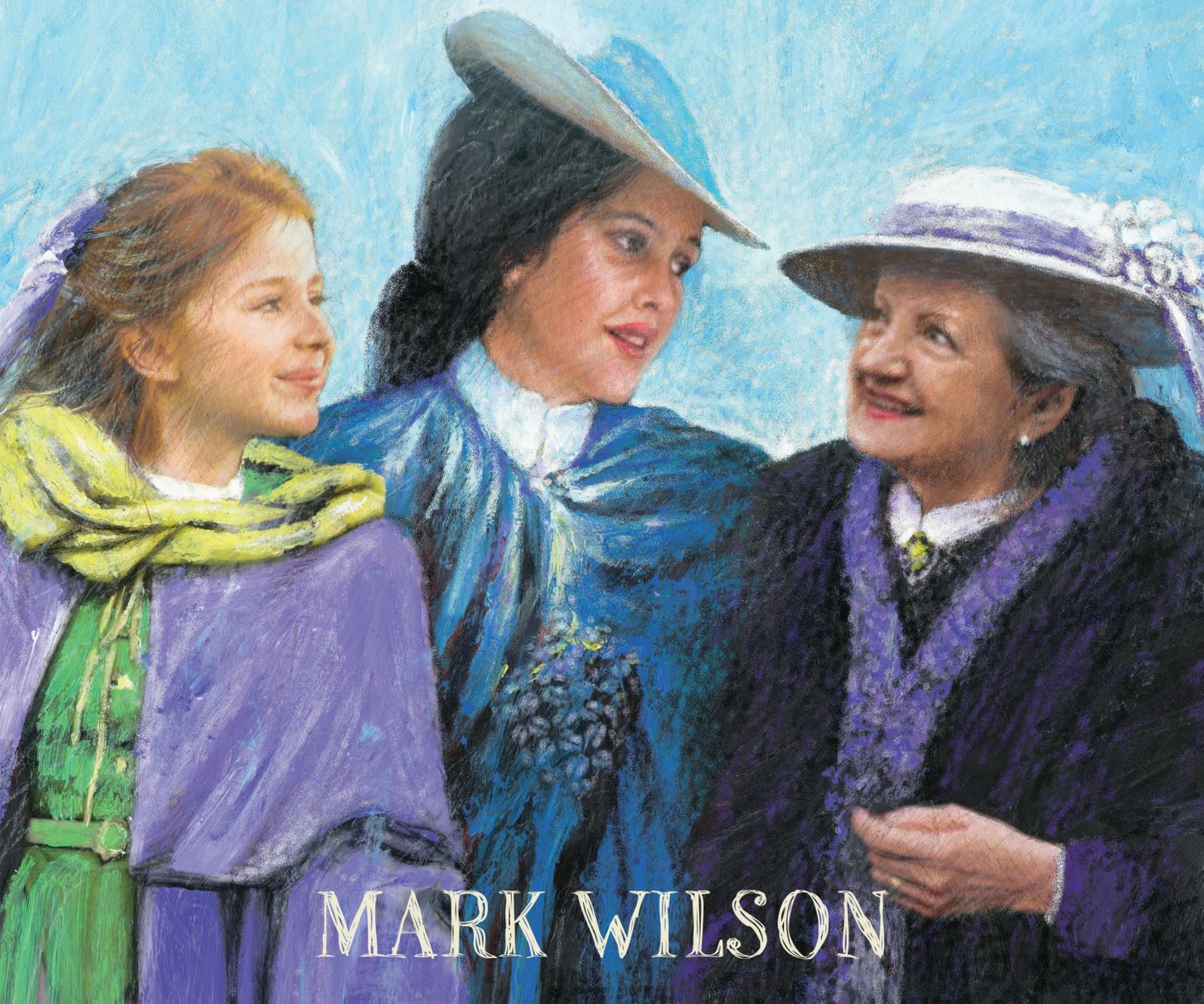


TEACHERS RESOURCES

# Votes for Women!

The story of Nellie, Rose and Mary



MARK WILSON

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## Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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# INTRODUCTION

