



“There can be no free nation without free women”

A look at the lives, influence and impact of six leading activists in the struggle for women’s suffrage in Ireland: Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Constance Markievicz, Winifred Carney, Margaret Cousins, Dr. Kathleen Lynn and Jennie Wyse Power

Links To Junior Cycle History

Developing historical consciousness. Students will

1. Develop a sense of historical empathy by viewing people, issues and events encountered in their study of the past in their historical context
2. Consider contentious or controversial issues in history from more than one perspective and discuss the historical roots of a contentious or controversial issue or theme in the contemporary world
3. Appreciate their cultural inheritance through recognising historically significant places and buildings and discussing why historical personalities, events and issues are commemorated

Exploring people, culture and ideas. Students will

1. Explain how the experience of women in Irish society changed during the twentieth century



Jennie Wyse Power / Courtesy of Kilmainham Gaol Museum KMGLM 2015.0673

Jennie Wyse Power: Member of Inghinidhe Na hÉireann, Ladies Land League and Sinn Féin

- First president of Cumann Na mBan which was set up in 1914
- 1916 proclamation signed in her building at 21 Henry Street
- Member of the Irish Women's Franchise League
- In 1920 she was elected as one of five women to Dublin Corporation.
- One of four women appointed to the first Free State Seanad in 1922 and served until its' abolition in 1936
- **Activity:** Imagine that there is a proposal to knock 21 Henry Street and replace it with a new modern shop. Write the letter that you would send outlining why this should not be allowed to happen.



Dr. Kathleen Lynn / Reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland

Kathleen Lynn:

- In 1899 Kathleen graduated from the Royal University of Ireland after studying at Catholic University Medical School
- In 1909 she became a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons
- Kathleen was elected House Surgeon in the Adelaide Hospital. Her appointment was resisted by her male colleagues because she was a woman and her position was never ratified.
- Joined the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association
- Also joined the British based and more militant Women's Social and Political Union
- She was part of the garrison sent to take City Hall during Easter Week and was the chief medical officer for the Irish Citizen Army
- Took command when original leader was shot until they were forced to surrender
- Deported to Britain but returned to Ireland before the end of 1916.
- Elected a TD in 1923 for Dublin County but did not take her seat in line with Sinn Féin policy.
- Established St Ultans hospital to provide medical and educational support to infants and their mothers in some of Dublin's' most impoverished areas
- Only women staffed the hospital from the outset and it pioneered the use of BCG vaccine to fight a disease called Tuberculosis (TB)
- **Activity:** Imagine that you are a reporter from the UK sent to interview Kathleen in the late 1920s after St Ultans was set up and she had been elected to the Dáil: Write the questions that you would ask her about her life.



Winifred Carney / Courtesy of Kilmainham Gaol Museum KMGLM

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Winifred Carney

- Worked as a teacher and clerk in a solicitors office
- A crack shot with a rifle
- Worked to improve the wages and conditions of the mill-girls working in the factories of Belfast
- She was present at the founding of Cumann na mBan in Wynn's Hotel, Dublin.
- A member of the Irish Citizen Army, she was a close friend and secretary to James Connolly.
- She was the only woman in the group that seized the GPO on Easter Monday, 24 April. Typed up orders throughout the fighting, tended the wounded and refused to leave
- Interned after the Rising but was released and worked for womens rights in Ireland
- One of the two women who stood in the 1918 general election. She stood in a unionist division of Belfast, and was not elected.
- **Activity:** Write a short diary entry that Winifred might have written (i) When the Rising started and (ii) The night before the general election in 1918



Margaret Cousins / By kind permission of Keith Munro, grandnephew of Margaret and James Cousins

Margaret Cousins

- Studied music at the Royal Academy of Music in Dublin (1898), graduating in 1902.
- One of the founders of the Irish Womens Franchise League in 1908
- Travelled the country to address suffrage meetings
- Convicted of smashing windows at 10 Downing St., and served a one-month sentence in Holloway prison
- In January 1913 she was one of a group who broke windows in Dublin Castle and was in Tullamore jail for one month
- Moved to India with her husband in 1915 and was a founder member of the Women's Indian Association
- She served a year in prison for supporting Gandhi's free-speech campaign
- Organised the first all-India women's conference in 1926 and the all-Asia women's conference in 1931
- Became the first female magistrate in India in 1922.
- **Activity:** Imagine that you are preparing to introduce Margaret before the all Asia women's conference in 1931. Think of three statements that you would like the audience to know about her life in Ireland and India



Hanna Sheehy Skeffington / Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Hanna Sheehy Skeffington

- Her father was an MP for the Irish Parliamentary Party which was also called the Home Rule Party.
- A prize winning pupil at secondary school Hanna went on to college to study French and German and graduated with Master of Arts Degree with first-class honours in 1902.
- Also in 1902 she helped to found the Women Graduates' and Candidate Graduates' Association, which aimed to promote the advancement of women in university education.
- In 1908 she was one of the founder members of the Irish Women's Franchise League.
- She also contributed to Ireland's first feminist newspaper, The Irish Citizen, the official outlet of the Irish Women's Franchise League.
- In 1912 the Irish suffragettes organised their first military activity when they decided to disrupt the visit of the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. On the 13th of June 1912 eight members of the Irish Women's Franchise League, including Hanna, smashed the windows of the GPO, the Custom's House and Dublin Castle.
- The women were all arrested and sentenced to between a month and six months in jail.
- As a result of her activism Hanna lost her teaching job but greater tragedy was to strike in 1916. Her husband Francis was executed



after being arrested and executed without trial. He had set up a group to try and limit the losses inflicted on businesses when looting broke out during the week of the rising but was arrested and shot without trial. He was wearing his votes for women badge when executed

- Throughout the 1920s and 30's Hanna continued to be politically active as an organising secretary of Sinn Féin and member of numerous committees and organisations, such as the Women Prisoners' Defence League and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- **Activity:** Write a short article for the Irish Citizen newspaper giving your opinion on the actions of Hanna and others when the Prime Minister visited in 1912



Countess de Markievicz / Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Constance Markievicz

- Born into an upper class family Constance studied art in London and later Paris.
- Markievicz played a prominent role in the 1916 rising as she was second in command to Michael Mallin in St Stephens Green.
- After her arrest and trial she was sentenced to death but this was overturned to life imprisonment.
- Constance served time in both Mountjoy and Aylesbury prisons before being released in 1917
- When World War One ended in November 1918 an election was called. For the first time women were allowed vote in this election. After many years of campaigning The Representation of the People Act gave the vote to women who met certain conditions for example if they were over 30 and a property owner.
- Just before the election, in November 1918, an act called the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act was passed, allowing women to be elected to Parliament. Although several women ran as



candidates in the election only one was returned: Constance Markievicz

- However in keeping with the Sinn Féin policy of abstention from the parliament in Westminster she did not take her seat
- Constance did take her place in the Dáil and became Minister for Labour becoming only the second woman in the world to hold a cabinet position in government and the first in Western Europe to do so.
- **Activity:** Write the letter that you think Constance Markievicz would write to the English parliament explaining why she would not be attending

Activities

Part A: Short answer questions: Answer the following questions based on the biographies above

1. What was the Irish Parliamentary Party better known as?
2. What do the letters IWFL stand for?
3. Who was British prime minister in 1912?
4. Why was the Representation of People Act so important?
5. Why was the Parliament (Qualification of Women) act so important?
6. What was the Sinn Féin policy of not taking their seats in the parliament in Westminster called?



Part B: To think about...

1. Why do you think these women would have been welcomed the Representation of People Act? Think about the effort and time they had put in
2. What characteristics do they share with each other?

Further Research

More detailed biographies are available at

<http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do> and Women In Parliament Ireland 1918-2000 by Maedhbh McNamara and Paschal Mooney

<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-1916/1916irl/cpr/cwr/jwp/> (Jenny Wyse Power)

<http://ifoplayer.ie/kathleen-lynn-the-rebel-doctor/> (Kathleen Lynn)

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/visit-and-learn/votail-100/pioneers-in-parliamentary-politics/>

<http://www.rte.ie/radio1/the-history-show/programmes/2014/0330/604446-the-history-show-sunday-30-march-2014/?clipid=1518346>

<http://centenaries.ucd.ie/>

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Discovering-Women-in-Irish-History.pdf>

<https://womenshistoryassociation.com/>

<http://womensmuseumofireland.ie/articles/hanna-sheehy-skeffington>

<http://lissadellhouse.com/countess-markievicz/>

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/about/history/people/>