

## **WRITTEN TASK 2 OUTLINE FORM**

Examination session: **May 2019**

**Prescribed Question:** How and why is a social group represented in a particular way?

**Title of text for analysis:** “Should Men Vote?” - speech by Nellie McClung

**Part of the course to which task refers:** Part 1: Language and Power

**Thesis:** McClung debilitates the role of men within society in order to elevate women to liberate themselves from oppression and gain power, recalibrating the balance between the two sexes.

**Key points explaining the focus of the task:**

1. Men are dehumanised and infantilised through McClung’s condescending tone and manipulation of animalistic imagery.
2. Traditional gender roles are circumvented and criticised through the powerful use of irony, assertion and ethos; McClung ultimately empowers women to defy societal expectations, take on dominant roles and shape their own destinies through the mechanism of role reversal.
3. McClung appeals to tradition and nostalgia to reassure men that women still share common values of society, asserting common ground to show women still have capability to maintain the momentum of what men have established. This is achieved through the motif of time, metaphors and appeals to patriotism, establishing security and national identity.

‘Should Men Vote?’ is a speech delivered in 1914 by Canadian suffragette Nellie McClung, the driving force behind women’s suffrage for the province of Manitoba. The primary audience for her speech was men who denied Canadian women the right to vote, and it was delivered to a group of women playing as a ‘mock parliament’ of men campaigning for suffrage. In this speech, McClung debilitates the role of men within society in order to empower women to liberate themselves from oppression and gain power, recalibrating the power dynamics between the two sexes.

McClung characterises men as sub-human through her manipulation of animalistic imagery, devaluing their worth. McClung asserts that men have “the brains of a butterfly, the acumen of a bat, the backbone of a jelly-fish”. These animals are fragile and delicate, and have connotations of being less-advanced life forms, characterising men as primal and lacking intelligence, degrading their role in society. This fortifies her later descriptions of men as “leaderless lambs”, a biblical allusion to the sacrificial nature of lambs, who are slaughtered for the benefit of higher powers. “Leaderless” implies that men yet again lack control, which is emphasised through McClung’s condescending tone: “sitting in your high chair, drumming on a tin plate”. McClung infantilizes men by comparing them to infants, as babies are seen as helpless, innocent and in need of supervision, which exposes men’s vulnerability and strips their individuality, compelling the audience to debilitate men’s competence in society. Ultimately, this forces McClung’s audience to build a degrading picture of men in their minds and disempowers men as a social group. Thus, McClung dehumanises and devalues men, degrading their position within society.

McClung’s intention for devaluing men is to elevate women, which she achieves by circumventing and criticising traditional gender roles placed upon women as a social group. McClung reverses aphorisms for female domestic roles, distorting them to apply to men - “man’s place is to provide for his family [...] politics would unsettle our men,” effectively exploiting irony. By turning men’s patronisation and platitudes around to face them, McClung empowers her fellow suffragettes to reclaim the injustices imposed on her gender by men. This subversion

of expectations and role reversal reveals the wit and mental prowess women possess, which juxtaposes with McClung's previous characterisations of men as "brainless". McClung also establishes herself as a figurehead by referring to herself as "the chosen representative of the people", increasing her ethos and credibility as a speaker. Declaring herself as a spokesperson of the masses elevates her position within society, paralleling the traditionally masculine dominant position of power and leadership. This legitimises her empowerment of her fellow women and emboldens her audience to rebalance their position in society, reminding them not to underestimate women's potential to embody assertive roles. McClung subverts the expectation that women are powerless and overly-emotional through assertion, creating a binary opposition between emotion and power: "I must not lose my temper [...] "I have studied self-control [...] in order that I may be a leader", which allows her to embody the strength and emotional control of typical 'male' leaders, constructing the image that women can be decisive, taking dominant roles in society to rebalance their destinies. Despite this power, the modal verb "may" shows women still need to be given permission to enact change in society, connecting to the cultural context of this speech where society still presented barriers to female liberation. Finally, McClung unifies the collective ability of women by asserting that "women are the best [...] we always endeavour to get the greatest number of votes". The superlative "the best" combined with the adverb "always" and the collective pronoun "we" compels the audience to associate the image of women in power with high standards, consistency and reliability. This is a clear juxtaposition with the traditionally submissive image of women prevalent during the 1900s. Thus, McClung empowers women to defy societal expectations and regain their own destinies through the mechanism of role reversal.

McClung appeals to tradition to assert and reassure men that women still share common values of society. The motif of time, seen in "the men we have before us today" and "time and again" reassures McClung's wider audience of the power women have to maintain the momentum of societal development set by men. McClung includes "time and again" as an indication of the stagnant beliefs traditionally held by society, appealing to her Western audience, implying that what she advocates for today is for the better of the future. This enforces

McClung's credibility towards the audience, as well as allowing her to portray women in a positive, productive light. McClung refers to Canada as a "fair, flower-decked land", cementing a glittering generality and glamorising Canada. The use of the adjectives "fair" and "flower-decked" depict Canada as a stable, healthy state, appealing to her audience's patriotism by invoking the idea that women also share this national identity, equating women with men in the control they exude over matters pertaining to governance and clearly demonstrating her influential power. McClung continues to draw on her audience's national identity using the metaphor of Canada as a "good ship" coming "safely into port, with the same old skipper on the bridge". The phrase "same old" has connotations of familiarity and safety, reassuring her audience that women have the power to maintain the stability of the country. The word "port" also implies an affirmed final destination for the ship, establishing a refuge and a goal for the country's future. Hence, McClung appeals to tradition and security by creating balance and establishing the role of women as assured and authoritative.

