Discovering Women in Irish History
# Contents

## INTRODUCTION

### UNIT 1 EARLY AND MEDIEVAL
- Teachers’ notes & timeline 11
  1. Prehistoric 13
  2. Celtic 19
  3. Early Christian 25
  4. Women in medieval Ireland 35

### UNIT 2 EARLY MODERN
- Teachers’ notes & timeline 47
  1. The challenge of sources 51
  2. Rural life 55
  3. Wealthy women 63
  4. Family 69
  5. Women’s work 73
  6. Care 77
  7. Emigration 81
  8. Women of 1798 85
  9. Document 91

### UNIT 3 LATER MODERN
- Teachers’ notes & timeline 95
  1. Women and politics 101
  2. Work 113
  3. Family 119
  4. Women and workhouses 121
  5. Women and emigration 125
  6. Women in Northern Ireland after 1969 133
  7. Documents 137

### UNIT 4 EDUCATION
- Teachers’ notes & timeline 143
  1. Primary education in Ireland 147
  2. Girls’ second level education in Ireland 159
  3. University education in Ireland 165
  4. Documents 175

### UNIT 5 VOTE
- Teachers’ notes & timeline 197
  1. Why women could not vote for parliament in the nineteenth century 201
  2. Nineteenth century campaign 205
  3. Twentieth century England 211
  4. Twentieth century Ireland 215
  5. Attitudes towards votes for women 230
  6. A tribunal of inquiry on the tactics of Irish suffragists 235

### UNIT 6 INDEPENDENT IRELAND
- Teachers’ notes & timeline 247
  2. Women at home and at work 257
  3. Mothers and children 265
  4. Women since the 1970s 269
  5. Documents 285

### UNIT 7 FILM RESEARCH EXERCISE

### UNIT 8 INTERNET RESEARCH

### UNIT 9 DEBATE

### UNIT 10 CELEBRATION OF WOMEN

### UNIT 11 QUIZ

### UNIT 12 BIBLIOGRAPHY
# Worksheets

## Early & Medieval Worksheet Page

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EARLY &amp; MEDIEVAL</th>
<th>WORKSHEET</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prehistoric</td>
<td>Mesolithic</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neolithic</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celtic women</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Early Christian</td>
<td>Saints</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Virgin Mary</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Women in medieval Ireland</td>
<td>Vikings</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anglo-Normans</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gaelic society</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Early Modern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EARLY MODERN</th>
<th>WORKSHEET</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The challenge of sources</td>
<td>The challenge of sources</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rural life</td>
<td>Rural life</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wealthy women</td>
<td>Wealthy women</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Women’s work</td>
<td>Women’s work</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Care</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Emigration</td>
<td>Emigration</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Women of 1798</td>
<td>Women of 1798</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document</td>
<td>Luke Gernon describes the women of Ireland, 1620</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Later Modern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LATER MODERN</th>
<th>WORKSHEET</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Women and politics</td>
<td>Women and politics 1800-1918</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women and elections 1918-1923</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Work</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education and training for professions</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trade unions</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Women in workhouses</td>
<td>Women in workhouses</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Women and emigration</td>
<td>Women and emigration</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female orphan emigration scheme</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>Making a match in the 1930s</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Ar aimsir’ i Meiriceá, 1926-1928</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>WORKSHEET</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Primary education in Ireland</td>
<td>Nineteenth century schools</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irish religious orders and congregations of women</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary and the Master</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training for women primary school teachers</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Montessori education in Ireland</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Girls’ second level education in Ireland</td>
<td>Girls’ second level education in Ireland</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. University education in Ireland</td>
<td>Women and the university question</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reform of women’s higher education</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Growth of university education for women</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trinity College campaign</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solution</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Documents

Attitudes revealed in the Parliamentary Debate on the inclusion of girls in the Intermediate Education Act 1878, by newspaper coverage, and by leading members of society 175
Newspaper coverage on inclusion of girls in the Intermediate Bill 183
Overall effects of The Intermediate Education Act on girls' schools 187
Sa Ghaeltacht: Laethanta Scoile i gCill Chaitiarn 193

