

# Springboard<sup>into</sup> Comprehension 6

|                           |                                                            |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Main Idea                 | Letters from the Goldfields<br>The History of Looking Cool |
| Compare and Contrast      | In the Public Eye<br>Two Mines, Two Rescues                |
| Fact and Opinion          | Let There Be Rock!<br>Snake on the Loose                   |
| Cause and Effect          | Rainforests at Risk<br>The Gallipoli Campaign              |
| <b>Bias and Prejudice</b> | <b>Women's Rights</b>                                      |
|                           | Animal Issues                                              |
| Figurative Language       | Your Health<br>Smythe's Department Store                   |

RA 12.5+



Recount

## Women's Rights



Written by Sarah Edwards

# Women's Rights

## Contents

|                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Introduction</b> . . . . .               | 2  |
| <b>Women – The Inferior Class</b> . . . . . | 4  |
| <b>Changing Ideas</b> . . . . .             | 6  |
| <b>The Right to Vote</b> . . . . .          | 8  |
| <b>Women, Work, and War</b> . . . . .       | 10 |
| <b>A Woman's Place</b> . . . . .            | 14 |
| <b>Liberating Women</b> . . . . .           | 16 |
| <b>Are Women Equal or Not?</b> . . . . .    | 20 |
| <b>Glossary and Index</b> . . . . .         | 24 |

Written by Sarah Edwards

# Introduction

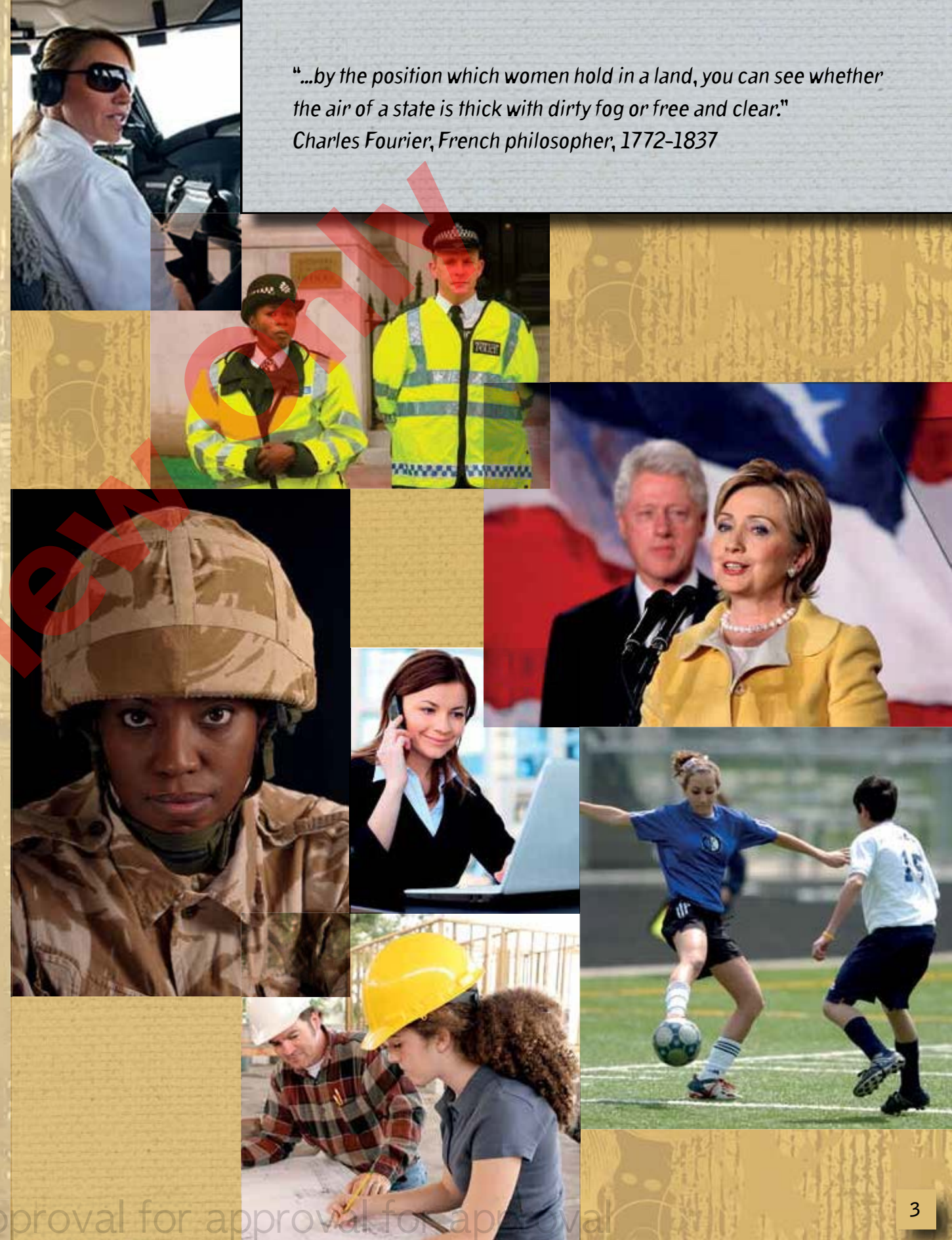
Today, when you go into a shop, it could be either a man or a woman who greets you. Your doctor could be female or male. The chances are that you have the option to go to a school where girls and boys learn together. Everyone can take the same subjects. You might have a female or male teacher. Your principal could be either a woman or a man. Yet life was not always so equal for women and men. Over 100 years ago, this picture would have looked very different. The rights to go to school, to be employed, own land, vote, or even speak freely were long denied to half of the human race – women.

