

YOUNG WOMEN SAY NO



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Summary

In this session, students will look at different instances of protests led by young women which have challenged gendered discrimination and power imbalances. It draws on the example of 16 year old suffragette Dora Thewlis as well as the contemporary #MeToo movement to examine the different means people have used to draw attention to, and effect change around, gendered inequality.

Learning objectives

- To think critically about the different tactics of contemporary campaigns led by young women and those which existed historically.
- To discuss the importance of gender equality, and the different ways in which women's oppression can manifest.
- To demonstrate and challenge the ways that young women are criticised for their attempts to change the world for the better.

United Nations Sustainable Development Links

- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
- Reduced Inequality

Curriculum Links

- GCSE History- AQA paper 'Power and the People'
- Citizenship- KS3 and KS4

British Council Core Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Creativity and Imagination
- Collaboration and Communication
- Enterprise



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Note to educators

This session will address issues that include gendered violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. Some of your students may have experienced/ be experiencing these issues first-hand or else are close to someone who is. We recommend looking at the following resources for guidance on addressing these topics in an educational environment.

End Violence Against Women Schools Guide:

<https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/EVAW-Coalition-Schools-Guide.pdf>

Against Violence and Abuse Digital Prevention Platform (in particular, the 'toolkit' section, and the list of support services which can be signposted to students).

<http://www.preventionplatform.co.uk>

Against Violence and Abuse also host a safeguarding e-learning resource which may be of use.

http://www.preventionplatform.co.uk/media/course/index.html#slide/0_0



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Activity One: Dora Thewlis, the 'Baby Suffragette'

Requirements: Slides 2-4, worksheet source 1 and the source 1 questions

Preparation: Ensure that you have copies of the worksheet printed for all students

- Run through slides 2-4 which examine the young suffragette, Dora Thewlis, and give students a brief introduction to the WSPU and their tactics. The notes below provide more information which can be used during the slideshow.
- Ask students to read through the extracts from newspaper articles and letters regarding Dora's arrest (source 1 on the worksheet), and to discuss the questions listed beneath it in pairs.
- After students have discussed in their pairs, draw the group back together to compare answers.

Slide 2:

- In 1907, Dora Thewlis was just 16. She was born and raised in Huddersfield, and worked long hours as a weaver in a mill. Her parents were both members of trade unions and socialist groups, and she had been encouraged to read and be interested in politics from a young age. She joined the local branch of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a political group founded in 1903 that aimed to win the right to vote for women.

Slide 3:

- Unlike previous groups that campaigned for women's right to vote, WSPU members embraced confrontational tactics which aimed to draw attention to their cause, and force the government to listen to their demands. Their tactics included smashing shop windows, destroying post boxes, damaging works of art, burning down stately homes, and harassing politicians, as well as more-commonplace tactics like organising protest marches, rallies, and speakers' tours and publishing posters, leaflets, and newspapers. This got the group a lot of media attention, and led to the arrests of many women. These confrontational law-breakers were known as 'suffragettes' while activists who used purely legal tactics were often called 'suffragists'.

Slide 4:

- In 1907, the Dickinson Bill was being voted on in parliament. If enough Members of Parliament voted to support it, it would become a law that would give married women the same right to vote as their husbands. However some MP's were so determined not to let any women vote, that they refused to let it be voted on by Parliament.
- Suffragettes from across the country gathered outside parliament, demanding the right to talk to Members of Parliament about the bill. Many were from northern working-class towns, and were in their 20s. When they were refused, they tried to push through the lines of 500 burley policemen and enter parliament anyway, leading to 75 arrests. Dora was one of those arrested.
- Her age was seen as a curiosity by many people, and the press became very interested in her. This picture appeared in the Daily Mirror, on the 21st March 1907, the day after Dora's arrest. She was nicknamed 'The Baby Suffragette' by the paper. Photographers and journalists tried to follow her after her appearance in court and when she arrived back in Huddersfield.

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Activity 2: #MeToo

Requirements: Slides 5 and 6, Worksheet source 2 and the source 2 questions

Preparation: Ensure that enough copies of the worksheet have been printed for all students

- Ask the group if they know of other examples of women making change by drawing media attention to issues which affect them.
- After getting responses, show them slide 5. When they have read the tweets, switch to slide 6.
- Ask students what they know about the Me Too movement, if it hasn't been mentioned yet.
- After a discussion, inform the class that 'Me Too' was a campaign first created by Tanara Burke, a black woman from Harlem, New York, USA, over 10 years ago. The phrase came to public attention after Harvey Weinstein, a Hollywood producer, was accused of sexually assaulting young women. The actress Alyssa Milano tweeted on October 15th, 2017, that women who had experienced assault or harassment should tweet the hashtag #metoo as a way to end the stigma around this experience. For a long time many women have been blamed for being sexually assaulted or harassed- they are told it is their own fault for what they wear or how they act- rather than the blame being placed on the men who committed the action. When it happens within the workplace, many women are pressured to stay quiet as they are told it may affect their career.
- Ask students to have a look at the data visualisations and facts in source 2 in small groups, and to look at the questions which follow them.
- When discussions have quietened down, draw the class back together to share answers.
- Try to engage students with the question of celebrities and protest movements- how they might draw attention to the cause but simultaneously draw it away from other people. Try to make clear that the rise of #metoo has led to prominent sexual abusers being arrested and put on trial, challenged organisations to make real changes, and allowed survivors to express their truths with less stigma than before.