In conclusion, McClung simultaneously disempowers men by characterising them as incompetent and ignorant, while elevating the status of women by portraying them as assertive, dominant and able to uphold the stability of a country. This serves the ultimate purpose of recalibrating her audience's rigid perceptions of females in 1900s Canada, achieving balance between the two sexes and memorialising the ability of language to strip and reinstate power amongst social groups.

Word Count: 996

## Works Cited

McClung, Nellie. "Should Men Vote?" Leaping Off the Page, 1915,  
[www.l-ruth-carter.com/blog/should-men-vote](http://www.l-ruth-carter.com/blog/should-men-vote).

## APPENDIX A

### Should Men Vote

By Nellie McClung

Gentlemen of the Delegation, I am glad to see you. Glad to see you—come any time, and ask for anything you like. We like delegations—and I congratulate this delegation on their splendid, gentlemanly manners. If the men in England had come before their Parliament with the frank courtesy you have shown, they might still have been enjoying the privilege of meeting their representatives in this friendly way.

But, gentlemen, you are your own answer to the question; you are the product of an age which has not seen fit to bestow the gift you ask, and who can say that you are not splendid specimens of mankind? No! No! any system which can produce the virile, splendid type of men we have before us today, is good enough for me, and if it is good enough for me—it is good enough for anybody.

But my dear young friends, I am convinced you do not know what you're asking me to do; you do not know what you ask. You have not thought of it, of course, with the natural thoughtlessness of your sex. You ask for something which may disrupt the whole course of civilization. Man's place is to provide for his family, a hard enough task in these strenuous days. We hear of women leaving home, and we hear it with deepest sorrow. Do you know why women leave home? There is a reason. Home is not made sufficiently attractive. Would letting politics enter the home help matters? Ah no! Politics would unsettle our men. Unsettled men mean unsettled bills—unsettled bills mean broken homes—broken vows—and then divorce.

Man has a higher destiny than politics! What is home without a bank account? The man who pays the grocer rules the world. Shall I call men away from the useful plow and harrow, to talk loud on street corners about things which do not concern them? Ah, no, I love the farm and the hallowed associations—the dear old farm, with the drowsy tinkle of cowbells at eventide. There I see my father's kindly smile so full of blessing, hardworking, rough-handed man he was, maybe, but able to look the whole world in the face.... You ask me to change all this.

I am the chosen representative of the people, elected to the highest office this fair land has to offer. I must guard well its interests. No upsetting influence must mar our peaceful firesides. Do you never read, gentlemen? Do you not know of the disgraceful happenings in countries cursed by manhood suffrage? Do you not know the fearful odium into which the polls have fallen—is it possible you do not know the origin of that offensive word "Poll-cat", do you not know that men are creatures of habit—give them an inch—and they will steal the whole sub-division, and

although it is quite true, as you say, the polls are only open once in four years—when men once get the habit—who knows where it will end—it is hard enough to keep them at home now! No, history is full of unhappy examples of men in public life; Nero, Herod, King John—you ask me to set these names before your young people. Politics has a blighting, demoralizing influence on men. It dominates them, pursues them even after their earthly career is over. Time and again it has been proven that men came back and voted—even after they were dead.

So you ask me to disturb the sacred calm of our cemeteries? We are doing very well just as we are, very well indeed. Women are the best students of economy. Every woman is a student of political economy. We look very closely at every dollar of public money, to see if we couldn't make a better use of it ourselves, before we spend it. We run our elections as cheaply as they are run anywhere. We always endeavour to get the greatest number of votes for the least possible amount of money. That is political economy.

You think you can instruct a person older than yourself, do you—you, with the brains of a butterfly, the acumen of a bat; the backbone of a jelly-fish. You can tell me something, can you? I was managing governments when you were sitting in your high chair, drumming on a tin plate with a spoon. You dare to tell me how a government should be conducted?

But I must not lose my temper and I never do—never—except when I feel like it—and am pretty sure I can get away with it. I have studied self-control, as you all know—I have had to, in order that I may be a leader. If it were not for this fatal modesty, which on more than one occasion has almost blighted my political career, I would say I believe I have been a leader, a factor in building up this fair province; I would say that I believe I have written my name large across the face of this province.

But gentlemen, I am still of the opinion, even after listening to your cleverly worded speeches, that I will go on just as I have been doing, without the help you so generously offer. My wish for this fair, flower-decked land is that I may long be spared to guide its destiny in world affairs. I know there is no one but me—I tremble when I think of what might happen to these leaderless lambs—but I will go forward confidently, hoping that the good ship may come safely into port, with the same old skipper on the bridge. We are not worrying about the coming election, as you may think. We rest in confidence of the result, and will proudly unfurl, as we have these many years, the same old banner of the grand old party that had gone down many times to disgrace, but thank God, never to defeat.