'My cause is the cause of womanhood, no bluster or denunciation will silence me while one wrong to womanhood exists of which I have knowledge, or against which I have the power to protest.' Mary Lee, *Adelaide Observer*, 22 August 1891

(Quoted in *Votes for Women*, p 2)

In 1890, Rose Birks and her stepdaughter, Nellie, two strong-willed and determined women, began writing letters and attending meetings to help improve the lives of women and children in their home city of Adelaide. They soon found themselves part of a movement that would change the lives of women everywhere. Through their friendship with the famous female suffragist Mary Lee, they petitioned politicians and lawmakers – and in 1896 they became the first women in Australia to vote in an election. *Votes for Women!* tells their story.

## THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several thematic ideas are covered in this book which might be used in conjunction with curriculum topics (for primary or secondary school students) in the following areas:

### STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT (SOSE)

Several themes are relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/> Investigate the following sub-topics using skills developed in this Curriculum Area relating to **INQUIRY AND SKILLS** and **KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING**:

1. *Develop Methodology and Research Using Primary and Secondary Sources;*
2. *Synthesise and Evaluate Evidence;*
3. *Present Evidence;*
4. *Develop Alternatives.*

### SUFFRAGISTS AND THE VOTE FOR WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The Women's Suffrage League was founded in 1888. Read more about this significant organisation.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** In 1894, 'South Australia was the first state in Australia to give women the right to vote, and the first in the whole world to give women the right to stand for election to parliament.' Research the passing of legislation in Australia and the timeline involved before that.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** This book tells the story via the experiences of three Australian female suffragists. Research the lives of the two most well known women: Mary Lee and Rosetta (Rose) Birks.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Then research the lives of other Australian women who were

involved in this movement.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What is the difference between a 'suffragist' and a 'suffragette'? Research the difference between these two terms.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Examine the international context of the movement and how Australia played a role in that.

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What are the key events internationally which led to women's suffrage? Did giving women the right to vote mean that everyone then had the right to vote?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Examine the key figures in the international women's suffrage movement, such as Susan B. Anthony (US), Emmeline Pankhurst (UK) and others.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Some writers have called for more recognition of the role played by women of colour in the suffrage movement. Research this further [See **Bibliography.**]

## FEMINISM

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The 1970s were a watershed moment when women asserted their right to a range of freedoms and equal opportunity, and used the term 'feminism' to describe the movement. But were your students aware of the earlier movement led by suffragists? They may not have used the term but were they in fact, 'feminists'?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Young women today have benefited from the fact that women now have so many more rights than they had formerly. What rights have still to be achieved, though?

## VOTING IN AUSTRALIA

**DISCUSSION POINT:** This book offers teachers and students a case study relating to the voting process. Develop a class unit exploring the voting process.

**ACTIVITY:** Conduct a mock voting process on a particular issue, with your class.

## VALUES

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What are the moral values reflected in this picture book text?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** How would you describe the character of Rose? What morals or ethics does the text suggest are typical of her?

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>>

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

**DISCUSSION POINT:** This text is written in third person past tense. Rewrite a section of the story as if written in first person by Rose.

**ACTIVITY:** Test your students' comprehension by asking them questions about the written text. [See also **Worksheet 2.**]

**ACTIVITY:** Write a diary entry as if written by Nellie about her feelings for her stepmother Rose.

## **VISUAL LITERACY**

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>.

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

**ACTIVITY:** The **cover** of this book depicts the three women in a beautiful portrait. The colour purple features prominently in the clothing, and is symbolic of the women's movement. Create your own cover for this book.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The **front and back endpapers** depict women working in a production line and women placing their votes. The contrast is deliberate. What do these images suggest about women's choices and rights?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The **title page** contains an image of the suffragists sitting speaking together with a poster to one side which reads: 'Our Cause is the Cause of Womanhood' and partly obscured to the other side: 'Votes for Women'. The image is in a sepia tone, denoting times past. What emotional impression does this image give to your students?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The **format** of the book is varied. Some images are full-page spreads; some contain framed portraits. Some contain collaged images of letters and a petition. On p 3, the three women are depicted in a triptych panel of three portraits. On p 16, two panels in graphic novel style depict the plights of women. Discuss the varied use of format and how that contributes to story-telling in this visual text.

