

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

Teachers' Notes

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Key Stage

3-5

Theme

Family and children

Rationale

This activity examines motherhood and the gendered division of labour in the home. Students will engage with case studies such as, motherhood and depression and use these to explore the expectations placed on women when raising their children.

Content and activities

Ann Oakley on motherhood and depression

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

Understanding the text: Discussion points

- "... the circumstances in which women bring up children are not so wonderful."
- How did Ann Oakley feel about bringing up her children?
- What was she not happy about?
- Why does she consider the diagnosis of postnatal depression an inaccurate term (misnomer)?
- What does Ann Oakley say that she gained from the experience of being a young mother?
- Ann Oakley later completed a PhD and she is currently Professor of Sociology and Social Policy at the Institute of Education, University of London. She has written significant sociological studies that focus on women's work and health as well as fiction including *The Men's Room* (London: Virago, 1989), adapted for television in 1991.

Zoë Fairbairns on her mother's life and work in the home

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

Understanding the text: Discussion points

- "... that sense that you really couldn't win"
- Describe the house that Zoë Fairbairns grew up in.
- Explain why this house was hard work for her mother.
- Why did the author feel that women 'really couldn't win'?

In small discussion groups:

- What do you think about Ann Oakley's experience and how Zoë Fairbairns describes her mother's life?
- Can you describe the division of labour in your own home? Do you think the housework and/or childcare is fairly distributed?
- Present your findings to the rest of the class.

Activity: Create your own found poem or musical piece about women in the home

At the end of 1965, The Rolling Stones recorded a song written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. Called 'Mother's Little Helper', it describes the frustration of an overworked housewife who reaches for tranquilisers to calm her nerves.

Kids are different today, I hear ev'ry mother say
Mother needs something today to calm her down
And though she's not really ill, there's a little yellow pill
She goes running for the shelter of a mother's little helper
And it helps her on her way, gets her through her busy day

You can find this song on the internet; listen to it and think about the lyrics.

- Read through all the information in this section and listen closely to the oral history clips. In groups of 5-8 people, on thin strips of paper (tear up a sheet of A4) each person writes words that are EXACTLY TAKEN from the written or spoken texts. Your line could have few words, or consist of longer phrases or even a whole sentence.
- Each group has to shuffle these strips around to create a poem, editing, altering or omitting a line wherever necessary. This part takes discussion and argument. This is a FOUND poem, so every single word must be taken from given texts – you are not allowed to add a single word of your own – not even 'a' or 'the'! You can, however, repeat words or phrases as much as you like, which could give rhythm to the piece.
- When the poem has been polished, it must be performed to the class. Each group has to decide how to do this. Parts can be taken for individual words or lines and it could be in sung or acted out. Musical groups may like to play an instrument – or improvise with finger clicking, whistling, humming or tapping together objects. Give your work a title.
- Concluding discussion: What did you learn from examining the text extracts and from creating this poem? How does this relate to you in your own life?