The last 200 years have transformed the way people feel about the rights of all human beings, not just women. The French Revolution and the Declaration of Independence in the United States in the late 1700s showed the need for more equality. Many people started demanding more rights in different areas of life. People of all religions and races should be judged equally. They wanted better rights for all groups of the same social rank, or **classes**. In the 1800s, these ideas of the universal rights of human beings spread and grew.

The twentieth century was a period of great change throughout Western countries. As the new century dawned, people were learning to live in a newly industrialized world. People's lives and roles in society were rapidly changing. Factories, better transport, and better communications impacted on where people lived. There were great changes in the economy and people's living conditions. Developments in science improved people's knowledge of the world. All this changed people's personal values and paved the way for **many new** ideas and reforms. Then, the devastation of two world wars further shook the foundations of Western culture and society.

Amidst this century of upheaval, change, and destruction, women seized the opportunity to stand up against **bias** and prejudice. Through courage and determination, they fought to attain equality with men. It still took years for women to achieve their basic rights – women's rights.

*"...by the position which women hold in a land, you can see whether the air of a state is thick with dirty fog or free and clear."*  
Charles Fourier, French philosopher, 1772-1837



# Women – The Inferior Class

During the 1800s, Western culture was governed by class systems. Wealthy and comfortable people belonged to the upper and middle classes, while poorer people belonged to the working class. All women, however, were considered second-class citizens to men. Many people thought women were inferior to men. Women did not have the same rights, responsibilities, or control of their own lives.

A woman's place was in the home, where she cared for her family and carried out domestic duties, such as cooking and cleaning. As soon as a girl was old enough, her main goal was to marry. Those who did not marry were often pitied and ridiculed. In most places, a woman had no right to own land and her possessions became her husband's property when she married. She had to obey her husband and the law offered her no protection if he was violent. If the marriage broke up, a mother had no rights to look after her children, or **custody**. The custody of any children would always go to the father.

Women faced discrimination because of their class, too. Middle- or upper-class women were expected to be frail, helpless, and ignorant. They were taught the "proper" way to act. They were not meant to travel alone, and to speak in public was considered bad manners. Although many upper-class women received private education, women in general were not thought worthy of education. If girls did go to school, the subjects they were taught focused on home economics. For a long time, women could not study at universities. It was also considered very improper for middle- or upper-class women to work.

"As women, then, the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men – inferior in mental power, in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength."  
From *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character, and Responsibilities*, written by Sarah Stickney Ellis, 1843

Marriage was almost the only way that a woman could survive. If a working-class woman did not marry, she faced poverty. There was only a limited choice of jobs available to women. Working-class women worked only in roles that were considered suitable for a woman. Some did low-paid work at home, such as making clothes. Some became domestic servants. Others helped their fathers or husbands in family businesses or on farms. Some working-class women went to work in factories. Factory jobs were often better paid, but they met with heavier scrutiny. Both men and women frowned upon women who went to work outside the home. They viewed working women as a problem and threat to society.

