

Have you ever heard about International Women's Day? Why do we need a day to celebrate just half the inhabitants of our planet? Find out about this special day by reading the text below.

What is International Women's Day?

International Women's Day takes place every year on 8 March to celebrate the achievements of women all over the world. It started with a protest that took place in New York City in 1908 where women went out onto the streets to demand the right to vote, shorter working hours and better pay. Since then it has taken many forms and today it's a global event that is supported by lots of charities, NGOs, governments and academic institutions. In some countries March 8 is an official holiday, but in most it's a normal working day.

Why do we need an International Women's Day?

In today's world it may appear that women have all the same opportunities as men. If you watch the news you will see women astronauts, women prime ministers and women leaders in business. However, if you look at the statistics you realise there's still a long way to go. The BBC did a report a few years ago that showed that in the UK women occupied only 30.9% of the most senior positions across a range of jobs in areas like politics, business and policing. So, although progress has been made since 1908, there is still a lot to do before we see an equal number of men and women in the top jobs and receiving equal pay.

How is IWD celebrated in the UK?

A lot of special events take place in towns and cities all over the UK to celebrate International Women's Day. There are exhibitions, theatre shows, talks, discussions, walking tours, films, workshops, fun runs and so much more. All the events are designed to celebrate the role of women in society and to make us all take a step back and think about the progress that has been made, but also about the changes that still need to take place to ensure the world is a fair and equal place for all its citizens. To find out what is happening in your country have a look on the events page of the International Women's Day website.

Think globally and act locally

The message for women around the world is to 'think globally and act locally'. This means to learn about some of the key issues that women face around the world and then to try to take action close to home. Emma Watson, the actress who played Hermione in the Harry Potter films, is a great example of someone who is doing something to raise awareness about the issues that women face globally. She has launched a campaign called HeForShe, which aims to get people talking at all levels about gender equality. The aim is to create a 'gender-equal world'. The HeForShe campaign makes it very clear that it's the role of men as well as women to make changes in all areas of their lives, both at work and in the family, to help make this possible. With the support of UN Women, the United Nations organisation to support women, Emma's campaign is surely going to make a big impact.

The future

Can you imagine a future where there's no need at all to even have an International Women's Day? Where there is total equality for men and women? Hmm ... something to think about but perhaps in your lifetime this could happen!?

International Women's Day: www.internationalwomensday.com

UNWomen: www.unwomen.org

HeForShe: www.heforshe.org

www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglishteens