

1. If you were living in Canada during World War I, what effects do you think the war would have on your everyday life?
2. Brainstorm actions you think the Canadian government might have to take during the war. Suggest reasons for each action.

Support for the War Effort

During World War I, people on the home front were encouraged to do all they could to support the troops overseas. Posters, patriotic community groups, and government campaigns suggested that no sacrifice should be spared to ensure a victory in Europe. Many people planted "victory gardens" to produce as much food as possible. They reduced the amount of food they ate and tried to waste as little as possible. Meals contained less meat, butter, sugar, and bread so that these foods could be sent overseas. Canada was shipping vast quantities of food to the fighting forces and civilian populations of other Allied countries.

Although Black Canadians were discriminated against in Canada, many women worked for the war effort. These women worked through the Coloured Women's Club of Montreal during the war.



On the wheat fields of the West, thousands of students were often dismissed from school early to help bring in the harvests. Farm women worked long hours in the fields, and women from the cities also lent a hand. They were needed to replace the farm workers who were fighting overseas.

Groups of women of all ages also met regularly to organize community fund raisers and to roll bandages for the troops. Every community held card games, dances, bazaars, and variety shows. The profits from these evenings were used to send soap, writing paper, pencils, and candy to the troops. Some groups also raised money for war victims and war relief.

Not all groups were made up of women of British heritage. Many other ethnic communities including Chinese, Japanese, Jewish, Italian, Aboriginal, and Black women and men also raised funds and contributed what they could. Women of the Six Nations organized a Women's Patriotic League in 1914. It raised money through garden parties and tag days for Six Nations soldiers overseas. Aboriginal people on the Tyendenaga Reserve near Deseronto, Ontario, allowed some of their land to be used for a flying school during the war. Polish organizations worked with the Red Cross to send money, food, and clothing for war relief in Poland. Chinese women held Rice Bowl festivals and

bazaars to raise money for war victims. The Coloured Women's Club of Montreal worked with the Red Cross to provide support for the war effort overseas.

Many of these ethnic communities were discriminated against in Canada during this period. They faced racism and intolerance, and did not have the right to vote. However, they were eager to show their loyalty and support the war effort.

Terror on the Home Front

No battles ever took place on Canadian soil during World War I. But from the beginning of the war, there were fears of sabotage and suspicions about spies in Canada. Even before war was declared, Britain warned Canada to take precautions. Militia were posted at major bridges, canals, and railways to guard against sabotage.

Early on the morning of 6 December 1917, however, the horrors of the war did come to the doorsteps of Canadians. A terrible explosion rocked the city of Halifax. Halifax was a major shipping port in the war. Most of the North American convoys with supplies for Europe set out from Halifax.

On that morning in 1917, the *Mont Blanc*, a French munitions ship carrying a cargo of explosives, collided with the Belgian vessel *Imo* in the harbour. Almost 3000 tonnes of explosives were set off. The blast levelled large sections of Halifax and was heard all over the province. It was even felt in Sydney, over 320 km away. Fires roared through the wooden buildings of the city. A huge tidal wave swamped other ships in the harbour and tossed them in pieces onto the shore. Two thousand people were killed and thousands more were injured or left homeless.

The explosion was one of the worst disasters in Canadian history. It is said that,

Halifax, after the devastating explosion in 1917.





IMPACT ON SOCIETY

POSTERS IN WORLD WAR I

One way for the government to encourage support of the war effort was through a massive poster campaign. Since television had not yet been invented and not everyone owned a radio, posters were the most effective means of getting a message across. Colourful posters were put up on street corners, in post offices, and in other public places where every-

one could see them. They were also printed in magazines and newspapers. The posters were part of a major propaganda campaign to back the war effort and promote the Allied cause. **Propaganda** is a systematic spreading of ideas influencing people to support a particular cause or point of view.



