

[Sisterhood and After: the Women's Liberation Movement Oral History Project](#)

Teachers' Notes

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Key Stage

3-5

Theme

Changing cultures and the arts

Rationale

In these activities, students will explore the influential artistic and intellectual work of the Women's Liberation Movement. By examining the popularity of Virago Books and the role of female musicians, this activity will show how creative outlets can be used to change opinions and ideas.

Content and activities

Ursula Owen on the Popularity of Virago Books

Listen to the [audio clip](#) and/or read the transcript.

Understanding the text: Discussion points

- “Young women just felt their lives had been changed by it.”
- Why do you think Virago Press made such a difference to its readers?
- Have you ever read a book (seen a film or TV programme, heard a radio programme, or seen / heard something on the Internet) that made an enormous impact on you and that encouraged you to make changes in your own life?

Activities: women writers

- In small groups, find out more about Virago Press. Why do you think the name ‘Virago was chosen? Research the term.
- Go to the Virago Press website, check out their reading guides and see what events are promoted. Discuss your findings with each other and then share them with the rest of the class. What is interesting to you on Virago’s website? Are there books you would want to read, or events you would like to attend? Give reasons for your answer – and try to follow up these interests.
- In small groups, research female authors, find out about their lives and work and present back to the whole class. Suggested writers (or find your own): Phillis Wheatley, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Rebecca West, Maya Angelou.
- Start a reading group. Get together with a few friends, select a book by a woman writer and arrange a meeting to discuss it.

Alison Rayner on Politicising Music

Listen to the [audio clip](#) and/or read the transcript.

Understanding the text: Discussion points

- “It’s difficult enough to play the guitar, I don’t want to have to make it as well”.
- What sort of questions did the women musicians ask themselves?
- What did they consider to be male or female music?
- Do you think that music can be identified by gender? (‘male’ or ‘female’ music?)
- Is there any musical genre or style, or are there lyrics to individual songs that you consider to be aggressively male or sexist?

Activity

- In small groups, find out more about Alison Rayner’s band, Jam Today. Play sample songs. If you like to sing or play an instrument, you could improvise your own accompaniment to songs such as *Hard Times* or *Love Isn’t Enough*. You could also improvise with finger clicking, whistling, humming or tapping together objects.
- Emma Goldman, the Russian born American feminist writer declared: ‘If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be part of your revolution!’ Create a group dance to perform to Jam Today’s music – make up your own steps and choreography, in any style that seems appropriate. Practise and present to the rest of the class.
- You could also make up your own song, or choose a piece of music written and performed by women. Choreograph a dance routine to match your choice and present it to the rest of the class.
- After your presentation note how you felt about yourself. Did you feel energised, empowered – ready for a revolution?