**ACTIVITY:** The **medium or style** employed for many of the illustrations is **impressionism** in **acrylic and watercolour painting on canvas and also freehand drawings or sketches**. [See also Mark Wilson's note on **Illustration Technique** in his **Author/Illustrator's Notes.**] Invite students to use various techniques to create their own images of Nellie, Rose and Mary. [See also **Worksheet 1.**]

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What effect does the **impressionism** of many of the illustrations convey to a reader?

**ACTIVITY:** Students might be encouraged to use **critical literacy skills** to unearth meaning in this text; teachers might ask them a series of questions. [See also **Worksheet 2.**]

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Mark Wilson writes on the reverse endpaper p 2: 'The paintings in this book were inspired by the French and Australian impressionist painters Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, Fred McCubbin and Arthur Streeton. These artists

were at their peak when our story was set in the late 1800s. They inspire me every day.' Research their work and then compare to Mark Wilson's art in this book.

## CREATIVE ARTS

There are many creative activities suggested by this text. Students might:

1. Create a **classroom mural** which tells the story in a series of dramatic frames designed and executed by students.
2. **Write, direct and act out a scene** based on any incident in this book, for example the rally when Rose is accosted by the anti-suffragists.
3. **Design a Book Trailer based on this book.** Visit sites such as: 'How to Make a Book Trailer' *Tristan Bancks* March 23, 2016 <<https://www.tristanbancks.com/2016/03/how-to-make-book-trailer.html>>
4. **Create a poster celebrating the Women's Suffrage Movement.** [See **Worksheet 3.**]
5. **Organise a classroom display** featuring some of the writing and illustration that students have done for this unit with books or texts they have researched as a group.

## LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

Activity: Study any of the topics suggested by this book and notes online. [See **Bibliography.**]

## MATHEMATICS

**ACTIVITY:** The book states that one-third of the more than 11,600 signatures on the petition were men's. How many signatures would have been male?

**ACTIVITY:** Develop mathematical exercises regarding voting with your students. For background, visit: 'Enrolment Statistics' *Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)* <[https://www.aec.gov.au/enrolling\\_to\\_vote/enrolment\\_stats/](https://www.aec.gov.au/enrolling_to_vote/enrolment_stats/)>

## **FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH**

- **Research the work of Mark Wilson.** Compare his other books to this one.
- Research the themes in this work by reading non-fiction books such as those listed in the **Bibliography.**
- **Conduct a debate** about one of the issues explored in these notes.

## CONCLUSION

Mark Wilson's books throw a light on many key events in Australia's history. *Votes for Women!* examines the role played by women in ensuring that gender did not determine any citizen's right to vote for this country's elected representatives. These activists believed that women and men were equally entitled to vote and set about ensuring that legislation recognised that. Their achievements were significant in an era which still didn't give women other rights we now accept as routine. The passing of the Constitution Amendment Act was a triumph and one which this book celebrates in Mark Wilson's stunning artwork.

## AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES

All my artwork starts with line drawings (see page 9), sketched in with as much detail as necessary to 'get' the character. I then use 'blocking-in' with watercolour and acrylic paint - this means broad areas of tones, see

<https://principlearttalk.com/2015/02/03/technique-tuesdays-blocking-in/>

I use models for my main characters, usually friends and family, but some from my children's school in Frankston, Victoria. Under Covid lockdown in Victoria, I couldn't use my models in person, so 'Mary' in the story is based on photographs of my mother. Nellie and Rose are based on friends who photographed themselves for me from different angles, that I indicated in sketches, then they sent me the pictures. These are only for reference - detail, flesh tones and shadows, because quite often, the angles or expressions are not quite right. So I then do a line drawing exactly the way I want it, using a soft grey lead pencil on canvas.

