



History

Women's suffrage

Lesson plan

Developing historical consciousness

Students will:

- Develop a sense of historical empathy by viewing people, issues and events encountered in their study of the past in their historical context
- 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
- 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:

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

Resources

Dictionary of Irish Biography

<https://dib.cambridge.org/home.do>

Centenary of Cumann na mBan

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

Vótáil100

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

Violence, Ridicule and Silence

<https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/WAKyKH0PC6zKA>

Introduction

“There can be no free nation without free women.”

This lesson looks at the lives, influence and impact of six leading activists in the struggle for women’s suffrage in Ireland:

1. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington
2. Constance Markievicz
3. Winifred Carney
4. Margaret Cousins
5. Dr. Kathleen Lynn
6. Jennie Wyse Power

Development

Give students copies of the six biographies in this lesson plan. Ask them to read the biographies and give them time to do the activity.

Ask the class the following questions or assign them as written work.

Short answer questions

What was the Irish Parliamentary Party better known as?

What do the letters IWFL stand for?

Who was British prime minister in 1912?

Why was the Representation of People Act so important?

Why was the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act so important?

What was the Sinn Féin policy of not taking their seats in the parliament in Westminster called?

Questions to think about

Why do you think these women would have welcomed the Representation of People Act? Think about the effort and time they had put in

What characteristics do they share with each other?

Notes on legislation

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.

In November 1918, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act was passed, allowing women to be elected to Parliament. Constance de Markievicz was the only one of the 17 women who stood for election in the United Kingdom to be elected.

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 (IWFL)
- 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 demolish 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.

Image courtesy of Kilmainham Gaol Museum KMGLM 2015.0673

Dr. Kathleen Lynn

- In 1899 she 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 (IWSLGA)
- Joined the British based and more militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)
- 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 Ultan's 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 Lynn in the late 1920s after St Ultan's was set up and she had been elected to the Dáil. Write the questions that you would ask her about her life.

Image reproduced by kind permission of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland

Winifred Carney

- Worked as a teacher and clerk in a solicitor's 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 and close friend and secretary to James Connolly
- The only woman in the group that seized the GPO on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916
- Typed up orders throughout the fighting, tended the wounded and refused to leave
- Interned after the Rising but was released and worked for women's rights in Ireland
- One of the two women who stood in the 1918 general election; stood in a unionist division of Belfast and was not elected



Activity

Write a short diary entry that Winifred Carney might have written

- When the Easter Rising started
- The night before the general election in 1918

Image courtesy of Kilmainham Gaol Museum KMGLM 2012.0243

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 imprisoned 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 Cousins 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.

Image by kind permission of Keith Munro, grandnephew of Margaret and James Cousins

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
- One of the founder members of the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) in 1908
- She also contributed to Ireland's first feminist newspaper, *The Irish Citizen*, the official outlet of the IWFL.
- In 1912 the Irish suffragettes organised their first militant activity when they decided to disrupt the visit of the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. On 13 June 1912 eight members of the IWFL, including Hanna, smashed the windows of the GPO, the Customs House and Dublin Castle.
- The women were all arrested and sentenced to between one and six months in jail, and Hanna lost her teaching job
- Her husband Francis was arrested and executed without trial; he had been trying to stop looting in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising. He was wearing his Votes for Women badge when he was executed
- Throughout the 1920s and 30s 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.

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Constance, Countess de Markievicz

- Born into an upper-class family, she studied art in London and later Paris
- 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 commuted to life imprisonment
- Served time in both Mountjoy and Aylesbury prisons before being released in 1917
- One of the two women who stood in the 1918 general election; stood in St. Patrick's, Dublin and was elected
- In keeping with the Sinn Féin policy of abstention from the Parliament in Westminster she did not take her seat
- Took her seat in the First Dáil
- 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 de Markievicz might have written to the British Parliament explaining why she would not be attending.

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland