

WHY WERE PRAIRIE WOMEN LEADERS IN THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT?

A. Background to the Suffrage Movement

1916 was an extremely important year for voting rights in Canada. It was in this year that women were granted the right to vote in the three Prairie Provinces. Saskatchewan was the second province to enfranchise women, with comparatively little controversy or opposition. The leader of the suffrage movement in Saskatchewan was Violet McNaughton, a British homesteader and social activist.

Learning Activity:

As an introduction, have the students listen to the CBC Radio interview with Violet McNaughton explaining the process of Women's Suffrage. While the students listen, have the students consider how such a process would be different in contemporary society, and how it would be the same. **(Continuity and Change)**

Divide the class into five equal groups, and ask each group to read the Women's Suffrage in Saskatchewan article, plus one of the five listed articles (one per group) that focuses on the life and activism of Violet McNaughton. While reading, have the students record/make note of:

- 3 interesting facts from the reading,
- 2 connections to prior historical knowledge, and
- 1 Big Idea that they've taken from the reading. **(Historical Significance)**

Women's Suffrage in Saskatchewan

http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/woman_suffrage.html

Violet McNaughton

http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/mcnaughton_violet_clara_1879-1968.html

<http://www.producer.com/2007/12/violet-mcnaughton-the-most-influential-farm-woman-in-canada/>

<https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/030001-1117-e.html>

<http://womensuffrage.org/?p=1165>

http://www.pc.gc.ca/APPS/CP-NR/release_e.asp?bgid=113&andor1=bg

B. Introduce the Inquiry Question:

Even though there were suffrage movements taking place in other provinces across Canada, it was on the Prairies that this movement had the most and earliest success. Ontario and British Columbia followed a year later, and women were granted the voted in national elections in 1918. Some provinces followed much later, and Quebec women were not enfranchised until 1940! Which begs the question:

Why were women in the three prairie provinces the leaders in the women's suffrage movement? (Cause and Consequence)

C. Scaffolding Evidence Analysis

Using a contemporary political cartoon that addresses an issue the students would be familiar with (election, Syrian refugees, drop in oil prices, etc), model the process of analyzing primary sources. As you go through each of the steps, use the Think Aloud strategy to model how a historian will create knowledge and understanding of the past using a primary source. **(Evidence)**

- 1) Sourcing the Evidence - Who created this source? What is the political and social context surrounding the source? What is the viewpoint of the author?
- 2) Ask Questions – What questions can you ask of the cartoon that will prompt further inquiry?
- 3) Make inferences - What does the cartoon tell us about: the issue? The author? The social context?

D. Suffrage Source Analysis

Split the class into groups and provide them with three varied sources to analyze (a political cartoon or photograph, a personal correspondence, and a newspaper article), following the same process that was modelled for them. Have the students go through the analysis process for each source with the inquiry question in mind. This will allow students to construct historical understanding and make relevant connections between the suffrage movement and the political and social circumstances of the time. **(Evidence)**

A list of the available sources is located in Appendix A. The sources themselves are available for download from the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan website, at www.saskarchives.com/Suffrage.

- 1) Sourcing the Evidence - Who created this source? What is the political and social context surrounding the source? What is the viewpoint of the author?
- 2) Ask questions - What questions can you ask of the text that will prompt further inquiry?
- 3) What does the source tell us about:
 - a) The author?
 - b) The suffrage movement?
 - c) The social and historical context?
- 4) What isn't being said in the source?
- 5) Why is this source significant?

E. Corroboration

Have the groups collaborate with other groups to compare and contrast inferences they have made about the suffrage movement and Prairie history. The students can use the following questions as a guide for their discussion:

- a) What is similar about your inferences? How do you account for the similarities? What can you conclude about the suffrage movement and the political and social climate of the prairies at the time?
- b) What is different about your inferences? How do you account for the differences? Do you need to rethink your inferences? Can both interpretations be correct?

As a further step in collaboration, have the students use internet and textbook research for further corroboration to ensure their analysis aligns with the accepted historical record? **(Evidence)**

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F. **Assessment**

Have the students reflect on the original inquiry question: ***Why were the three Prairie provinces the leaders in the women's suffrage movement? (Cause and Consequence)***. The students will then present their individual understanding of the connection between the suffrage movement and Prairie culture and history using one of the following formats:

- Written essay
- Formal presentation
- Journal entries from the perspective of Violet McNaughton (or another suffragette)
- Art - Visual Art, music, dance, drama, etc.
- Film – Documentary, Canadian Heritage minute, film trailer of Violet McNaughton's biopic
- Storytelling

Suffrage in Saskatchewan Extension Activity:

Purpose: To consider suffrage in Saskatchewan in light of other possible causes and catalysts, including the impact of the Great War.

