

Inspiring Women

“I would rather be a rebel than a slave”

Emmeline Pankhurst

Introduction

There are many opportunities in the secondary curriculum to celebrate female scientists, explorers, philosophers and leaders and their contribution to our world. As part of the Women’s Vote Centenary project we explored four *Inspirational Women* from the past 200 years. We chose four British women: Emmeline Pankhurst, Mary Seacole, Helen Sharman and Emma Watson to give a range of age, backgrounds and qualities within a British context. There are a wealth of women to choose from both in the UK and around the world, both past and present: Marie Curie, Rosa Parks, Elizabeth I, Noor Inayat Khan, Malala Yousafzai. The choice is endless and there is plenty of controversy and debate about who are the most inspiring and why.

The following activities are linked primarily to:

- English – persuasive writing, speaking and listening
- Drama – hot seating and role play

But can also link to:

- History – women’s suffrage, medicine through time, Britain since 1901
- Politics – extension of the franchise, social reform

Activities

English – persuasive writing, speaking and listening

Present each character to the class using the mini biographies, photos and quotes. All four women are known for success in their field – Emmeline Pankhurst a campaigner for women’s suffrage, Mary Seacole, a contemporary of Florence Nightingale, a nurse for soldiers in the Crimean War, Helen Sharman – Britain’s first astronaut in space, and Emma Watson – actress and feminist. Students can further their research using the useful websites list to choose one of the women as their most inspirational woman. They can then use the template provided to write their speech, if it helps. They can practise their speech in pairs or small groups first before speaking to the rest of the class. They can also watch the short film of other students presenting their most inspirational women and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses to help improve their speeches.

Drama – hot seating and role play

Using the same resources and introduction as with the English activity, students can go more into role. If they choose a character to play they can collect a simple prop to help them. They don’t need to mimic accents. Just develop a sense of who that character is. For example; for Mary Seacole it might be her medal; Emmeline Pankhurst, a banner or leaflet; Helen Sharman, her astronaut’s badge or helmet; or Emma Watson, one of her acting awards or film posters. Then it’s easier to go in and out of role. Each character can be hot seated in role and questions opened to the rest of the class to help explore her character. They can also make a speech in role and the rest of the class can choose one of the characters as their most inspirational woman.

Teacher guidance

You can ensure all four characters are covered by the students in your class, or allow free choice, or choose four completely different characters which suit your curriculum better, either fiction or non-fiction.

You can have 'battle' rounds where you pitch 2 characters against each other to put to the class vote. The winners of each round face each other for the final. You can have students 'in role' for a drama element or keep them as themselves speaking their own opinions.

Watch Portia (*Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice*) battle Beatrice (*Much Ado About Nothing*) or Juliet (*Romeo & Juliet*) battle Desdemona (*Othello*)! You can choose.

When they vote you can use hands up in class but they can also create their own ballot box and a ballot paper to introduce rules around voting and how rules help to keep elections fair.

Throughout the topic you can start and finish with big questions to reflect on, for example:

Why have men and women not been seen as equal in the past?

Why have some women been forgotten by history, and some women remembered?

Collect your own big questions to explore, discuss or debate.

Teaching materials included:

- Photos, mini biographies, quote sheets and useful websites for Mary Seacole, Emmeline Pankhurst, Helen Sharman and Emma Watson
- Template for making a persuasive speech
- Short film featuring 3 student speeches
- Ballot paper template for *Inspiring Women* voting
- Example Mary Seacole speech – in character
- Hot seating in practice
- Hot seating by David Farmer
- Key dates in voting
- Who is eligible to vote in a UK General Election