VOTE

1. Why women could not vote for parliament in the nineteenth century The debate 201
2. Nineteenth century campaign Why did the suffrage campaign develop in the nineteenth century? The campaign begins 205
3. Twentieth century England Twentieth century England 211
4. Twentieth century Ireland Suffrage campaign in twentieth century Ireland The Home Rule Bill 215
Closing stages of the campaign 224
5. Attitudes towards votes for women Revision lesson 229
Attitudes towards votes for women 230
A public meeting 232
A tribunal of inquiry into the tactics of the Irish suffragists: instructions and character profiles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 235

INDEPENDENT IRELAND

2. Women at home and at work Women at home 257
Women at work 260
Protests and progress 1923-1970 262
3. Mothers and children Mothers and children 265
4. Women since the 1970s Political campaign in Ireland 269
Raising awareness 272
Legal challenges 275
Entry to the EU 277
Further developments 1970-2000 279
Documents

Women TDs and Senators 1922-1937 285
Proportion of women in the national parliaments of the European Union member states 286

Film research

Character profiles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 293
Group assignments 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 294
Assessment 296

Internet exercise

Researching the Annals of the Four Masters 2242 BCE – 887 AD 302
Researching the Annals of the Four Masters 1440 – 1456 AD 303
INTRODUCTION

Discovering Women in Irish History is a programme designed to make the history of women in Ireland more accessible, interesting and attractive to Transition Year and other Senior Cycle students in post primary schools in Ireland. It comprises a handbook and CD ROM.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

Handbook
The handbook is an introduction to the programme. It contains a selection of lessons on the theme of women in Irish history. It is really intended to be used in conjunction with the website or CD ROM, but may be used separately, as some of the material is duplicated.

CD ROM
The CD ROM considers women in Irish history under the following headings:

- Early & medieval
- Early modern
- Later modern
- Education
- Vote
- Independent Ireland

Timelines and biographies are provided also.

Each section contains overviews and summaries of research to date on the topic of women in Irish history. The questions that follow cater for a wide variety of approaches and abilities. Activities are suggested, based on methodologies appropriate to Transition Year students. In addition each section contains a selection of documents extracted from both primary and secondary sources. Hints are provided for students hoping to do their own research and comprehensive bibliographies are also provided.

AIMS

The overall aims of the programme are:

- to increase awareness amongst teachers and students of the role of women in Irish history
- to explore the contribution women made to Irish society in the past: the lives they lived, the work they did, how they affected and, in turn, were affected, by developments in politics, economics, religion, social customs and attitudes, emigration, law, medicine and general culture
- to explore how change came about in women’s lives in Ireland
- to promote original research at local and national level in this discipline
- to encourage inquiry, analysis and freedom from bias
- to make existing research more accessible to second level students
- to increase awareness of relevant national and local primary sources
- to provide bibliographies and guides to primary and secondary sources for the history of Irish women
- to develop a variety of methodologies appropriate to the study of history
OBJECTIVES
The objectives of the programme are that students may:

• become more aware of, and interested in, the role of women in Irish history
• consider how change came about in the role of women in Ireland
• become aware of the relevant national and local primary sources
• be empowered to conduct and publish their own research
• reflect on the values and beliefs of the past
• extend and deepen their understanding of contemporary gender relations through inquiry into the past
• approach the study of women in the past with openness, impartiality and freedom from bias

HOW MIGHT THE PROGRAMME BE USED?
The programme is versatile and adaptable and several opportunities arise for using a cross curricular approach.

There are a number of possibilities for teaching Discovering Women in Irish history during Transition Year:

• the programme may be timetabled for the full year, in which case the teacher will select sections from the programme that are appropriate to the class
• one section or, indeed, a selection, may be chosen and timetabled as a module
• a particular theme may be selected and considered in its broader historical context, using traditional history textbooks, such as those the class already studied for Junior Certificate History
• topics may be chosen for research or project work. There are several suggestions throughout the programme.

BACKGROUND
The history of women has emerged as a major field of scholarly inquiry, especially since the 1970s, and an extensive literature has accumulated in Ireland as elsewhere, recognising and documenting the contribution women made to Irish society in the past.

Although the Department of Education and Science has encouraged the study of women’s history at all levels, problems arise in practice, mainly because of the lack of secondary sources appropriate to the post-primary level and the perceived difficulty in detecting and accessing primary sources.

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