Historical Thinking Concepts:

Cause and Consequence: Guidepost 2: The causes or catalysts that lead to a particular historical event vary in their influence, with some being more important than others.

Demonstrating Powerful Understanding: Students analyze the causes or catalysts of a particular historical event, ranking them according to their influence. In this activity, students use a "relevance square" to rank the relative importance of causes and then justify their rankings and ratings.¹

Background:

Students will be asked to review the background resources and at least 2 documents from the following list of primary source documents from the "Women's Suffrage in Saskatchewan" learning package on the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan website at www.saskarchives.com/suffrage.

Background Resources:

- Women's Suffrage in Saskatchewan: http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/woman_suffrage.html
- Audio Clip: [Violet McNaughton Interview \(excerpt\) about the women's suffrage movement in Saskatchewan](#)
- From the Prairies to the Trenches 1916 video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-Hb8nVNehw>
- Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan entry for "Woman Suffrage" at http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/woman_suffrage.html

Primary Source Documents at www.saskarchives.com/suffrage:

- "Some Women Will Vote Wisely, Some Foolishly, and Some Not At All,"
The Saturday Press & Prairie Farm, 1 May 1915, 6.

¹ "Relevance Square" thanks to John Myers, Curriculum Instructor, OISE, University of Toronto, as described in Dr. Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2013), 121.

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- "Equal Suffrage in Saskatchewan," *The Saturday Press & Prairie Farmer*, 16 February 1916, 1.
- Women's Section, including "Suffrage Board Will Meet in October" and "Eloquent Speeches by Suffragists," *The Evening Province & Standard (Regina)*, 28 May 1916, 5.
- "Petition for Women's Votes Presented," *Regina Morning Leader*, 28 May 1915, 12.

Activity:

- Distribute the Suffrage in Saskatchewan Causal Factors sheet and a large sheet of paper to each small group of students. The Causal Factors provides 12 catalysts for suffrage in Saskatchewan. Ask students to cut these out to create 12 cards, and then distribute the cards equally within the group.
- Ask students to draw a square in the center of the large sheet of paper, writing in the words "Suffrage in Saskatchewan"
- Students consider the question, **"What caused women's suffrage to be legislated in Saskatchewan in 1916?"** They will review the causes and catalysts noted on their cards and decide which are the most important and which are the least relevant. They take turns placing a card on the paper. If the cause or catalyst is important, they place it in the square. The greater the importance of the cause or catalyst, the closer to the centre they place the card. If students determine a card is not relevant at all, they place it outside the square. As students place a card, they explain the reasoning behind their choice to their group. The group discusses the placement until it reaches a consensus.
- When the groups are finished, they defend the placement of their cards to other groups.

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<p>1</p> <p>Premier Scott makes enquiries about the success of enfranchisement of women in Australia (in the 1890s) and in New Zealand (in 1893), and learns that the result has been deemed satisfactory and that women voting is “as ordinary and natural as the daily rising of the sun.”</p>	<p>7</p> <p>Men from groups such as the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association and the Dominion Congress of Working Men publicly speak out in favour of granting women’s suffrage.</p>
<p>2</p> <p>In May of 1915, Premier Scott asks Equal Franchise League organizers to get more signatures on petitions, from women representing communities across the entire province.</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Suffrage activists argue that by using their vote, women can help to make Saskatchewan a healthier, happier, cleaner place for the province’s women and children.</p>
<p>3</p> <p>Women’s contributions and tribulations during the Great War demonstrate their readiness to use the franchise responsibly.</p>	<p>9</p> <p>The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union argues that if women get the vote, they will vote to “Abolish Drink” (laws against drinking alcohol), which they claim will bring many improvements to society.</p>
<p>4</p> <p>Women argue that they can more effectively aid in the wartime effort if they can deal with serious wartime issues as citizens with full rights, including the right to vote.</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Violet McNaughton organizes a meeting of women’s groups in Saskatchewan in February 1915 to coordinate their efforts and to create the Provincial Equal Franchise League, to lobby for voting rights for women.</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Some women argue that if they had the vote, they could offset the male vote of foreign born men and men who are careless, selfish or indifferent.</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Suffrage activists argue that women who own land and pay taxes experience injustice because of taxation without representation, in other words it is undemocratic that they have to pay taxes without being able to vote.</p>
<p>6</p> <p>Saskatchewan women are granted the right to vote in municipal elections in 1915; for example, they can participate in the election of candidates to school boards.</p>	<p>12</p> <p>After three years of gathering petitions requesting that the Government of Saskatchewan grant the franchise to the women of Saskatchewan, a delegation of organizers presents an additional batch of petitions totalling 10,000 names to the Saskatchewan Legislature on Valentine’s Day, February 14, 1916.</p>