I then set up my easel and acrylics, and the style I used in this book is called 'Impressionism' (the style of painting popular when our story is set, in the late 1800s), and I only use paintings on the special pages to stop the reader, so they focus on the picture and text it goes with (see cover and pages 2-3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 16, 18, 20, 23, 24, 27 and 30). You can see they are spaced out like little loops linking important events in the story. All the other illustrations are line drawings or 'sepia' (to give the impression of old photographs). They are on the pages where I want the written narrative to really flow along (this is all in my head, but I do think it actually works!).

I loved the illustrated 'Boy's Own Annual' books when I was little, and this was how they were done then. Two or three pages of line drawings, then a full-page detailed colour painting. Magnificent! I still have the books today.

I was very sick during the illustration work for *Votes for Women!* I had many of the pictures almost finished when I became sick, just needing either a little detail here and there, or just brightening up. But I couldn't stand at my drawing board to do the final work. So I had the illustrations scanned, and I did the 'tidying up' in 'Microsoft Paint' on my laptop in bed. 'Paint' is an older program than Photoshop, which most people use nowadays. I trust it all worked, but that's for you wonderful readers out there to decide!

**Mark Wilson**

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

**Mark Wilson** was born in Brunswick, Victoria. He took to drawing from a very early age, and also loved comics. He went on to spend most of his teenage years performing as a singer and drummer in a rock band. He studied mural design and painting at the Caulfield Institute of Technology (now Monash, Caulfield Campus). He also did national service with Training Command in the ADF, followed by a Diploma of Education. In the early seventies, he became a designer and illustrator for *The Education Magazine* and *Pursuit Magazine*, and also started illustrating for various publishers, including Penguin, Rigby, Brooks Waterloo, Houghton & Mifflin and National Geographic in the USA. In 1981 he held his first solo exhibition of paintings and drawings.

Recently, he has focused on writing and illustrating children's books, and also picture book presentations and workshops in schools and at literature festivals. His books include *The Last Tree* (2007 Whitley Award for Children's Literature) which deals with the effect deforestation has on the creatures that inhabit our forests, and *Journey of the Sea Turtle* (2011 Whitley Award) which highlights the fragile existence of sea turtles. Other award-winning books include *My Mother's Eyes* about World War One, published by Hachette Australia in 2009; *Angel of Kokoda* in 2010; the *Ben and Gracie's Art Adventure* series, *Inside the World of Tom Roberts* (shortlisted in the 2013 Aurealis Awards), *A Day to Remember: The Story of the Anzacs* with Jackie French (shortlisted in the 2013 CBCA Awards); *Vietnam Diary* (2013), *Afghanistan Pup* (2014), *The Horse Soldier* (2015), *Migaloo, the White Whale* (2015), *Digger, the Dog who Went to War* (2015), *Beth: The Story of a Child Convict* (2016), *Flapper, VC* (2017), *Never Lose Hope: The Story of Australia's First School* (2018), *The Rats of Tobruk* and *All of Us* (2019). His book *Eureka! A Story of the Goldfields* (2019) was the first children's picture book to be longlisted for the prestigious Colin Roderick Award. His most recent previous book is *Rachel's War* (2020). Mark lives in Frankston, Victoria. For more information about Mark visit: <http://www.markwilson.com.au/>

# WORKSHEETS

## WORKSHEET 1 SUFFRAGISTS IMAGE

Create a collage by drawing a scene around this image of Rose, Nellie and Mary.



## WORKSHEET 2 QUIZ

**These questions can all be answered by reading or interpreting the text.**

1. What were some of the women's issues that Rose and Nellie were campaigning about leading up to the voting campaign?
2. What did Mary Lee ask Nellie when she first met her?
3. What year was the Women's Suffrage League formed?
4. What were the dire economic and social conditions in South Australia at that time?
5. What else did Nellie and Rose do to assist women?
6. What method did they use to convince government to change the legislation?
7. What was the legislation allowing women to vote called and when was it passed?
8. What date did women finally get to cast their votes?
9. What did Nellie unfurl as she and Rose met Mary Lee on the steps of the electoral office in Glenelg?
10. What was so significant about South Australia passing this legislation?

