

WOMEN AT WORK IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR



History, Literacy and Remembrance



Key Stage 2



Session One
1 – 2 hours

*The Women's Land Army
and Timber Corp Memorial*



In this session you will learn about some of the jobs that women did in the First World War. You will also have some literacy activities to complete throughout the session.

First, watch a virtual tour of the Arboretum.

Tour of the Arboretum

<https://youtu.be/R6YyFpMBDgg>

You have a short film to watch. This will take you to look at some of the memorials at the Arboretum linked with women in the First World War.

The memorials you will visit are:

- **The National Nursing Memorial**
- **Women's Royal Naval Service Memorial Garden**
- **The Women's Land Army and Timber Corp Memorial**



The National Nursing Memorial →



← *Women's Royal Naval Service Memorial Garden*

**After watching the film,
answer these questions.**

What was the nickname for the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS)?

What was the nickname for the women in the Women's Land Army (WLA)?

What did women in the Women's Land Army wear for their uniform?

What were conditions like for nurses on the front line?

Edith Cavell was a nurse in Belgium. Who did she help to escape?



Edith Cavell

The First World War

The First World War was known as the Great War. This was because countries from all over the world were involved in the war. The war involved two sides, the Allies (Britain, France, Russia, Italy, the United States of America, Commonwealth countries and many others) and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria.)

The First World War began on 28 July 1914 and ended on 11 November 1918 with the signing of an armistice agreement between Britain, France, and Germany. We remember this date every year, it is called Armistice Day. Many people buy poppies to remember this day.

Women at Work in the First World War

Women worked before the First World War, but they did not have a wide choice of jobs. The best jobs for women were as teachers, shop assistants, typists, and dressmakers. Others worked as servants for rich families, washed clothes or worked long hours in bad conditions in factories. Once women got married, they were expected to look after their husbands and children.

When the First World War started, life changed for everyone. Many men were away fighting so more women had to work outside their home for the first time. The work that women did was vital to the war effort, both at home and on the front line.

There were many different jobs that women could now do such as munitions workers (making bombs and shells for the war), bus drivers, farmers, and police officers, as well as jobs in the armed forces.

The money women earned helped their families. They made new friends through their jobs and had some independence. By 1918, there were five million women working in Britain, almost a million of these worked making ammunition.

Women were able to join the armed forces, but they could not go onto the front line to fight. They also worked in factories, on transport or on farms and wore uniforms. Some women wore trousers in their jobs, this was very unusual as trousers were not worn by women before this.

Why did women do more jobs in the First World War?

Name three jobs that women did in the First World War.

One job was very dangerous. What was it and why was it dangerous?

Do you think women enjoyed working in the First World War? Why?

Vocabulary mix-and-match

Can you match the word with its meaning?

Armistice

Independence

Ammunition

Allies

Bad conditions (to work)

Front line

Home Front

Vital

A terrible place to work, it could be dangerous, long hours, poor pay or even a mean boss.

In war, these are nations that are friends you trust. They are on your side.

A supply of bullets, shells, or missiles for fighting.

At the front of any military action in a war. It would be dangerous to be here.

Something that is very important.

The people at home when your country is at war.

An agreement to stop fighting in a war.

The freedom to live your life without relying on someone else.

Here are some examples of the jobs that women did in the First World War



Image courtesy of bbc.co.uk/history

Nurses

Women were not allowed to fight on the front line, but some were very close to it when they were nursing injured soldiers. At the beginning of the war, there were not enough trained nurses. To help, women volunteered as part of Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). In the summer of 1914, there were around 50,000 women and girls that had volunteered. By 1916 women in the Voluntary Aid Detachment who had hospital experience were allowed to go overseas.



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Bus Conductors

The job of a bus conductor was new for women as many men were sent to fight. The first woman conductor started in November 1915 and 3,500 women were employed in London during the war. The role of the conductor was to stop the bus by ringing a bell when a passenger wanted to get on. Once the passenger was seated the conductor rang the bell and the driver would start the bus again. The conductor carried a ticket machine and a money bag and would sell the passenger a ticket and then clip the ticket. Female bus conductors had the nickname 'Clippies'.



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Canary Girls

During the war, there was a huge need for bombs, bullets, and missiles. Women went to work in munitions factories. This work was well paid, but it was also very dangerous. The women worked with dangerous chemicals every day. One chemical that was used in bombs called TNT, turned the women's skin yellow. This is how they got their nickname 'The Canary Girls'.



Image courtesy of bbc.co.uk/history

Land Girls

Because of a shortage of food during the First World War, the Minister for Agriculture recruited women to work on farms and join the Women's Land Army (WLA). The women were given the nickname of 'Land Girls'. By the end of 1917 there were 23,000 women working in the WLA as well as over 250,000 women and girls that worked as farm labourers. Land Girls could volunteer to do three different roles:

1. **Agriculture** – ploughing, harvesting, milking, and looking after farm animals.
2. **Timber-cutting** – measuring trees, cutting them down, stacking them and working in sawmills.
3. **Foraging** – producing bales of hay for horse feed and straw for Army and farm horses' bedding.

Pick two of the jobs then answer the questions and complete the table.

Job 1

Job 2

Where did the women work in this job? Was it in Britain (on the Home Front)? Or overseas (near the front line)? Or both?

What kind of thing do you think women would need to do in these jobs?

Would the women doing these jobs wear a uniform? Do you think they wore trousers?

Do you think these were nice jobs to do? Why do you think this?

After the War

Many women who worked in the First World War had a lot more freedom than they did before the war, and they proved that women could do jobs just as well as men.

When the war ended men returned and many women lost their jobs. They were expected to go back to working in their old jobs or stay at home as they did before.

How do you think this made women feel?

The role that women played in the war helped lead to women getting equal rights to men, though this took many years.

Design a Poster

In the war, posters were used to encourage women to work in these jobs. Design a poster to inspire women to start doing one of the jobs you have learned about.



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