



I think it would have been awful to work in a factory back then. I wonder if Nellie McClung was able to do anything to change the working conditions.

Attitudes Toward Women

It was not easy for women like Nellie McClung to make changes in society. Part of the reason was because women did not have much power. The first thing that had to change was the attitudes many men had toward women.

Women's Roles

How would you feel if you were not allowed to play your favourite sport just because you were a girl? Growing up in the late 1800s, Nellie McClung was not allowed to play sports as her brothers did.

Nellie learned that there were many things she was not allowed to do because she was a girl. For example, girls were discouraged from attending university.



Voices of Canada

Nellie McClung

At 16, Nellie became a schoolteacher. She bought a football and organized noon-hour games. She wanted the children to work off their energy and learn to play as a team. Nellie played with them. Nellie remembered:

One day, one of the girls came to me almost in tears, and told me that her mother... and [other women] had said that I should not play football: it wasn't a ladies' game...

Nellie explained her reasons for letting the children play the game. She found out that she had a special skill. She could convince people to change their minds.

Nellie became determined that girls and women have new opportunities. She wanted to change attitudes and laws to make life better for mothers and their children.

Skill Smart

- Imagine you are in Nellie McClung's class. Write a persuasive letter to your parents to convince them to let boys and girls play football together.

Women's Identities

At the beginning of World War I, women were not considered citizens of Canada. In fact, women were not even allowed to vote. Married women could not own property or money. The law said that homes, farms, and even children belonged only to the husband. Even though they could not own property, married women worked hard for their families.



Voices of Canada

Farm Women

There is no harder worked woman than the woman on the farm. Not only must she perform her duties as housewife, not only must she nurse and care for her children, but she... usually is the general servant of the farm itself. Her working day is the length of time she can manage to stand upon her legs.

The Western Producer, Oct. 23, 1924



Have you ever heard a story of something unfair happening to someone? Did it make you want to take action? An Albertan named **Emily Murphy** had this experience. She met a woman whose husband had left her and their children. He sold their farm, but the law did not force him to share the money with his wife. She and her children now had no money.

Murphy was determined that this law must be changed. With **Nellie McClung**, she tried to change people's attitudes. They worked to convince people that women should be allowed to participate in government. That way, women could help change unfair laws. They could also pass new laws that would improve the lives of families on farms and in cities.

Skill Smart

- Look back at the inquiry questions on page 247. Check which ones you have found answers to. Take time to jot down your answers, along with notes for sources of information.

How Did Women Help Change Canada?



I know that I can become anything I want—a lawyer, doctor, soldier, athlete—I can even become prime minister. But I also know that 100 years ago, women were not allowed to do these things.

words matter!

Suffrage means the right to vote. People who fought for women’s right to vote were called suffragists or suffragettes.



These women were gas-station attendants during World War I. How do you think the new jobs and responsibilities that women had at that time helped change people’s attitudes?

Have you ever heard someone say “Many doors are open to you”? An “open door” means an opportunity. Today, Canadians have many more opportunities than they did 100 years ago. How did this change?

Murphy, McClung, and many other brave women in Canada began fighting for change by trying to win the right to vote for women. The struggle took great courage and determination. Many people were afraid that allowing women to vote was too big a change. Some people made fun of the **suffragists**. They even accused the women of neglecting their children. But McClung, Murphy, and others believed that women should have a voice in government. They could then make the future better for their children.



These suffragists are protesting in front of the House of Commons in London, England, in 1924. Women in Canada were not alone in their fight to win the right to vote. What does this tell you about the importance of this struggle?



Voices of Canada

Nellie McClung

Disturbers are never popular—nobody ever really loved an alarm clock in action—no matter how grateful they may have been afterwards for its kind services.

Nellie McClung

What do you think Nellie McClung meant when she said this?

The Right to Vote

By 1916, women in the Prairie provinces were celebrating their victory. They had won the right to vote! By the end of the war in 1918, women across Canada were allowed to vote for the governments in Ottawa and in most provinces.