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Activity 3: Opposition to Women's Activism

Requirements: Slides 7 and 8, Worksheet source 3, white/black/smart board

Preparation: Ensure that there enough copies of the worksheet for all students, and that you have the means to write on the board.

- This activity looks at the similarities and differences between the ways people have opposed both historic and contemporary feminist movements, particularly the idea that they are led by 'emotional' women who are counterposed to 'sensible women' who do not take part.
- Display the cartoon of a suffragette and a 'sensible woman' on slide 7, and ask the group the following questions:
 1. Who are the two figures in the cartoon?
 2. What does the cartoonist seem to think of them?
 3. What message is being given about suffragettes here?
- Display the cartoon on slide 8 and ask the group the following questions:
 1. What does this cartoonist seem to think will happen to men if women get the right to vote?
 2. How are women portrayed by the cartoonist?
 3. Why do you think it has been called the 'House of (un)Commons' in this picture?
 4. Were the cartoonist's predictions of the future correct?
- Ask the class to read source 3 on the worksheet. As they read, write the following questions on the board
 1. Why does the author of this piece seem to think about young women and feminist activists?
 2. Are there any similarities between the author's criticisms of feminists today and those you have seen of the suffragettes in the past?

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Activity 4: Protesting Today

Requirements: Large pieces of paper, pens in a range of colours

Preparation: Ensure that there are enough large pieces of paper for each sub-group of students, and that there are enough pens for the group to share.

- Ask students, in their small groups, to think of an issue of gender inequality which frustrates or upsets them. Ask them to plan a campaign or a protest which can draw attention to the issue, drawing on the ideas that have been explored in the class. They will need to create a poster together which shows what their campaign is and how they would go about it.
- Encourage students to start by using mind maps/ spider diagrams to explore the themes of inequality and ways of protesting.
- Ask students what means they could use of attracting attention to their cause- what would be a way of engaging the media and the wider public? Would they start a social media campaign, have physical protests, or both?
- If they decide on a social media campaign, ask them what their hashtag would be. Would they seek to involve celebrities or other activist groups- if so who and why them? Encourage students to research different activist groups and individuals using the internet.
- If they decide on a physical protest- ask them to think about where they would hold their protest and why? What might draw media attention? What would their protest look like?
- Once students have decided on what they would do, encourage them to make something which can demonstrate their plans on a poster. It could have a slogan or a hashtag, details of what they want to change and why, and/or potentially a drawing of what their protest would look like or what their placards might look like.
- Once students have finished, place the different posters around the room, and encourage students to go around and look at what everyone has created.
- Once they have done this, encourage them to sit back down and reflect on other people's work- what ideas did they like that other people had come up with? Was there anything that they saw which made them change their mind about ways that they could protest/organise?



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Source 1

Dora Thewlis' Arrest

These quotes come from Dora Thewlis' appearance in court and were published in the Daily Mirror. Horace Smith was the magistrate, and Mr Muskett was the prosecuting lawyer.

- Horace Smith: "You are only a child. You don't know what you're doing"
- Horace Smith: "The child cannot be a [protestor] or anything else. She doesn't know what she is doing. You ought to be at school. It really is a shocking thing that you should be brought up to London to be turned loose on the London streets"
- Muskett: "I don't think it is any good trying to help or reason with this class of woman. It is absolutely futile."
- Horace Smith: "It is disgraceful, and the matter ought to be taken notice of. Here is a young girl of 17 [16] enticed from her home in Yorkshire and let loose in the streets of London to come into collision with the police. It is disgraceful for everybody concerned."

An extract from a letter written by Dora's parents, Eliza and James Thewlis, to the magistrate.

- "We find ourselves in agreement with his Honour when he says that girls of seventeen [sixteen] ought to be at school. But we respectfully remind his Honour that girls of Dora's age in her station of life are... compelled [in their] thousands to spend ten hours per day in health-destroying factories, and the conditions and regulations under which they toil for others' gain are sanctioned by law, in the making of which women have no voice."

Dora, after stating that she was ready to go back to London and keep fighting for the cause of women's rights, reflected on her trial and treatment by the media:

- "They held me up to ridicule as a "baby" and a "child", and treated me like a criminal rather than a girl under remand.... Don't call me the "Baby Suffragette"... "I am not a baby really. In May next year I shall be eighteen years of age. Surely for a girl that is a good age?"