Appendix A

List of Primary Sources for Use with Suffrage Lesson

Background Information

- Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan (PAS), Tape R-6334. Violet McNaughton interview (excerpt). *Trans-Canada Matinee: Salute to Saskatchewan Women*. CBC Radio Broadcast, [1956].
- PAS, S-A1, Violet McNaughton fonds, File C.1. Personal Papers: Articles: Violet McNaughton Speech "How We Got the Franchise in Saskatchewan", n.d.

Editorial Cartoons

- PAS, S-B6493: "Votes for Women": an editorial cartoon showing Premier Walter Scott making women beg for the vote, from *Grain Growers' Guide*, 26 February 1913.
- PAS, R-A369-2: "The Door Steadily Opens": an editorial cartoon showing a woman entering a room of men (Special Privilege, Drink, Combine, White Slaver, Graft, Monopoly, Corrupt Press) with "Women Suffrage" broom, from *Grain Growers' Guide*, 21 September 1910.
- PAS, R-B10754, "The Vote Girl": an editorial cartoon showing a boy and girl fighting, from "The Grain Grower's Guide," 8 July 1914, 8.

Articles

- PAS, S-A1 Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, "Women Do Not Want It," by Alice Stone Blackwell, n.d..
- PAS, S-A1, Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, "Some Women Will Vote Wisely, Some Foolishly, and Some Not At All," *The Saturday Press and Prairie Farm*, 1 May 1915, 6.
- PAS, S-A1, Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, "Letters from Readers: Votes for Women," *The Montreal Weekly Witness*, 2 October 1917, 13.
- PAS, S-A1, Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, "Women and Political Parties," by Mrs. H.H. McKinney, *Saskatoon Star*, 13 December 1918.
- PAS, S-A1, Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, "Equal Suffrage in Saskatchewan," *The Saturday Press and Prairie Farmer*, 16 February 1916, 1.
- PAS, S-A1, Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, "An Appeal to the Men of Canada," Montreal Suffrage Association, n.d.
- PAS, S-A1, Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, "Women's Section," including "Suffrage Board Will Meet in October" and "Eloquent Speeches by Suffragists," *The Evening Province and Standard* (Regina), 28 May 1916, 5.

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- PAS, S-A1, Violet McNaughton fonds, File I.9, *The Saturday Press & Prairie Farmer*, 1915-1918, 19 February 1916, 1.
- PAS, Micro. R-1.618, Reel 78, Regina Morning Leader, "'Votes for Women' Are Asked in Petition, 30 April 1915, 8.
- PAS, Micro. R-6.18, Regina Morning Leader, Reel 79, "Petition for Women's Votes Presented," 28 May 1915, 12.
- PAS, S-B6544: "Women Receive the Vote..." Headline in the Regina Morning Leader, 15 February 1916.

Letters

- PAS, S-A1 Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, Letter from Lillian B. Thomas, Winnipeg, to Violet McNaughton, 17 September [c. 1916-1919?]
- PAS, S-A1 Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, Letter from Effie L. Storer, Battleford, to Violet McNaughton, 11 May 1914
- PAS, S-A1 Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, "Reasons Why Women Should Be Enfranchised," c. 1914-1916.
- PAS, S-A1 Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, Letter from Premier Walter Scott, Regina, to Violet McNaughton, 16 February 1916.
- PAS, S-A1 Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, Letter from M.A. Lawton of Yorkton and Nellie L. McClung of Edmonton, to Violet McNaughton, 28 June 1916.
- PAS, S-A1 Violet McNaughton fonds, File E.18, Equal Franchise League, 1914-1919, Letter from Lillian B. Thomas, Winnipeg, to Violet McNaughton, 21 December 1916.