



Creative Toolkit



Produced by



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Introduction

Ludus Dance was funded by Heritage Lottery Fund to create Mill Girls and Militants: A Virtual Reality experience which explores the stories of local suffragists and suffragettes from Preston, Nelson and Lancaster.

With the support of Lancashire County Councils Heritage Learning Team, we have created this education resource for you to explore these inspirational stories in a creative way!

The aim of the project was to create a mass participation dance piece to be filmed on 360-degree camera in order to share the work on Virtual Reality headsets alongside a workshop at local schools.

This education resource will support you in knowing the facts about these local women and give you useful tools and skills to run your own Mill Girls and Militants workshops.

The full film can be viewed by visiting our YouTube page <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxR74XFkHkg&t=16s>

During the use of this resource, please take as many photos, videos and voice recordings as possible so we can see all of the great things you get up to. Once you have finished using the resource, please fill out the questionnaire by clicking <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Z3SH5LZ>

If you wish to put this on social media, please tag Ludus Dance and Heritage Lottery Fund in your posts.

Facebook: LudusDance, National Lottery Heritage Fund

Twitter: LudusDance, heritagelottery

Instagram: ludusdance, heritagelotteryfund

Want help delivering this? Ludus Dance can work with you to develop a bespoke package to support a full dance and digital programme for your young people.

Get in touch today - 01524 35936 / info@ludusdance.org.

The project was also kindly supported by Lancashire County Council and Preston City Council.



The Heritage

This research was compiled by Lancashire County Council's Heritage Team in conjunction with Heritage Lottery Fund, Preston City Council and Ludus Dance. Information is difficult to gather about each suffragist and suffragette as they often changed their names or used false names to avoid identification. We have carefully selected the following suffragists and suffragettes based on the information available on archive as well as their geographical location.

Nelson Suffragist (Selina Cooper)

Selina is our resident Mill Girl, starting work in a textile mill at the age of 12. This is where her political mind came into force as she battled through the male lead union for better toilet facilities and to stamp out sexual harassment in the workplace. In 1900 at the age of 36 she joined the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage, which included the now infamous Pankhurst family. She helped organise a petition in favour of women's suffrage, signed by working class women in Lancashire cotton mills. She personally collected 800 signatures and the petition reached 29,359 by Spring 1901, she was then selected as one of the four delegates who travelled to London to present it to the House of Commons. Selina developed a national reputation for her passionate speeches for women's rights. Millicent Fawcett was a great admirer and Selina was invited to speak, on several occasions, at rallies held by the National Union for Women's Suffrage Society (NUWSS)

Lancaster Suffragette (Selina Martin)

Selina Martin was made a member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1908. She was arrested several times for militant actions including throwing an empty ginger beer bottle through the Prime Minister's car window when he refused to speak to her about women's rights. The first time she was arrested she knitted socks for the male prisoners (hence the appearance of our knitting nana!) and during later incarceration she smashed up her cell with her shoe! Selina is the most militant suffragette in our story making appearances at many demonstrations and protests and resorting to hunger strike when imprisoned. She was force fed repeatedly and subjected to rough treatment being thrown to the floor, shaken and struck.

Preston Suffragette (Beth Hesmondhalgh)

Beth was recruited by Edith Rigby who formed the Preston branch of the WSPU and ran it out of her home on Winckley Square in Preston. In 1909 Winston Churchill visited Preston, Beth attempted to stick posters up alluding to Prime Minister Asquith as Mr Double Face, but the home-made glue failed so plan B was to wrap the posters around potatoes and fling them through windows if they were arrested. Beth climbed on top of a barrier and began to shout her message but was arrested along with Edith, feeling for the potato in her pocket she whispered to Edith "Shall I?" But was promptly stopped by a policeman. Both women were sent to Preston prison and decided to go on hunger strike. In 1913 Edith Rigby placed a pipe bomb under the Liverpool Exchange, which exploded in a café, she had enlisted Beth to help her with this subterfuge. She had arranged for a man to make a bomb that would explode with the maximum noise and minimum danger. She then asked Beth to go to the man's house with a suitcase and collect the bomb. The story goes that Beth set off up Fishergate Hill with this very heavy suitcase, and bumped into a friend, who happened to be a detective! He offered to carry the suitcase for her and feeling the weight of it, asked "Are you off for the weekend with this heavy thing?" "Oh no" she replied, "I've just been getting some new material." "You'll be having a suit of armour by the feel of it!" he exclaimed. Beth later said that "When Mrs Rigby wanted you to undertake anything unpleasant or dangerous, she had a way of making you feel that she was doing you a favour!"

The Life of the Working Class Suffragette

Working class women were treated very differently to middle/upper class women e.g. violence, force-feeding. Lady Lytton disguised herself as a seamstress and was treated with violence and disrespect, despite declaring her heart condition to prison authorities.

There was a stronger sense of shame in the working class community – respectability was important because it delineated them from ‘non-respectable’ poor, the great unwashed!

Lack of funds was also an issue for women involved with the suffrage movement, they found it difficult to keep jobs when involved in actions and often had to hide it from employers. They might have given false names when arrested or, if working as a teacher for example, they would try and do jail time over the summer holidays. Often they would lose their jobs when imprisoned.

Suffragettes vs Suffragists

These factors, coupled with the women’s fundamental beliefs, aided in the creation of the two separate factions of the suffrage movement; Suffragists and Suffragettes. Suffragists usually belonged to the NUWSS and believed in peaceful protests without any violence or militant actions. Suffragettes were usually a part of the WSPU and believed in “deeds not words” they had grown tired of trying to talk their way into getting the vote and believed stronger action was needed. This was often the faction which resorted to throwing bricks, going on hunger strike and tying themselves to railings.

