

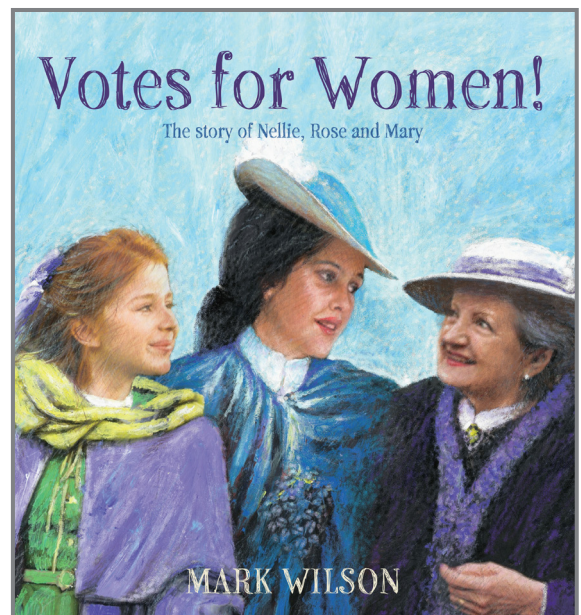
# Votes for Women! The Story of Nellie, Rose and Mary

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR  
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Primary



## SYNOPSIS

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.

## ABOUT THE CREATOR

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. In 1981 he held his first solo exhibition of paintings and drawings.

His books have been shortlisted for Aurealis Awards and CBCA Awards, and in 2007, his book *The Last Tree*, won the 2007 Whitley Award for Children's Literature. 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.

Mark now lives in Frankston, Victoria where he focuses on writing and illustrating children's books, and also picture book presentations and workshops in schools and at literature festivals.

For more information about Mark visit: <http://www.markwilson.com.au/>

## STUDY NOTES

### STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

- What is the difference between a 'suffragist' and a 'suffragette'? Research the difference between these two terms.
- Examine the international context of the movement and how Australia played a role in that.
- 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?

- 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?
- This book offers teachers and students a case study relating to the voting process. Develop a class unit exploring the voting process. As a class, conduct a mock voting process on a particular issue.
- What are the moral values reflected in this picture book text?
- 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 text is written in third person past tense. Rewrite a section of the story as if written in first person by Rose.
- Write a diary entry as if written by Nellie about her feelings for her stepmother Rose.

#### Comprehension

- After reading *Votes for Women!*, answer these comprehension questions about the text:
  - What were some of the women's issues that Rose and Nellie were campaigning about leading up to the voting campaign?
  - What did Mary Lee ask Nellie when she first met her?
  - What year was the Women's Suffrage League formed?
  - What were the dire economic and social conditions in South Australia at that time?
  - What else did Nellie and Rose do to assist women?
  - What method did they use to convince the government to change the legislation?
  - What was the legislation allowing women to vote called and when was it passed?
  - What date did women finally get to cast their votes?
  - What did Nellie unfurl as she and Rose met Mary Lee on the steps of the electoral office in Glenelg?
  - What was so significant about South Australia passing this legislation?

### VISUAL LITERACY

- 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.
- 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?
- 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?
- 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 storytelling in this visual text.
- 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. Invite students to use various techniques to create their own images of Nellie, Rose and Mary.
- What effect does the impressionism of many of the illustrations convey to a reader?