

Teachers Package

Not Just Mermaids or Sirens: Three Tales of Women at Sea

Overview of Lesson:

In this lesson students will learn about women whose lives were changed by their journeys at sea. Through in-depth analysis of images, documents, and artifacts students will learn why, when, and how women contributed to maritime history. Three themes will be explored including the participation of women in exploration, as immigrants to the colony of Vancouver Island, and the part women played in the Second World War. This program will challenge student's ideas about the roles of women in society and at work from the late 1700s to the early 1900s.

Time Required:

60 minutes

Essential Questions:

How did women contribute to maritime history and who were they? How did they fit the social constraints of their time period? How did they challenge the social constraints of the period? What role did these women play in the development of Victoria? How do the contributions these women made affect us today?

Rationale:

Women contributed to the maritime history and therefore the history of Vancouver Island and Canada in many ways. The successes achieved by these women directly contribute to the development of the Province and Country. This lesson should deepen students understanding of the differences women experienced at sea, in the "new world", and within society. Students will identify the influence of women on, and the contributions of women to, the development of Canada. Students will realize that fundamentally things have changed for women over time and that socially women have been both affected by and have effected change. The concepts of progress and decline will be examined as students are asked questions such "progress for whom" and "progress in what"? Finally, the concept of significance, or what is important about the past, will be explored as students develop an understanding of historical significance that links both what is interesting to them and important to us in our own lives today.

Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies, Grade 9

It is expected students will:

- Select and summarize information from primary and secondary print and non-print sources, including electronic sources
- Assess the reliability, currency, and objectivity of different interpretations of primary and secondary sources
- Analyze the relationship between Aboriginal people and Europeans and explain the role of each in the development of Canada
- Assess how identity is shaped by a variety of factors, including:
 - family
 - gender
 - belief systems
 - ethnicity
 - nationality
- Assess how economic systems contributed to the development of early Canada
- Analyze reasons for the initial exploration and settlement of North America
- Assess the impact of the fur trade on exploration and settlement

Social Studies, Grade 10

It is expected students will:

- Plan and conduct library and community research using primary and secondary print and no-print sources, including electronic sources
- Identify the changing nature of families and women's roles in Canadian society
- Assess the interaction between Aboriginal people and Europeans
- Identify the influence of immigration on, and the contributions of immigrants to, the development of Canada

Pre Visit Instructions:

- Please have an overhead projector set up and ready to be used for this program
- A table or desk large enough to hold a box approximate 1.5 feet X 2.5 feet set up near the front of the class

Introduction

This section will introduce students to the topic of women at sea by challenging their understanding of the maritime history. Students will learn some of the traditions and superstitions associated with women and the sea. They will begin to understand that women did participate in maritime trade and have a tradition at sea that is as interesting and important as that of men and learn about a few of the famous (and not so famous) women who sailed as pirates and on warships.

Section 1

Women have long recorded information in their diary and or in personal correspondence. The details and information found in these documents are very useful to historians. Informal historical accounts such as letters and journals are what historians use to piece together what life aboard ship was like.

Frances Barkley's reminiscence of her travels aboard ship with her husband Captain Charles Barkley give us a glimpse into life aboard ship, for women and men, in the late 1700s. Frances was not an exception as the tradition of Captains and officers wives aboard ship (both merchant and regular navy) is long. This section will focus on women who traveled with their husbands or fathers on merchant and military vessels. What their life was like, how they lived and what function they played in a male dominated society, and how they unofficially contributed to maritime history will all be discussed.

Section 2

Between 1860 and 1870 ships carrying suitable young women for employment as domestics and as wives of the men in the Colony of Vancouver Island and British Columbia arrived in Victoria. This section will outline the passage aboard these vessels, what conditions these young women faced, and how long the passage was. Circumstances surrounding their leaving England and why they came to the Vancouver Island / British Columbia will also be examined.

Section 3

In 1942 the Canadian Navy and Ottawa agree that the formation of a woman's branch of Royal Canadian Navy was needed. On May 12th, 1942 three British Officers (Women from the British Wrens or Mother Wrens as they affectionately called) arrived in Canada to set up the Royal Canadian Women's Naval Service. Challenging traditional roles for women the Wrens opened up the door to future generations of women to not only military service but work (professions) specifically seen as masculine. This section will explore the contributions these women made to the Second World War effort and to society as a whole.

Conclusion

The presentation will finish by asking the students, based on what they learned from the program, “How have women contributed to Maritime History”? The essential questions and the key concepts of progress, decline, and significance will be reviewed here as well. Comparisons will be made to the lives of the women in all three sections as the programs main theme is to draw together the idea that that fundamentally things have changed for women over time and that socially women have been both affected by and have effected change. At this point the interpreter will answer any questions.