Around the same time as they won the vote, women were allowed to take on new jobs and responsibilities. For example, a few women were allowed to train as doctors. Emily Murphy became a judge. But she was soon to discover that not all doors were open yet for the women of Canada.

More About . . .

The Vote

Not all women were allowed to vote by 1918. Neither were all men. For example, the laws of Canada did not permit Aboriginal people or people from Asia to vote. But over the years, attitudes changed, people fought hard, and new laws were passed.

1940: Québec women get the right to vote in provincial elections.

1947: East Indian and Chinese Canadians get the right to vote.

1949: Japanese Canadians get the right to vote.

1960: First Nations get the right to vote.

1971: Young people between 18 and 20 get the right to vote.



Dr. Emily Jennings Stowe (1831-1903)

In 1867, Emily Jennings, an Ontario woman, graduated from an American medical school. She had not been permitted to study medicine in Canada because she was a woman. When she returned to Canada, Stowe became active in organizations that fought for women's rights, especially the right to vote.



Voices of Canada

The Importance of Voting

Getting the right to vote allows people to participate as citizens in their country. It makes people feel like they belong. "When I voted I felt like I could finally join the human race."

Japanese resident of British Columbia, 1949



Marie Lacoste Gérin-Lajoie (1867–1945)

Marie Lacoste Gérin-Lajoie once led 400 women to ask the premier of Québec for the right to vote. She opposed the old laws that said married women could not own property or be their children's legal guardians. In 1940, women in Québec became full citizens with the right to vote.

THEN AND NOW



At the time of World War I, all Governors-General were British men. At left is Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught. He was a son of Queen Victoria and served as Governor-General from 1911 to 1916. At right is Michaëlle Jean. She was born in Haiti and is the first Black person to be Governor-General. She is also the third woman to hold the position. She was appointed in 2005. What does her appointment tell you about Canada's changing identity?

The Persons Case

After she became a judge, Emily Murphy heard things like “You are not even a person. You have no right to hold office.” A law at the time said that certain important government jobs could only be held by “qualified persons.” Most people thought this meant that only men could hold these jobs. But some Albertans thought that Emily should become a senator in Ottawa. Was this possible? Were women qualified persons? Murphy decided to find out what the law really meant. She asked Nellie McClung and three other women—Henrietta Edwards, Irene Parlby, and Louise McKinney—to help her. Here is a part of her letter to them:

“For the several years past the women of Canada, owing to what appeared to be a hopeless situation, took... little interest in this matter of the interpretation of the word ‘Persons.’ Our action in appealing to the Supreme Court of Canada... (gives to) women of all parties a renewed hope... Nothing can prevent our winning.”

In 1927 the Supreme Court of Canada answered the five women. It said that the Fathers of Confederation had not meant the word “persons” to include women.

The Famous Five, as the group was now called, was disappointed. But these women did not give up. They asked the highest court in the British Empire to decide. On October 18, 1929, the decision was announced: “[T]heir lordships have come to the conclusion that the word ‘person’ includes... male and female...” The Famous Five had helped to bring about change for Canadian women.

The Famous Five



I know what Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy did to fight for women’s rights. My classmates and I wondered what work the other three women in the Famous Five did. Our teacher gave us this list of questions to help us do some research.

1. Which member of the Famous Five are you most interested in researching? Why?
2. What was her childhood like?
3. Why do you think she became interested in women’s rights?
4. What jobs did she do in her life?
5. Did she become part of the government? In what position?
6. List changes that she helped to make. Include any organizations she started.
7. Does she deserve to be famous? By herself or as part of the Famous Five?



Emily Murphy— helped change property laws in Alberta to protect women and their children; first woman in the British Empire to become a judge in a police court



Nellie McClung— famous author and speaker who helped women get the right to vote in Manitoba and Alberta



Henrietta Muir



Louise McKinney



Irene Parlby

Thinking It Through

- Do you think the suffragists succeeded in making the future better for their children? Explain.
- Think of a situation today which shows that women are still treated differently than men are. Why do you think these situations still exist?