1. List the different purposes for which posters were used by the government.
2. What major images are used in each poster? Why do you think these images were used?
3. Summarize the message of each poster in a sentence.
4. a) What reasons do the posters suggest for supporting the war effort?
b) Do the posters show a bias? Explain.
5. How successful do you think these posters would be? Why?
6. What means of communication does the government use today to get messages across to the people? What kinds of messages does the government send out? Give some specific examples.
7. Design your own posters. In groups, create posters which could be used to:
 - recruit soldiers
 - encourage the purchase of war bonds
 - help reduce food consumption
 - recruit children to work in the war effort.

New Roles for Women

World War I brought other great changes, especially to the lives of Canadian women. As soon as the war began, hundreds of Canadian women volunteered to work overseas as nurses or ambulance drivers. Many worked in field hospitals just behind the front-line trenches. One operating room nurse wrote in a letter home, "We ... had 291 operations in ten nights, so that will give you a fair idea of a week's work."

Women also played an important part in the war effort at home. With the general shortage of labour in Canada, the number of women employed in industry rose dramatically. Thirty thousand Canadian women worked in munitions factories and other war industries. These jobs in heavy industry would have been considered unsuitable for women before 1914. Working conditions were difficult and sometimes dangerous. Women also drove buses and streetcars. They worked in banks, on police forces, and in civil service jobs.

I had a very hard job. It had to be that you run a machine of weights into the shell, and the weight had to be just

exact. Quite a few of them didn't have the patience.

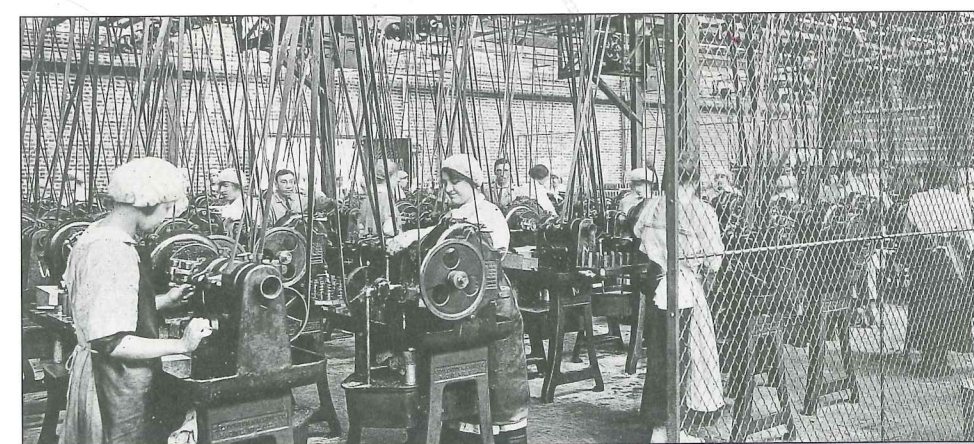
It was interesting work but very hard on your nerves. There was a machine went on fire. This friend from Beaverton was on the machine that blew up, and I run to her and we had to go down on our hands and knees and crawl out of the place. So we had a little experience of what it was to be right in a war.

In wartime, there were few men left to work on the farms. Women on the farms brought in the harvests and city women were also recruited to go out and help.

We decided to become farmerettes when we read in the paper that there was a big crop and they needed people to come, and there were no men. So this friend and I said that we would go. We volunteered. Masses of young people went out and brought that all in.

Groups of women of all ages met regularly to knit socks for the soldiers and to roll bandages. They arranged many of the card games, dances, and variety shows that helped fund the parcels sent to the troops.

I wanted to help do my share, and I joined the Red Cross and helped roll



During the war, women worked in munitions factories, sometimes under dangerous conditions.

bandages and knit socks. My first ones were big enough to fit an elephant, and after that, I became very proficient—so proficient that I knit a pair of socks a day without any trouble.

You see, everybody felt they had to do something. You just couldn't sit there. There was a phrase, 'Doing your bit.' Well, that was pretty well the keynote feeling all through that First World War. Everybody was extremely patriotic, and everybody wanted to 'do a bit.' If there's anything we could do to help, we must do it.

The Struggle for Women's Rights

Since women were doing so much for the war effort, they wanted a share in making decisions about the country. It was during World War I that an important step forward was taken in Canada for women's rights. At the beginning of the twentieth century, women in many countries had begun to organize themselves to gain the right to vote. Members of this movement in Canada were called **suffragists**.