During the war, women stepped up their roles in society, filling many of the jobs that men left behind as they were conscripted to the army. When the men returned the women refused to return to the way things were before and this played a big part in them finally being given the vote.

Preparations for the vote began in 1916. The NUWSS started to pressure the government. A conference of electoral reforms was set up to produce recommendations and in 1917 it recommended that women should be given the vote. On February 6th 1918 the bill was given royal assent and became law. This was called the Representation of the People Act; women over 30, who owned property, were allowed to vote and become MP’s. Another 10 years passed (with continued work from the NUWSS and WSPU) before all British women over the age of 21 were granted the right to vote in political elections.



Quotes

The following quotes are some of the key phrases spoken by our suffragists and suffragettes. The quotes are easily adapted to the heritage learning section or can be used as stimulus to create movement.



“As he will not listen to words, I think it is time that blows should be struck.” – Mary Edwards on striking a police officer outside Bingley Hall

“Could not bear to lose her or allow her to suffer the ill effects of imprisonment.” – Selina Martin talking about taking her mother’s place in Holloway prison

“Two wardresses caught me by the shoulders and dragged me down the steps, another kicking me from behind. As I reached the bottom step they relaxed their hold and I fell on my head. I was picked up and carried to the cell.” – from the book Go spin, you jade!: Studies in the emancipation of women

“She seized upon her as promising material.” – a witness describing Edith Rigby’s conduct when first meeting Beth Hesmondhalgh

“She was so determined; she even tried to get round my husband to persuade me. And then she sent Annie Kenney to complete the job. Well I joined, half against my will - and the next thing I knew I was asked to face imprisonment.” – Beth Hesmondhalgh discussing Edith Rigby’s recruitment tactics

“When Mrs Rigby wanted you to undertake anything unpleasant or dangerous she had a way of making you feel that she was, doing you a favour.” – Beth Hesmondhalgh talking about Edith Rigby

“In consequence of the injury done in public galleries by militant female suffragists no women will be admitted to the galleries except by ticket.” – public notice hung in the British Museum in 1914



The Workshop

Please use the following ideas to create your version of the Mill Girls and Militants workshop. Tasks can be easily adapted to suit the groups needs.

You may wish to show the video, or sections of it, before starting the workshop. You do not need a VR headset to watch the video, it can be viewed through a smart phone, tablet or computer.

We have found it's best to let the young people work in pairs, as the videos have learning points to discuss, one can watch the video and talk to their partner about what they found, write down key words or phrases and then swap over at the end of each section, it also ensures that the participants are safe, with one of the partners ensuring the other is aware of their surroundings at all times, this process usually takes around 1 hour.

If you have chosen to watch the video first, then some movements can be picked out from this and developed into their own dance sequences. This part of the session also takes around 1 hour. Below are some helpful tasks you can use to create your own Suffrage themed piece of dance, not all of the tasks should be used, approximate timings have been given to help you plan the session to the time you have available.

Warm Up Tasks

Militant Vs Caring Quotes (10 minutes)

Another great way to warm up, read, talk about opposing values and place in room. In groups, create 1 x still image that references the 'Militant' side and 1 x still image that references the 'Caring' side. Find a way to transition from one to the next e.g. spiralling/surging.

Prison Images (10 minutes)

Link to story of barricading themselves inside a prison cell. As a group, starting with one person in the middle preferably in a low shape, take it in turns to enter space and connect to the shape, try connecting with different body parts e.g. not just hands, once everybody is in spiral/explode away and start again with someone else being the starting low shape.

Freeze Frames (10 minutes)

This is great as a warm up game. Create freeze frames based on scenes of local suffrage using photos and discussion of local suffragettes. This can be done as solos, duets or in larger groups depending on the imagery or stories used.

Develop using level, spatial design, central character, intention, transition etc.

Creative Tasks

Solos or duets (15 minutes)

If the group is not very confident it may be easier to ask them to work in pairs and create duets rather than solos.

Create solos/duets using 4 words:

Hope / Pride / Fight / Struggle

Start by asking the participants to make a movement to each word, then as they complete this suggest they think about transitions between each movement, using different levels, changing the dynamics to be faster/slower/softer, adding in a moment of stillness or a moment of contact.

Extension to this task (10 minutes) - One person performs sequence and the other finds moments to Push Pull and Twist to develop. Swap roles.

Barriers group work (15 minutes)

Based on discussion around the barriers the women faced as suffragettes. In groups of 3/4 create 3 x barriers with bodies using different levels.

Consider now escaping the shape one at a time in order to..... hand out leaflets, deliver a petition to parliament, escape the police, shout the message loud

Other members of the barrier pull, reach, encourage, force members back into the shape. The shape evolves and changes each time!

Develop using a range of intentions and dynamics - slow motion, flurry, empowerment, belief etc.

March together and stand tall (20-30 minutes)

Watching the end of the VR video for inspiration, create your own version of the women's march.

Get creative and think about the feeling of taking 2 steps forward and 1 step back. How can they move? What militant gestures could be included? Who leads? Is it a straight march or do people start to break way?

This can be a really powerful moment, especially with larger groups.





Imagery

You may wish to use some of the following imagery to spark inspiration or for historical anchoring when discussing the heritage learning aspects of the work. For replica packs go to - <https://ludusdance.org/heritagesuffrage/>