All extracts are taken from 'Rebel Girls: How votes for women changed Edwardian lives' By Jill Liddington (Virago, 2006)



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Source 1

Questions

1. Do you agree with Dora, that the label 'Baby Suffragette' was an attempt to ridicule her? Is there anything in these extracts which support your view?
2. Why do you think the magistrate, Mr Smith, describes Dora as having been 'enticed' to London? What kind of image does this create in the mind of the reader?
3. Do you think Dora was too young to protest and should have been in school instead?
4. Dora's parents emphasised to the magistrate and the press that she worked ten hour days. Why do you think this was?

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Source 2 #MeToo



Effects as Data

The phrase had been used more than 200,000 times by October 15. It was tweeted more than 500,000 times by October 16.

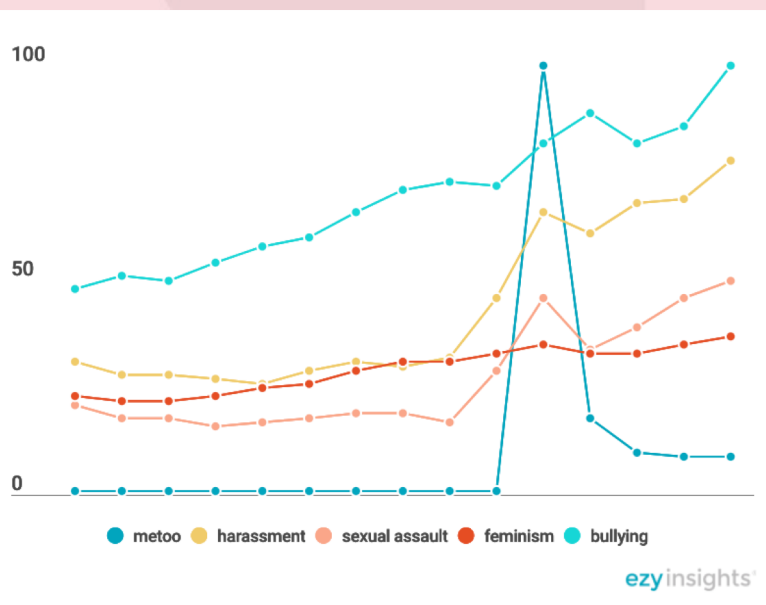
On Facebook, the hashtag had been used by more than 4.7 million people in 12 million posts during the first 24 hours.

The platform reported that 45% of users in the United States had a friend who had posted using the term.

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The hashtag has been used over 19 million times and it has trended in 85 different countries.

Below is a graph which shows how often certain terms were searched on google throughout 2017. The numbers on the left hand side represent the percentage of popularity of a search term at any given time (so when a point is at 100 the search term is at its' peak popularity for that year).



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Source 2

Questions

1. Why do you think the #metoo hashtag became so popular?
2. Why do you think searches about feminism, bullying, and harassment became more popular after the rise of #metoo?
3. Why do you think celebrities' tweets made more people take notice of the campaign? Is this a positive thing?
4. Why might large numbers of people expressing that they have had these experiences lead to change?
5. What impact do you think the rise of the hashtag might have for people who have experienced sexual assault/harassment?



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Source 3

In the wake of the #Metoo viral campaign, a number of young women who worked either for the British government or different political parties came forward stating that they had been harassed and, in some cases, assaulted by senior politicians.

In this extract from The Daily Mail, Sarah Vine, who often criticises feminist movements, attacks the culture which has led to young women going public about their experiences.

'If this hysterical Westminster witch hunt is what a world run by women looks like, count me out', Sarah Vine, Daily Mail, 1st November 2017

"What started as a WhatsApp group of parliamentary employees swapping notes on their bosses has turned into a mob of aggrieved 'victims' claiming a million sexual micro-aggressions against a number of unnamed individuals who, it seems, are not even allowed to know where they are supposed to have overstepped the mark..."

"There is a strong cultural and generational element to this, too. Most of the accused are over 40; most of the accusers are in their 20s."

"In other words, it's the revenge of the millennials, many of whom will have had their senses of humour surgically removed at university. There is a generation that seems permanently aggrieved, in a perpetual state of disgust at anyone over the age of 30..."

"Common sense and the intelligent rules of human behaviour have been replaced by a childish desire to push boundaries and a touchy, uppity tendency to take offence at the slightest thing..."

"Equality is not about exacting some sort of weird revenge on the opposite sex. All that amounts to is reversing the cycle of repression. Women should be better than that — we are better than that. If men and women are to survive and thrive alongside one another, we must lead by example. And that means not taking advantage of our hard-won positions of power."

"Because if a world run by women is a world where every man must fear for his reputation, then I for one don't want any part of it"



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Written and compiled by Dr Daniel Edmonds, danieledmonds237@gmail.com