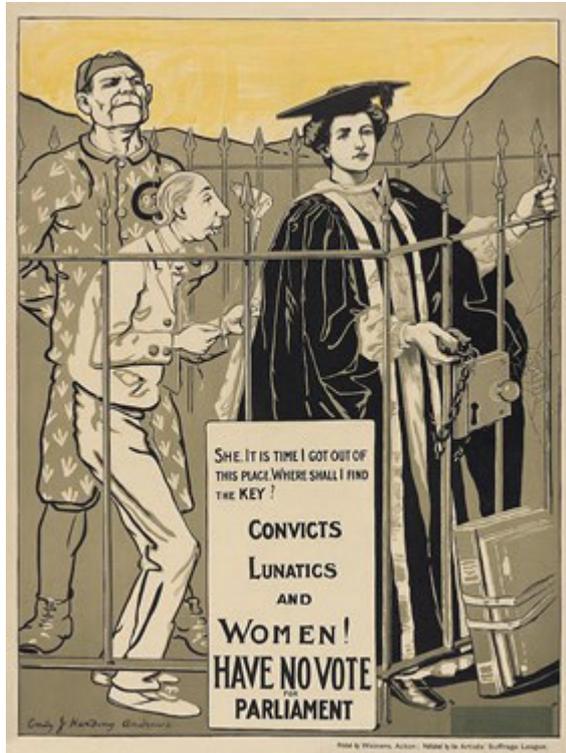
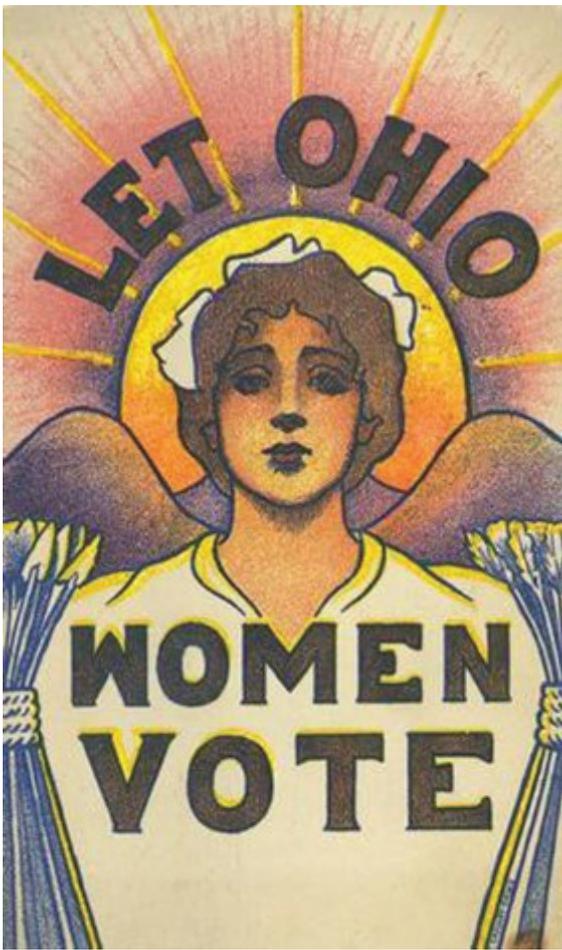
**Answers:** 1. 'They wanted to help women experiencing poverty, domestic violence, and those who suffered terrible, cramped working conditions.' (p 7)

2. She asked her to write on a silk banner for her. 3. 1888. 4. 'The collapse of the Commercial Bank and other businesses had led to widespread unemployment and many people were living in poverty.' (p 12) 5. 'They were not only lobbying for women to be allowed to vote, but also for children's rights. They began visiting factories where women worked in terrible conditions. They also organised food and clothing for the poor and destitute.' (p 17) 6. They collected over 11,600 signatures on a petition. 7. The Constitution Amendment Act was passed on 18 December 1894. 8. 25 April 1896.

