

Emmeline Pankhurst



At a time when many of the freedoms enjoyed by women today were unthinkable, Emmeline Pankhurst dedicated her life to achieving political and economic equality for women. One of the most renowned of the activists who strove to extend the right to vote - also known as suffrage - to women, Pankhurst is rightly considered to have been one of the most influential women of the 20th century.

Born on 15th July 1858 in Manchester - the eldest of ten children - Emmeline was a clever child and was a regular reader from the age of three. Despite her obvious intelligence and liberal parents, Emmeline did not receive the same education as her five brothers.

At 14 years of age, Emmeline attended a talk by Lydia Becker, the editor of the *Women's Suffrage Journal*. Excited by the meeting, she declared herself a suffragist (a supporter of women's right to vote). In 1873, Emmeline travelled to Paris to study chemistry and finance. In 1878, Emmeline met Richard Pankhurst - an eminent barrister and staunch supporter of women's rights - whom she married the following year. The newly-wed Pankhursts turned their London home into a meeting place for radical political debate. The couple's first child, Christabel was born the following year, followed by another daughter - Estelle - in 1882. Emmeline gave birth to a son, Frank, in 1884, followed by another daughter, Adela, in 1885 and finally Henry, in 1889.

In 1894, the Pankhurst family returned to live in Emmeline's home town and she became one of the first to run for, and win, a public job when she was appointed Poor Law Guardian - a role which involved researching the living conditions of the poorest people in society, especially those living in the government's harsh workhouses.

In 1898, Emmeline was devastated when her beloved husband died unexpectedly. She took a job as a registrar of births and deaths and served on a board of school governors - both positions gave Emmeline further insight into the terrible effects of inequality on women's lives. Five years later, Emmeline co-created - with her daughter Christabel - the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a women-only organisation. With the motto 'deeds not words', their intention was to use non-violent but confrontational protest and speeches to have their cause recognised. Its members were routinely arrested, jeered at and, on numerous occasions, attacked by men who were vehemently opposed to their cause.

By 1908, after several ugly clashes with the police, Emmeline and her fellow WSPU members came to be regarded as significantly more combative than other suffrage groups. Emmeline herself was arrested and imprisoned seven times. Conditions inside the prisons were appalling, and she made her protest by going on hunger strike; force-fed by prison staff through her nose, which she found incredibly painful.

By 1910, the WSPU were growing impatient and two years later they launched an even more violent campaign. This initially involved smashing shop windows and escalated to setting fire to stately homes and exploding bombs near public buildings, including Westminster Abbey. There then followed the night-time arson of unoccupied houses - including the home of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George - and churches. Suffragettes smashed windows of government offices. They cut telephone lines, spat at police and politicians, destroyed dozens of greenhouses at Kew Gardens and chained themselves to railings and blew up houses. A doctor was attacked with a whip and on one occasion, on 18th July 1912, Mary Leigh hurled a hatchet at the Prime Minister, H. H. Asquith.

45 On 3rd April 1913, Pankhurst was sentenced to three years' penal servitude for procuring and inciting women to commit "malicious injuries to property". The Temporary Discharge for Ill Health Bill was rushed through Parliament to ensure that Pankhurst, who had immediately gone on hunger strike, did not die in prison.

50 In 1914, World War One broke out and Emmeline recommended that the WSPU stand down from their violent activities, in order to support the war effort. Women all over the nation took on jobs in teaching, nursing and in factories in order to make up the shortage in the nation's workforce caused by men being away fighting. After meeting many women who had lost their husbands to the war, Emmeline established an adoption home, and subsequently adopted four children.

55 By February 1918, the crucial role played during the war by women had dramatically changed the manner in which women's rights were viewed. The government passed the Representation of the People Act, giving women over 30 the right to vote, though many restrictions remained. By this time, Emmeline had become estranged from both Sylvia and Adela - who considered that their mother's methods were far too violent.

60 Eight years later, surprisingly, Emmeline Pankhurst officially joined the Conservative Party and was chosen as a candidate for Parliament. She believed that working with the government was a shrewd move in her mission to secure the vote for all women.

65 By 1928, years of protesting, regular imprisonment and hunger strikes had taken its toll on her health and Emmeline Pankhurst died - on 14th June - with Christabel at her bedside. Less than a month after her death, the Conservatives finally granted the right to vote to all people in Britain - both women and men - over the age of 21.

1 In which year did Emmeline marry Richard Pankhurst?

- A. 1878
- B. 1879
- C. 1873
- D. 1858

2 On how many occasions was Emmeline Pankhurst imprisoned?

- A. Seven times
- B. Twice
- C. Just once, after chaining herself to the railings outside Downing Street
- D. Eight times

3 How many younger sisters did Emmeline have?

- A. Five
 - B. Nine
 - C. Four
 - D. Ten
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4 What is another word for 'the right to vote'?

- A. Service
 - B. Entitlement
 - C. Permission
 - D. Suffrage
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5 Where did the Pankhurst family move to in 1894?

- A. London
 - B. Bristol
 - C. Manchester
 - D. Dublin
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6 How did the WSPU react to the outbreak of World War one?

- A. They embarked on an even more violent campaign to further their cause
 - B. They continued to protest as passionately as they had been previously
 - C. They took the decision to disband for the duration of the war
 - D. They decided to curb their destructive activities and support the war effort
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7 In which year did Emmeline Pankhurst sign up to the Conservative Party?

- A. 1926
 - B. 1918
 - C. 1924
 - D. 1920
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8 Why did Emmeline ultimately become alienated from her younger daughters?

- A. They were jealous of Christabel's close relationship with their mother
 - B. They lost touch as they had moved to a different part of the country
 - C. They both felt that their mother had presided over campaigns that were far too brutal
 - D. They thought that Emmeline favoured her sons over her daughters
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9 Which one of the following statements is true?

- A. Emmeline's husband practised as an eminent doctor
 - B. The WSPU was responsible for igniting a bomb in the vicinity of Westminster Abbey
 - C. From its inception, the WSPU intended to use violent means to promote their cause
 - D. Christabel Pankhurst was Emmeline's youngest daughter
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10 How old was Emmeline Pankhurst when she died?

- A. She was 70 years old
 - B. She was 69 years old
 - C. She was 68 years old
 - D. She was 59 years old
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1	B	Lines 13 to 14
2	D	Line 33 states that Emmeline was imprisoned seven times and then in line 45 states that Pankhurst was sentenced to three years' penal servitude - total 8 times
3	C	Line 7 states that Emmeline was the eldest of ten children. Line 9 states that she had 5 brothers - all of which must have been younger. Therefore she had 4 younger sisters.
4	D	Line 4
5	C	Line 7 states that Emmeline was born in Manchester and line 19 states that the Pankhurst family returned to live in Emmeline's home town
6	D	Lines 49 and 50
7	A	Line 55 states 'By February 1918' and line 60 states 'eight years later, Emmeline Pankhurst officially joined the Conservative Party...' $1918 + 8 \text{ years} = 1926$
8	C	Lines 58 and 59
9	B	Line 38
10	B	Line 7 states that Emmeline was born on 15/7/1858 and in the final paragraph we learn that she died on 14th June 1928, therefore she would have been 69 years