

How did the women's rights movement shape modern Britain?

How did black and south Asian women shape the women's rights movement?

Guidance Notes and Lesson Plan

By the end of the lesson students will:

- Understand the initiatives and goals of black and south Asian women's activism during the women's liberation movement
- Reflect on the significance of intersectionality to personal identity

Introduction

The 1970 Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford, is often heralded as a watershed moment for the women's liberation movement. Yet the attendees were primarily white and middle-upper class women from educated backgrounds. One of the very few black women to attend, Gerlin Bean, shared a different perspective on the conference when interviewed in Shrew magazine in 1971: "I thought blacks need their own women's liberation groups because it's different – their problems. The problems as women are the same; the problems as black women are different. Very different."

This lesson complicates the narrative of the women's liberation movement which has been presented in Lessons 1-3 by introducing students to black and south Asian women's activist initiatives. The lesson invites students to consider intersectionality as a framework for understanding identities – both their own and of activists like Jayaben Desai. It then provides a brief overview of black and Asian women's activism during the 1970s, including the Grunwick factory strike.

By the conclusion of the lesson, students should be able to better understand the perspectives and initiatives of black and women Asian women during the women's liberation movement. They should also have a better understanding of how intersecting identities shape our perspectives on society and social change.

Key Information

This lesson is designed for students aged 12 and above. It is devised for History classes.

Timings are suggested based on a one-hour lesson and may need adapting based on circumstances.

Prior knowledge is not needed. However, the notion that students may arrive with knowledge, ideas and preconceptions is embraced and should be utilised to explore and resolve misconceptions.

Resources:

- Lesson plan
- Lesson PowerPoint
- Intersectionality worksheet (Slide 6) – one copy per student
- Black and Asian Women's Activism worksheet (Slide 8) – one copy per student
- Activism Notes for independent work (Slides 9-13) – one copy of each slide per student

Lesson Plan

Starter: The 'Strikers in Saris' (3 minutes)

Invite students to examine a photograph of Jayaben Desai. Ask students to share with the class:

- What stands out to you about this image?

Students may comment on Desai's facial expression, her bindi, or the police officers standing behind her. Explain to students that this photograph was taken during a strike by workers at the Grunwick film processing factory. The majority of the factory's workers were southeast Asian women. Much like the Dagenham strikers, these women were protesting for better treatment as working women. But they were also protesting for better treatment as women from ethnic minority and migrant backgrounds.

Introduction (2 minutes)

Remind students of the enquiry question for the unit: How did the women's rights movement shape modern Britain?

Introduce students to the question for this unit: How did black and south Asian women shape the women's rights movement?

Activity: Defining Intersectionality (12 minutes)

Review the definition of 'intersectionality' (Slide 3). This term was coined by the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It refers to the interlocking and overlapping identities we all have, which impact how we interact with our surroundings. Students can refer to the Terminology Worksheet from Lesson 1 to review this definition if needed. The diagram on Slide 3 includes some examples of intersecting identity markers. Ask students: can you think of anything else which might shape someone's identity? Examples might include their neighbourhood, political beliefs, hobbies/interests, etc.

Now, use Grunwick strike leader Jayaben Desai as an example of a person with intersecting identities (Slide 4). Desai was from India and lived in Tanzania, East Africa for several years before migrating to Britain. She was a wife and mother. She worked as a labourer in the Grunwick factory, earning low wages and working very long hours.

What identities did Desai have? How did they intersect? Give students 2-3 minutes to share out their responses. Facilitate discussion among students.

Now ask students to use the intersectionality worksheet (Slide 6) map out their own identities for 1-2 minutes. Clarify that this worksheet is just for students to complete independently and will not be turned in or shared with anyone, so that they are comfortable writing whatever identities feel the most important to them. Students should be able to recognise that they also have a wide range of identities which combine.

Activity: The Grunwick Strike (14 minutes)

Ensure every student has one copy of the Grunwick Strike handout (Slide 6).

Play students the [BBC Witness History video on 'Strikers in Saris.'](#) (Slide 7). As students watch the video, they should take notes on their handout.

Lead students in a classroom-wide discussion on the handout questions:

- What stereotypes did the factory managers have about the women workers?
- What were the workers at the Grunwick factory protesting against?
- Why did Jayaben view the conclusion of the strike as a victory?

- What role did intersectionality play in Jayaben's activism?

Students should understand that Jayaben was protesting not just against sexism, or against racism, but against both kinds of discrimination at once. The intersection of her identities as a woman and as an Asian migrant impacted her life as an activist.

Activity: Black and South Asian Women's Activism (24 minutes)

Ensure every student has one copy of the Black and Asian Women's Activism handout (Slide 8) as well as an individual copy of the Activism Notes (Slides 9-14).

Students should take 10-15 minutes to independently read through the information in the Activism Notes (slides 9-13), which provide an overview of black and south Asian women's activism during the Women's Liberation Movement. After reading through the information on the Activism Notes, they should complete the handout.

At the conclusion of the independent reading and notetaking exercise, invite students to discuss the following handout questions in groups of 4-5:

- What do you think Gerlin Bean meant when she said, "The problems as women are the same; the problems as black women are different"?
- Why do you think the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) addressed such a wide range of social issues at their conferences and events?

Give students 4-6 minutes to discuss their responses to these two questions. Invite one member from each group to feedback a summary of what their group discussed.

Summary (5 minutes)

To conclude the lesson, ask students to reflect independently on the question: How did the intersecting identities of black and Asian women activists shape their contributions to the women's rights movement? Invite students to share their response with their partner. Call on individual students to share their response to the question with the classroom.