



LADIES IN THE HOUSE
PODCAST SERIES

MOAD

Museum of Australian Democracy
at Old Parliament House



LADIES IN THE HOUSE EPISODE 6: SUSAN RYAN

Lesson Plan

Learning Intention:

Understand the experiences of women in the workplace in the 1970s and 1980s.

Success Criteria:

Create a bill to present to parliament about creating more equality in women's wages in the area of sport.

Before Listening:

Activity One:

Pre-Listening
Vocabulary

Write up or project the
following words on the board:

- public service
- insurmountable
- discrimination
- opposition party
- An Act
- A Bill



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Activity

One:

Pre-Listening Vocabulary

In groups ask the students if they can put the words into one of the 4 categories.

- Don't know it at all
- Have seen or heard, but don't know the meaning
- I think I know the meaning
- I know the meaning and can explain it

If any of the students are in the 3rd or 4th category, see if they can explain it to the people in your group or to the class.

Share the following definitions for the vocabulary.

Definitions:

- **Public service jobs** are those jobs that work for the government. For example; in education, the council, government branches, the defence force, the tax office etc.
- A problem that is **insurmountable** is so great that it cannot be dealt with successfully
- **Discrimination** is the practice of treating one person or group of people less fairly or less well than other people or groups.
- The **opposition party** is the political party that is not in power at the time.



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Activity One:

Pre-Listening
Vocabulary

- An Act is a law that has been agreed on by both houses of parliament and been given approval by the Governor General so it will now become an official law.
- A bill is a proposed law or legislation that is under consideration by politicians to become a law.

Activity Two:

Before listening
discussion
questions

1. List all of the kinds of jobs that a woman can do in our modern-day society.
2. Are there any restrictions for women wanting to do particular jobs?

After Listening:

Activity Three:

After listening
reflection
questions

1. List some of the restrictions that women had in society in the 1970s and 1980s.
2. What were the three main points of the Sex Discrimination Act of 1984?
3. What improvements did Susan Ryan make to the education system?



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Activity Four:

Create a bill to propose to Parliament.

Ensure that before you begin that your students know the difference between a bill and an Act.

The salaries for male and female sport players vary greatly. For example, the Average male player in the AFL receives more than \$260 000 a year with some players earning over a million dollars in a year.

However, the highest paid woman in the AFLW, receives only \$36 000. It is important to note that the Australian minimum wage is \$39 000.

This means that while male athletes can dedicate their life to training and focusing on their craft, female athletes must have a second job to support themselves and their family and are unable to dedicate as much time to training and perfecting their craft.



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Activity Four:

Create a bill to propose to Parliament.

- Imagine you are politicians in political party, and you want to propose a bill that raises the wages of female athletes to above the minimum wage, (or more).
- Work in a group to create a new bill to present to parliament.
- What would you call the Act?
- What would be the main points of your Act?
- Come up with 3-5 arguments as to why this bill should be passed into law.
- Think about counter arguments that the opposition party might come up with to reject your new bill. Think of ways to defend your bill from these arguments.



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Episode Transcript:

Hi, this is Kelly Chase and you are listening to Season 2 of a Museum of Australian Democracy and History Detective Collaboration: Ladies in the House. In this 3-part series we are going to celebrate the lives of three incredible women and how they contributed to Australian democracy.

In this episode I would like to introduce you to Susan Ryan.

1975 was the year that the two Australian territories, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory finally got representation in the Senate. And one of the first elected senators for the ACT was Susan Ryan, and she certainly made an impact! She helped to pass laws in Australia that protected women against workplace discrimination. But it wasn't just discrimination against women that she fought for, she cared deeply about education. Later in her career, she also held the positions of both the age discrimination and the disability discrimination commissioner.

But first let's pop in our time machine and see what life was like for women in the 1960s and 70s. You see, women's jobs were not very secure, if a woman were to get married, she would get fired from her job. It was only in 1966 that a law was introduced that married women in the **public service** could keep their jobs. And, it was not until 1980 that married female Police Officers in the New South Wales Police Force were allowed to keep their jobs. Women would often keep their marriages a secret, just so they could keep their jobs.

Additionally, landlords would often refuse to rent homes to single mothers. Shockingly, it was not until 1983 that a woman could apply for a passport without needing her husband's permission. And if a woman were to get pregnant, it was very likely that she would lose her job. Let's just say that there were not a lot of opportunities for women to be anything other than a wife and mother and there were **insurmountable** obstacles if she did try to have a career.

In the 1970s Susan Ryan began attending feminist meetings, but she wanted to do more than just talk about these inequalities. She wanted to make a change from the inside. She decided to go to the place where the laws are made. The Senate. This is where the amazing work of the newly elected feminist Senator Susan Ryan came in. She was a member of the Australian Labor Party.



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Ryan believed strongly in equality for women, in her own words, “I felt from the youngest possible age that it was unfair, intolerable really, that females were regarded as second-class citizens.” Susan Ryan played an instrumental role in introducing in laws that made discrimination based on gender illegal. The first of these was called the Sex Discrimination Act of 1984. The Act had three main points. Firstly, it made it unlawful to discriminate against you because of your gender, marital status, pregnancy or your potential to become pregnant. Secondly, the Act made it illegal to dismiss you from your job because of your family responsibilities. And finally, it made sexual harassment against the law. Susan Ryan regarded this achievement as, “Probably the most useful thing I’ve done in my life.”

However, bringing in this law was not easy. It took over a year from when she first introduced the bill to when it finally went through, and in the year leading up to the Act passing, the opposition party petitioned against the bill almost every day that parliament sat. One of these petitions said that the Act would undermine the traditional family structure of our nation. But Susan Ryan continued to fight, and in August 1984 the Act was eventually passed.

Another enormous achievement that she had was in her role as the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, becoming the first female federal Labor Cabinet Member. She believed firmly that education was a tool for social justice. When she began the job as Education Minister in 1983 only 3 in 10 students graduated high school, and she made it her mission to change those statistics. Of course, the majority of those students dropping out of school were young women. By the time that the Labor Party left office, 8 out of 10 students were staying in school until Year 12.

Susan Ryan witnessed the restrictions that women had faced in society and decided to become a part of the political system that made the laws, so she could help to rewrite these laws to make a fairer and more just world for women. What I want you to think about today is, next time you are complaining about an unjust issue, stop and think about what genuine action you can take to help to try and change that issue?

This is Kelly Chase, on the case.
See you next time!



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