

# The War-Workers' Alphabet

This poem was written to describe the kinds of jobs that women were doing during WW1.

Some of the language is quite old-fashioned! You may need a dictionary, encyclopaedia or the internet to help you understand it.

## Activity 1: Understanding the Language

1. Read the poem on the next page. Try to work out what each job might be.
2. Underline or highlight any jobs or words that you don't understand.
3. Use a dictionary, encyclopaedia or the internet to research the meanings.
4. Read the poem again when you know what most of the words mean. Don't worry if there are one or two that are still unclear.



## Activity 2: Understanding the Poem

- What do you think the poet means by "bifurcated garments" in line 4?
- Why do you think the poet uses clothes to talk about women's jobs?
- Do you think the poem was written by a man or a woman? Why?
- Do you think doing "men's work" good or bad for women? Why?
- Before the end of the war in 1918, women were not allowed to vote in Government Elections as men were. Do you think the war might have helped women to get the vote?
- If you were going to write a poem like this today, what would you change?

## Activity 3: Write your own poem

Individually, in groups or as a class, rewrite the poem using stronger, positive language to describe women's contributions to the war.

# The War-Workers' Alphabet

Here in this list from A to Z  
Women's activities may be read.

One thing in common their work has, which is  
The prevalent habit of wearing - bifurcated  
garments

A is an Ambulance helper; she  
Doesn't want skirts to hamper her knee.

B is a bus girl. What she wears  
Is easily seen as she goes upstairs.

C is a commissionaire. You'll find  
She wears whatever her firm's designed.

D is the Driver working with A  
She says long skirts are in the way.

Engine cleaning engager E  
She's quite a man at the job, you see.

The Farm girl doesn't do things by halves,  
She isn't shy about cows - or calves.

The Gardener, busy with bulbs and roots  
Doesn't endeavour to hide her boots.

H is a horse-breaker, and of course  
You don't want skirts when you straddle a  
horse.

I is an inspector of tickets, yes  
This is a case where one has to guess.

J is a jockey, though I don't know  
If girls are used when the real ones go.

K, who's a knitter, wears skirts; mayhap  
Because when you're knitting you need a lap.

The Lift girl also, I confess  
Is another who seems to keep her dress.  
M makes Munitions quite a lot

She doesn't trouble with skirts a jot.

Nurses of course must figure for N  
But they never need to dress like men.

O is an Officer, neat and smart,  
Dressing as near as she can to the part.

P is a postwoman, haven't you guessed  
What the stripe down her skirt is meant to  
suggest?

Q's QM and hers don't show  
But she certainly wears puttees below.

R is a railway carriage cleaner  
She's very manlike in demeanour.

S is a Shepherdess, Little Bo Peep  
Says skirts are not wanted when tending the  
sheep

T is a Telegraph girl, this sort  
Already has skirts sufficiently short

Umbrella holding is U's job, but she  
Has already appeared above as C

V is a Van driver, driving a van  
Doing his job, why not dress like a man?

Window cleaning occupies W  
Skirts up ladders always trouble you

X is Policewoman X of course  
A useful addition to the force

Y's in the Yeomanry. Didn't you know,  
That nowadays women have learned how to  
Yeo?

Z brings us down to the end of this list.  
Fill in the space with the ones we have  
missed.

# The WAR-WORKERS ALPHABET

Here in this list from A to Z  
Women's activities may be read.  
One thing in common their work has, which is  
The prevalent habit of wearing - bifurcated garments.

**A** is an Ambulance helper. She  
Doesn't want skirts to hamper her knee.

**B** is a Bus girl. What she wears  
Is easily seen as she goes up stairs.

**C** is a Commissionaire. You'll find  
She wears whatever her firm's designed.

**D** is the Driver working with A.  
She says long skirts are in the way.

**E** is the Engine-cleaning engager E.  
She's quite a man at the job, you see.

The Farm girl doesn't do things by halves,  
She isn't shy about cows - or calves.

The Gardener, busy with bulbs and roots,  
Doesn't endeavour to hide her boots.

**H** is a Horse Breaker, and of course  
You don't want skirts when you  
Straddle a horse.

**I** is an Inspector of Tickets. Yes,  
This is a case where one has to guess.

**J** is a Jockey, though I don't know  
If girls are used when the real ones go.

**K** who's a Knitter, wears skirts. Mayhap  
Because when you're knitting you  
Need a lap.

The Lift girl also, I confess,  
Is another who seems to keep her dress.

**M** makes Munitions, quite a lot.  
She doesn't trouble with skirts a jot.

**N** is a Nurse, of course, must figure for N,  
But they never need to dress like men.

**O** is an Officer, neat and smart,  
Dressing as near as she can to the part.

**P** is a Postwoman. Haven't you guessed  
What the stripe down her skirt is  
meant to suggest?

**Q** is a Q.M. and hers don't show,  
But she certainly wears puttees below.

**R** is a Railway-carriage cleaner:  
She's very manlike in demeanour.

**S** is a Shepherdess. Little Bopseep  
Says skirts are not wanted when  
tending the sheep.

**T** is a Telegraph girl. This sort  
Already has skirts sufficiently short.

Umbrella holding is U's job, but she  
Has already appeared above as C.

**V** is a Van driver driving a van.  
Doing his job, why not dress like a man?

Window cleaning occupier W.  
Skirts up a ladder always trouble you.

**X** is Police woman X, of course.  
A useful addition to the force.

**Y** is in the Yeomanry.  
Didn't you know  
That nowadays women  
have learnt to yeeo?

**Z** brings us down  
to the end of the list.  
Fill up this space with  
The ones we have missed.

**N** 

**O** 

**P** 

**Q** 

**R** 

**S** 

**T** 

**V** 

**X** 

**Z** 

**Y** 

**W** 

**U** 

**H** 

**F** 

**D** 

**C** 

**A** 

**M** 

**L** 

**K** 

**J** 

**I** 

**G** 

**E** 

**B** 