

Atatürk and Women's Rights in Turkey Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

Did Atatürk's reforms actually improve the status of women in Turkey?

Materials:

- PowerPoint
- Copies of Documents A-E
- Copies of Guiding Questions

Note: This lesson may take multiple class periods.

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction: Use the PowerPoint to provide background on Mustafa Kemal "Atatürk" and the reforms he carried out in Turkey from 1923-1938.
 - a. Slide 1: Title Slide. Introduce the day's lesson
 - b. Slide 2: Center of the Ottoman Empire. *Present-day Turkey was at the center of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was led by its Sultan, who was also Caliph, the religious leader of all of Islam.*
 - c. Slide 3: Laws and social norms: *Laws and social norms discriminated against women, who were subjected to*
 - *Forced and early marriages (as young as age 9 for girls)*
 - *Limited rights within marriage*
 - *Polygyny*
 - *Strict rules about dress*
 - *No educational opportunities*
 - *No political rights*
 - *Unpaid or very low-paid work*
 - d. Slide 4: The Creation of Turkey. *The Ottoman Empire along with Germany and Austria-Hungary lost WWI.*
 - *After the war, Greece, Italy, France, Great Britain and others moved to take land from what is now Turkey. As a result, it lost most of its remaining lands in the Arab world.*
 - e. Slide 5: The Creation of Turkey
 - *After the Ottoman Empire was split, Turks fought to create the state of Turkey.*
 - *Many Turks admired General Mustafa Kemal for his successes in World War I.*
 - *In 1919, he called on Turks to resist foreign efforts to divide up Turkey.*
 - *He led Turkey in the War of Independence (1919-1923).*
 - *It ended with Turkey winning its independence.*
 - *Mustafa Kemal took the title "Atatürk," which means "Father Turk."*

- f. Slide 6: Atatürk's Reforms. *Atatürk led Turkey through an era of major reform during his presidency from 1923 to his death in 1938. He was the first president of Turkey.*
- *In constructing the Turkish state, Atatürk looked towards the power and prosperity of the West and considered the failures of the Ottoman Empire. He and other Turkish reformers decided that Westernizing Turkish society, both culturally and politically, was necessary in order for Turkey to become a modern nation-state.*
 - *To this end, Atatürk stressed education, industrial development, and limits on the role of Islam in Turkish society.*
 - *In 1924, Atatürk abolished the office of Caliph.*
 - *Atatürk set up an elected parliament, but kept nearly all political power to himself. Despite efforts of his to transition to a multiparty democracy, he banned parties who criticized him or who he disagreed with, including the Turkish Women's Association.*
 - *He introduced Western legal codes, calendar, and alphabet, by replacing the Arabic script with a Latin one. He required men to adopt Western styles of dress, and banned women from wearing religious veils.*
- g. Slide 7: Reforms for Women. *For decades, the Turkish women's movement had demanded political rights for women. Reforms for women fit with Atatürk's goal of creating a secular, united, and modern Turkish state.*
- *Polygamy was banned.*
 - *Gave women more rights to divorce and inherit property.*
 - *Women were granted the right to vote and run for public office in 1934.*
 - *Encouraged women's involvement in public life.*
 - *Promoted education for girls.*
 - *Ended gender segregation in many public areas.*
 - *Men were still the legal heads of households. By law, women needed the head of household's position to travel abroad.*
- h. Slide 8: Central Historical Question. *Although Atatürk gave women more legal rights, we are going to consider the actual impact of these reforms on women's status in society. Explain that students' main task will be to answer the lesson's Central Historical Question: Did Atatürk's reforms actually improve the status of women in Turkey?*
2. Hand out Document A. If students are unfamiliar with secondary sources, tell them secondary sources are accounts of the past based on primary sources. They are not the primary source evidence itself. Textbooks are one kind of secondary source. Then explain that they will read a secondary source passage by an author from the time of Atatürk.
- a. In pairs, students read the passage and answer the Guiding Questions.

- b. Share out and discuss responses. Explain to students that this account reflects how women's status under Atatürk's rule has often been portrayed. Tell students that they will be examining documents to determine whether this portrayal is accurate.
 3. Hand out Documents B and C. Explain that these two sources are both passages from Atatürk in 1923. Point out that they are from speeches he gave at the very start of his rule over an independent Turkey.
 - a. In pairs, students read these documents and answer the Guiding Questions for each.
 - b. Share out and discuss responses.
 - c. Ask students: *Do these two documents back up the views expressed in the secondary source passage? Why or why not?*
 4. Hand out Documents D and E. Explain that these two sources are both from Turkish women who believe strongly in equal rights for women. The second source was written after Atatürk's rule.
 - a. In pairs, students read these documents and answer the Guiding Questions for each.
 - b. Share out and discuss responses.
 - c. Ask students: *Do these two documents back up the views expressed in the secondary source passage? Why or why not?*
 5. Discussion. Ask students as a group to discuss the following:

Based on the evidence in all the sources, what was the role of women in Turkey during Atatürk's rule?
 6. Final Claims: Have students make a final claim regarding the Central Historical Question using evidence from the documents.
-

Citations:

Document A

Henry Elisha Allen, *The Turkish Transformation: A Study in Social and Religious Development*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935, pp. 136-37.

Document B & C

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in *Atatürk, Speeches and Statements, II*. Retrieved from <https://www.ktb.gov.tr/EN-104191/turkish-women.html>

Document D

Sabiha Sertel, "'If You Ask Me': Sabiha Sertel's Advice Column, Gender Equity, and Social Engineering in the Early Turkish Republic," Ada Holland Shissler, *Journal of Middle East*

Women's Studies, Vol. 3, No. 2 Spring 2007, p, 18.

Document E

Şirin Tekeli as quoted in "Turkish Women, A Century of Change," by Katharina Knaus, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Spring, 2007, p. 56.