Nellie McClung was a suffragist and one of Canada's great social reformers. She wrote, "Certainly women belong in the

home, but not 24 hours a day. They should have exactly the same freedom as men." When World War I broke out, it helped to prove that Nellie McClung was right. Women did jobs once performed only by men. The war brought women together in volunteer organizations and employment. They began to share ideas and work for political equality with men. They also took active roles in journalism and campaigned for better public health, working conditions, and wages. They pushed for equal opportunities in careers such as medicine and law, and for the right to own property.

Suffragists campaigned enthusiastically for women's suffrage (the right to vote). Their leaders included Dorothy Davis in British Columbia, Margaret Gordon in Ontario, Emily Murphy and Alice Jamieson in Alberta, and the dynamic Nellie McClung in Manitoba. The first breakthrough for women's suffrage came in Manitoba. In 1916, women were given the right to vote in that province. Within months, Saskatchewan and Alberta also granted women suffrage. Ontario and British Columbia followed suit the next year.

But the main goal was to win the right to vote in federal elections. In the federal election of December 1917, the **Wartime Elections Act** granted the vote to the mothers, sisters, and wives of soldiers in the Armed Forces. Canadian nurses serving in the Forces could also vote. By the time the war had ended, the right to vote in federal elections had been extended to almost all women in Canada over the age of 21. The **Dominion Elections Act** (1920) also gave women the right to run for election to Parliament. However, Aboriginal women (and most Aboriginal men), Asians, and many other members of minority groups in Canada were not allowed to vote.



Nellie McClung, Alice Jamieson, and Emily Murphy. This famous photo was taken on the day women won the right to vote in Manitoba, 1916.



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Nellie McClung



"Never retract, never explain, never apologize—just get the thing done and let them howl," said Nellie McClung. Nellie McClung was one of Canada's great social reformers. She was a tireless worker for women's rights and political suffrage (the right to vote).

Born in Owen Sound, Ontario, in 1873, she moved with her family to Manitoba when she was seven years old. At 16, she had become a teacher and caused a stir when she allowed her female students to join in lunchtime football games. In 1890, she married and found she shared many common views with her mother-in-law, Annie McClung. Annie McClung was president of the Manitou chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Nellie joined the WCTU, which provided help to people in need, campaigned against the ill effects of alcohol, and supported the rights of women to have a voice in social and political affairs. The WCTU raised petitions, acted as a pressure group on governments, and encouraged debate on key issues to meet its goals.

By 1911, Nellie McClung was increasingly involved in journalism and political activism. She was a founding member of the Political Equality League in Manitoba and spoke out for women's suffrage across the province. Women's pleas for the vote, however, fell on deaf ears in the provincial government. In 1914, Premier Roblin responded to the women's requests with the words, "Now you forget all this nonsense about women voting. Nice women don't want to vote."

Nellie McClung and her supporters decided to fight back by staging a mock parliament in Winnipeg's Walker Theatre. The parliament was run

by women and Nellie was premier. Roles were reversed and men were asking for the vote. In a speech, Nellie cleverly turned the tables on the premier's words. "If men are given the vote," she declared, "they will vote too much. Politics unsettles men. Unsettled men mean unsettled bills—broken furniture, broken vows, and divorce . . . Men cannot be trusted with the ballot. Men's place is on the farm."

The performance was a roaring success. When World War I broke out some months later, women proved that they could perform the same jobs as men. They provided massive support on the home front for the soldiers overseas. Governments had to admit that the war could not have been won without the support of women. In 1916, women made their breakthrough in Canada. They first gained the right to vote in the province of Manitoba. By 1918, they had gained the right to vote in federal elections.

1. Nellie McClung wrote: "War is not inevitable. . . . War is a crime committed by men, and therefore when enough people say it shall not be, it cannot be. This will not happen until women are allowed to say what they think of war." Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Governments did not grant Asian and Aboriginal women, women of colour, and women of other minority groups the vote during the war, even though they also worked for the war effort and campaigned for their rights through their own organizations. Why do you think this was so?