9. The silk banner Mary Lee had asked her to make featuring the words: Women's Suffrage League of South Australia. 10. 'South Australia was the first state in Australia to give women the right to vote, and the first in the whole world to give women the right to stand for election to parliament.' (p 32)

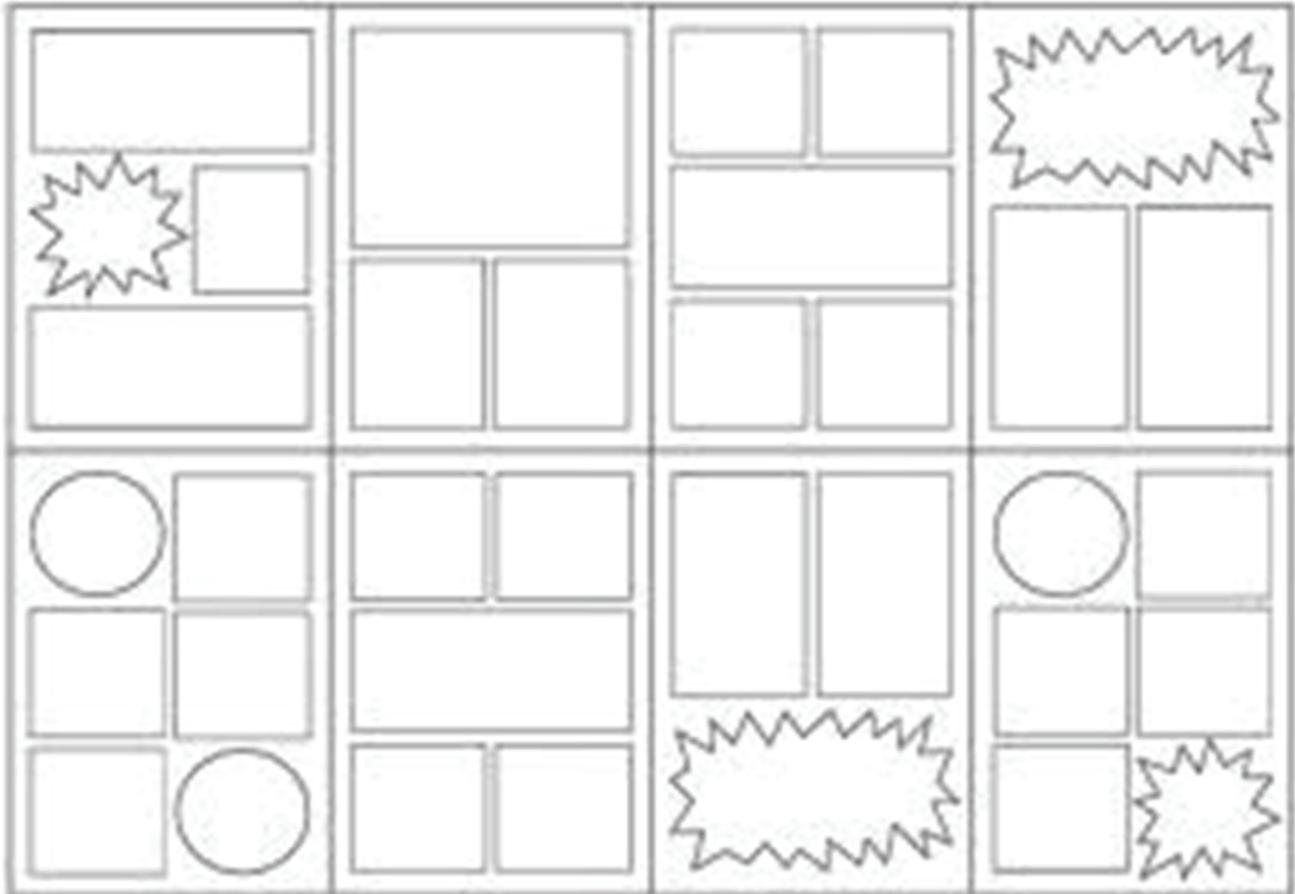
## WORKSHEET 3 WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE POSTERS

Examine these posters and then create a poster and slogan of your own in the space provided. [Enlarge the sheet to A3 to allow more room to work.]



## WORKSHEET 4 GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in this book. Use any of the layouts below as the storyboard for your comic. [You might photocopy and enlarge to A3 to make more space.]



Layouts taken from *Comic Book Guide*

<http://comicbookguide.wordpress.com/tag/drawings/page/2/>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM** operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.