



The Extraordinary Gertrude Bell

Classroom activity 3

KS3-KS4



3

GERTRUDE BELL AND WOMEN SUFFRAGE



Gertrude Bell was the youngest woman to graduate with a first-class honours degree in modern history from Oxford University. Life for women was not easy at Oxford: they had to remain silent in lectures and could not interact freely with professors or male classmates. In some classes, Gertrude and the other women even had to sit with their backs to the lecturer! Despite these constraints, Bell's academic career was remarkable. She became a respected fellow and gold-medal winning member of the National Geographical Society. She managed to become a very influential woman, who had a deep and lasting effect on British politics in the Middle East.

Her success as a woman and her life seems to contradict common stereotypes about the role of women in the Twentieth century. Yet, despite her achievements as a woman in a male dominated society, Bell openly campaigned against votes for women, becoming the Honorary Secretary of the Anti-Suffrage League (1909). The reasons for such a surprising position, at least to modern eyes, lay in Gertrude Bell's social and political background. Her life embodies the challenges that Twentieth century women faced in defining their role within the context of a changing society.

RESEARCH TOOLS:

- Discover Gertrude Bell Research website: [click here](#).
- Read Gertrude Bell Comics: [click here](#).
- Watch the introductory video: [click here](#).
- Discover more on Gertrude Bell in this paper by Professor Helen Berry: *A North-East woman of Contradictions* (pdf file): [click here](#).
- Read Gertrude Bell's articles against the suffrage movement:
 - “The National Anti-Suffrage League,” *Times* [London], 20 August 1908, p. 6.

- “Woman Suffragists and the House of Commons,” *Times*, 13 October 1908, p. 8.
- Read Bell’s diary entry where she recounts how she successfully managed to recruit her traveling companion on a train to the Anti Suffrage movement: [click here](#).
- Check UK Parliament website to discover more about women and the vote: [click here](#).
- Check the British Library website to find source material on the Suffrage Movement: [click here](#).

FURTHER READING:

- Bush, J., 2007. *Women against the Vote*, Oxford University Press: pp.119-125.
- Duplisea, G., 2016. Writing in the Masculine: Gertrude Lowthian Bell, Gender, and Empire. *Terrae Incognitae*, 48(1), pp.55–75.
- Riedi, E., 2002. Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire: The Victoria League, 1901-1914. *The Historical Journal*, 45(3), pp.569–599.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

- Encourage your pupils to research on the Women’s Suffrage Movement and on Gertrude Bell’s role as an Anti-Suffragist.
- Ask your pupils to get inspiration from contemporary posters for and against women suffrage and devise their own Suffrage and Anti-Suffrage posters.
- Then, ask them to give short speeches (or set up a debate in your classroom) for and against Women’s vote.

LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM:

Citizenship, History of the British Empire, Women suffrage, writing non-narrative texts, giving short speeches, expressing ideas, and participating in formal debates. Arts and design.

KEYWORDS:

Women suffrage, British Empire.