

The suffragette story of political reform

History

Year 8 Lesson 3

Enquiry: Why are different stories told about Britain's journey to democracy?

Mr Arscott



What can you see?

What do you think is happening in this picture? This was a poster made in 1910. What do you think is happening to the women?

The woman in yellow is a prisoner who is being force fed. She was arrested when she was **campaigning** for women to have the same voting rights as men.

How did this shocking poster end up being created?



Early efforts to win the vote

There has been a long history of women asking for the right to vote in elections. During the French Revolution, a remarkable woman called Olympe de Gouges had argued women should have the same political rights as men. In the 1830s, Anna Wheeler had campaigned for the franchise to be extended to women. In 1832, British parliament did increase the number of voters in Britain by giving middle class men the right to vote. However, the law also stated that women could not vote.



Early efforts to win the vote

Chartists, like Anne Knight, campaigned for women to have the right to vote as well as male members of the working class. Female chartists like Knight often faced sexism and many male Chartist leaders thought extending the franchise to women was less important than winning the right to vote for working class men. By the end of the nineteenth century three reform acts had increased the number of men who could vote. But no laws had been passed giving any women the right to vote in national elections.



Some campaigners thought it was time for radical action. Emmeline Pankhurst set up an organisation called the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. Pankhurst and her followers became known as the 'suffragettes'. By 1909, the suffragettes were frustrated by the lack of progress and started to attack property in order to draw attention to their campaign. Many suffragettes were arrested for doing things like smashing windows, bombing letter boxes and setting fire to empty buildings.

Pankhurst realised that the newspapers liked writing stories about suffragettes being arrested. She thought this was useful as it gained the campaign even more attention. She hoped this attention would put pressure on the government to give women voting rights. So Pankhurst started encouraging suffragettes to get arrested. When in prison, Pankhurst and thirteen other suffragettes went on a hunger strike to protest about the poor conditions. The government did not want to extend the franchise to women. But the government also did not want the bad publicity of women dying from starvation in British prisons. So, controversially, prison officers started force-feeding the suffragettes.



The First World War

Although many women disagreed with suffragette's methods, by 1914, more and more women were joining organisations that supported extending the franchise. However, in 1914 Britain entered the First World War and the government paid all its attention to winning the war. Working class women had long played an important role working in Britain's industrial factories. However, when young men started joining the army to fight the war, it became obvious how much the British economy relied on women. For the first time, women were working in large numbers in **munitions factories**. Women were therefore contributing directly to helping Britain win the war. After the war ended in 1918, the first law was passed which extended the franchise to women. In 1928, women were then given the same voting rights as men.



Glossary

Campaign: working in an organised way to try and achieve a political goal

Chartists: people who campaigned for members of the working class to get the right to vote

Munitions factories: factories which make weapons, ammunition or other technology related to war



Comprehension Questions

1. What happened to female prisoners who went on hunger strike?

Sentence starter: Female prisoners who went on hunger strike were....

2. What organisation did Emmeline Pankhurst create?
3. How did the suffragettes try to gain attention?
4. Why did women start working in munitions factories?
5. Challenge question: Why did the government force feed suffragette prisoners?



Extension Question

6. What can we learn from suffrage campaign posters?

Use the sentence starters and key words below to answer this question

Sentence starters:	Key words
<p><i>The women's suffrage poster attempts to show how it was unfair that women could not vote. For example...</i></p> <p><i>The women's suffrage poster attempts to show women in a positive light. For example....</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Professional job-Unequal-Franchise-Right-Responsible-Irresponsible-Moral/immoral-Campaign-Peaceful

