



LADIES IN THE HOUSE
PODCAST SERIES

MOAD

Museum of Australian Democracy
at Old Parliament House



LADIES IN THE HOUSE EPISODE 8: ENID LYONS

Lesson Plan

Learning Intention:

Understand the journey of the first female Australian member of the House of Representatives.

Success Criteria:

Research current Australian female members in the House of Representatives and examine their First Speech. Reflect on five issues that are important to you.

Before Listening:

Activity One:

Pre-Listening
Vocabulary

Write up or project the
following words on the board:

- superannuation
- widow's pension
- House of Representatives
- preferential voting
- social security



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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:

- **Superannuation** - money which people pay regularly into a special fund so that when they retire from their job they will receive money regularly as a pension.
- **Widow's pension** - a state benefit paid to a widow.
- **House of Representatives** - also known as the lower house. Members of the House are elected by the people of Australia.
- **Preferential voting** - a system of voting in which the electors signify their choices, as of candidates, in order of preference.



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Activity

One:

Pre-Listening
Vocabulary

- **Social security** - a system under which a government pays money regularly to certain groups of people, for example people who are sick, are unemployed, or those who have no other income.

Activity

Two:

Before listening
discussion
questions

1. In what situations do people need to make a speech in life?
2. Why do you think it might be an important skill to write a persuasive speech?
3. What qualities make for a good persuasive speech?

After Listening:

Activity

Three:

After listening
reflection
questions

1. Who was Enid Lyons married to?
2. How did she help him in his political career?
3. What obstacles did she face in her life and career?



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Activity Four:

Research a
current woman
in the House
of
Representatives.

Research a current female member of parliament in the House of Representatives.

Hint: Google “Women in the House of Representatives Australia” and you will find a link to the aph.gov.au website that lists the women in parliament.

- Select one of these women and find out the following information:
Political Party, Qualifications and job before parliament.
- Look up their First Speech and read through the transcript- links to these speeches can be found on the aph.gov.au website
- What are 5 main issues that are discussed in their speech?
- Do you agree or disagree with their political ideology?



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Episode Transcript:

Hi, this is Kelly Chase and you are listening to Season 3 of a Museum of Australian Democracy and History Detective Collaboration: Ladies in the House. In this 4-part series we are going to celebrate the lives of four incredible women and how they contributed to Australian democracy.

Today I would like to introduce you a remarkable woman—the first woman to ever be elected into the House of Representatives—Dame Enid Lyons. In 1943 she was sworn in on the very same day that Dame Dorothy Tangney was sworn in as the first woman in the Senate. You can hear Dorothy Tangney’s story in the previous episode.

Now, if you think the name Lyons is familiar, it is because her husband was a prominent politician Joseph Lyons, so prominent in fact that he was the Premier of Tasmania and then he moved to federal politics and became the 10th Prime Minister of Australia. Joseph Lyons was Prime Minister from 1932 until he died from a heart attack while in office in 1939.

Joseph and Enid’s courtship was a little unconventional for the time, and even by our standards today. You see when they first met, Enid was only 15 years old, and Joe was 18 years older than her. Needless to say, Enid’s mother was not happy about this relationship and forbid them from marrying until Enid was 17 years old. But they waited it out, and were married when she was 17 and he was 35. They were happily married for the rest of his life during which time Enid had 12 children.

One of the interests that first drew Enid and Joe together was their love of politics. Enid was a passionate and talented speech writer; in fact, she wrote many speeches for her husband during his political career. However, Enid had politics in her blood and her husband was supportive of her political ambitions and encouraged her to write speeches herself and even run for an election. So, in 1925 she stood as a candidate in the Tasmanian elections. Interestingly, her own mother also ran in the same election, but in a different seat. Unfortunately, Enid lost the election by 60 votes.



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When her husband died in 1939, she was only 41 years old and had 11 children to support. This was a time when superannuation funds for politicians didn't exist and there was very little by way of widow's pensions. The government made a suggestion that she be given some money to support her 11 children. This resulted in an uproar in both the parliament and media, to the point that Enid was sent hate mail and death threats.

This did not deter her, four years later- with encouragement from her daughter- she decided to run for a seat in the House of Representatives and she campaigned extremely hard. However, it was not an immediate victory; the voting count was very close and she won the seat on preferential votes. The preferential voting system is where, on the ballot paper voters can write who their second, third, fourth and fifth choices are, and if their first preference is not elected, their vote will go to their second choice and so on. In August of 1943, while she was ironing and listening to the radio, it was announced that she had become the first ever woman to be elected into the House of Representatives.

In her first speech to parliament, she addressed many of the issues that she wanted to focus on as a politician. Some of those issues were, the declining birth rate, social security, inadequate housing, and the importance of implementing post-war policies. Throughout her political career she continued to address issues that directly impacted women and families such as discrimination against married women in the workforce, widow's pensions, maternity allowances and child support amongst many other concerns.

After her career in politics, Enid published 4 books, was a newspaper columnist, and she remained active in public life, promoting family and women's issues and she became the commissioner for the ABC. In 1980 she was granted an Order of Australia. The Order of Australia is an award that recognises Australians who have demonstrated outstanding service or exceptional achievement. She passed away one year later, leaving behind not only a trailblazing legacy of political and social achievements; from her 11 children, she also left behind more than 100 descendants. What I would like you to think about today is, what are the issues happening in society that you feel strongly about? And what platforms do we have in the modern age to spread a message of change?

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