## School Syllabus for Girls, 1899

By the late 1890s, schools in England taught all children reading, writing, and basic mathematics. However, some subjects were just for girls:

Lesson 1: Laying a table. Preparing dinner.

Lesson 2: How to light a fire.  
Cleaning kitchen flues and grates.

Lesson 3: Preparation for washing day.  
Rules for drying clothes.

Lesson 4: Removing tea stains, fruit stains, etc. Washing and ironing table linen.

Lesson 5: Management of stove.  
Porridge-making.

Lesson 6: Using scraps (remains of joint).  
Stock- and gravy-making. Boiling potatoes.



Young girls in a classroom in the early 1900s

# Changing Ideas

Many women questioned the traditional ideas about marriage and family life, and by the 1800s, their ideas were becoming widespread. The women's rights movement began to gain momentum. Activists formed groups with the goal of ending inequalities in women's lives. They launched a series of actions to achieve a certain goal, or **campaigns**, to break down barriers in education and employment. They fought for the right to go to university and for more work options. They challenged unfair marriage, divorce, and property laws.

Many people were opposed to these campaigns. They found the new ideas shocking and revolutionary. They disagreed with giving women greater freedom and more rights. They believed it would cause society to collapse.

However, some people welcomed the new ideas. Slowly, more female professions began to appear, such as teaching and nursing. However, most of the powerful positions within these areas continued to be held by men. Women were still not allowed to work in many professions. When they married, they had to resign. In addition, women were paid less than men in almost all jobs done by both men and women.



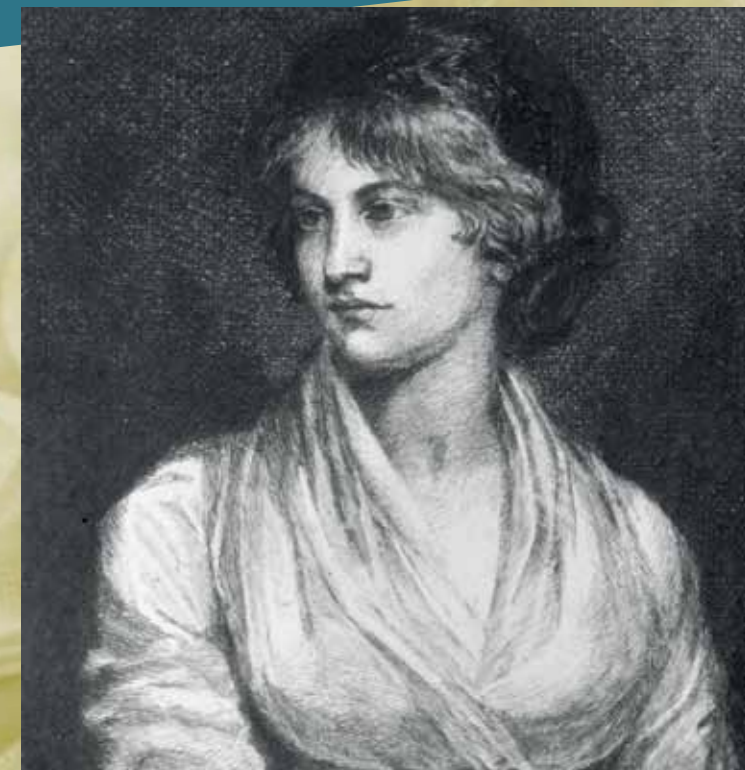
A woman's traditional role was that of a wife and mother.



When a woman married, she had to resign from paid employment.

Today, people believe it is unfair if women are paid less than men. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was expected that women were paid less. Employers believed that men worked harder than women. They also believed that men needed money to support a wife and family. A woman worked only to help her father or husband.

Despite many obstacles, women's rights groups continued to push for change. During the 1890s, people who supported more equal rights for women were first called **feminists**. Many feminists focused their attention on influencing the lawmakers. They pushed for new laws to grant women better legal rights, education, and job opportunities. By 1900, they had achieved many improvements in all of these areas. Yet in most countries, women still lacked the right they needed to make further changes possible – they did not have the right to vote, or **suffrage**.



In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft, an early feminist, wrote the work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.