

The Suffragettes

Pioneers of women's rights

1. In 1900 no woman in Britain had the right to vote. They could not participate in public life because they were only expected to fulfil family duties by taking care of their husbands, children, and home. Women were also excluded from higher education and from most of the jobs, which were still male privileges.

2. In the early years of the century, women in the United Kingdom began to advocate • for social reforms enabling their participation in voting. Led by Millicent Garret Fawcett, suffragists started peaceful campaigns to draw attention to their cause and tried to lobby members of Parliament to grant them the vote.

3. Dissatisfaction with the slow progress of the suffragists' approach, however, led to a more radical faction within the movement. In 1903, activist Emmeline Pankhurst founded an organisation known as the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). They believed that it was high time to use any means necessary to achieve their goal: women's suffrage.

4. The group made use of violent tactics: members frequently engaged in actions such as chaining themselves to gates, vandalising property, or setting post boxes and buildings on fires. The protesters often clashed • with the police and when they were arrested, they went on hunger strikes that often led to their death.



5. In 1906, a journalist from *The Daily Mail* coined the term “suffragettes” with the purpose of minimising the growing popularity of the group and their work. The suffix “-ette”, in fact, is often used to refer to something small and unimportant. Instead of rejecting this label, the militants embraced it to show their resistance against any form of provocation.

6. When the First World War began, suffragettes called off • their militant action to contribute to the war effort. With the majority of men enlisted • in the army, lots of women were employed in the factories, in offices as secretaries, and in hospitals as nurses. They had the opportunity to show their abilities and prove themselves to be equal to men. Eventually, in 1918, the government enacted the Representation of the People Act, granting women over the age of 30 the right to vote.



glossary

to advocate: essere a favore, propugnare
to call off: annullare

to clash: scontrarsi
to enlist: arruolarsi
placard: cartellone

1 **READING** Read the text and choose the best headline for each paragraph. There are two items you don't need to use.

- a Civil disobedience
- b From protests to progress
- c A non-violent approach
- d From moderation to activism
- e Two different views
- f Women at the turn of the 20th century
- g The power of a name
- h A remarkable woman

2 **READING** **SPEAKING** **GROUP WORK** Split into groups and prepare a presentation on one of the suffragettes listed below. Then, present your work to the class.

Millicent Garret Fawcett - Emmeline Pankhurst - Emily Davison - Edith Garrud



3 **READING** **VOCABULARY** Use the words given in brackets to form a word that fits in the gaps.

Women's Suffrage in the USA

In the United States, the Constitution (1789) originally left to the states to determine who could be qualified as 1. (ELECT). Originally, only white males who owned property were allowed to choose their representatives. In 1856, the right to vote was granted to all white men, and after the 2. (ABOLISH) of slavery (1865), voting rights were extended to all men 3. (REGARD) of their race (14th Amendment, 1870). No mention had been made about the voting rights of women, who had been left out of the US Constitution as they were not 4. (FULL) recognised as citizens: they were subject to their husband and prevented from 5. (OWNER) property, even the wages they earned. By the mid-1800s, women started to gather and advocate for their rights, especially for the right to vote which would allow them to have a say in 6. (POLITICIAN) matters. Their battle started in Seneca Falls, a town near New York, in 1848, when, during a convention, some women asked for better 7. (EDUCATE), independency from men, the right to work and vote. Finally, on August 18, 1920, the American Congress 8. (RATIFICATION) the 19th Amendment which granted women the right to vote.

Adapted from: <https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/seneca-falls-convention>

4 **WRITING** **SPEAKING** **PAIR WORK** Imagine you are suffragettes who want to take part in a rally against the government. Prepare some slogans to be written on placards • you want to carry with you.