorities that

the contrivance was designed and placed there by someone associated with the militant Suffragist movement. The “bomb,” as it is described by the police, was carefully wrapped in brown paper and in part of a recent issue of the militant newspaper The Suffragette.

An expert stated that while such a bomb as that found at St. Paul’s would have done relatively little damage to that building because of the great air spaces which exist within it, a similar machine in Westminster Abbey, owing to the crowded condition there, due to the many memorials and the form of the interior, might result in irreparable injury to an historic structure.

Questions:

1. What are other examples of violence and property damage in history? (Boston Tea Party, Guy Fawkes and failed Gunpowder plot, Burning of Reichstag, Storming the Bastille, etc.)
2. How successful are militant and destructive actions to property as a strategy to accomplish goals?

Document 3: Video on Emmeline Pankhurst (1:29) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDXR6cjmSbc>

Question:

1. Do you agree with the statement by the commentator? **“You can kill a person but you cannot kill an idea.”**

Document 4: Video on Emily Davison (7:14): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G4fJ9I_wOg

Questions:

1. Did the action of Emily Davison, significantly contribute to women gaining the right to vote in Britain?
2. Should Emily Davison be remembered as a martyr or terrorist?

Concluding Activity: Why was the struggle for the right to vote in Britain more violent than the struggle in the United States? How effective are the strategies of nonviolence in changing unjust laws?

Resources:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/general-history-of-women-s-suffrage-in-britain-8631733.html>
(Comprehensive article on Suffrage Movement in Britain)

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/education/suffragettes.pdf> (Lesson Plan)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/pankhurst_emmeline.shtml (Biography of Emmeline Pankhurst)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDXR6cjmSbc>

<https://www.ancient.eu/article/659/the-role-of-women-in-the-roman-world/> (Ancient Rome)

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wmna/hd_wmna.htm (Greece)

<https://middleeast.library.cornell.edu/content/status-women-egyptian-society> (Ancient Egypt)