



A Sailor's Life

Unit 5: Women at Sea

Key Stage 1

***Written by Hazel Askew
and Martha Burns Findlay***





The Full English Extra

The Full English Extra was an initiative to preserve and promote the folk arts, building on the success of EFDSS' flagship project The Full English, which created the world's largest digital archive of folk songs, dances, tunes and customs, and a nationwide learning programme that reached more than 16,000 people. The project was led by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Full English Extra saw the collections of Mary Neal, suffragette, radical arts practitioner and founder of the Esperance Girls Club, and folk dance educator Daisy Caroline Daking added to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library online archive (www.vwml.org), alongside its collection of 19th century broadside ballads and songsters.

The Full English learning programme worked with three national museums – the Museum of English Rural Life at the University of Reading, the National Coal Mining Museum for England near Wakefield in West Yorkshire and the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London – combining folk arts and museum education to provide powerful new learning experiences for schools and music hubs.

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Written by: Hazel Askew and Martha Burns Findlay

Edited by: Frances Watt

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Unit 5: Women at sea



Women at sea

Women were not allowed to join Nelson's Navy or even to board a Navy ship because it was thought they would create mischief and disorder. Despite this rule, some wives and sweethearts of the sailors did board Navy ships when they were docked and occasionally the families of high ranking sailors even travelled aboard the ships.

Occasionally women disguised themselves as men in order to join the Navy. This was a rebellious act at a time when women were regarded as weak and inferior to men. There were many reasons why a woman would choose to become a sailor. For some it provided an opportunity to leave the burden of home-making and enter an independent life of adventure. For other women they preferred to be in the company of men and felt more comfortable living life as a man. Some women boldly joined the Navy to follow in the path of their sweethearts.

There were also known occasions of women joining the crew of ships as nurses, cooks and cleaners.

Women didn't used to be allowed to join the Navy. It was considered bad luck for women to be at sea. About 100 years ago, women were allowed to join their own version of the Navy, and it joined together with the men's Navy in 1994.

Sailor's Trousers

There was no official uniform in the Royal Navy until 1857. However, many sailors did wear a particular style of dress called "slops". When you think of a sailor, what do you imagine them to be wearing?

Sailors usually wore white and blue clothing which consisted of:

- checked or striped blouse
- waistcoat
- neckerchief
- short blue coat
- striped trousers

Activity: Can you disguise yourself as a jolly sailor? Transform your classroom into a ship and have a costume party!

Song 8 - Lovely Susan

This song is from was collected quite a few times including by Cecil Sharp, George Gardiner, E. Moeran, Percy Grainger and Ralph Vaughan Williams. It also appears on many broadsides. It is one of many traditional songs about a woman who dresses up as a man to go to sea. It is great as a listening song as it has an action packed narrative. It could also inspire lots of creative writing and artistic tasks.

Lyrics

1. Young Susan was a blooming maid, so valiant stout and bold,
And when her sailor went to sea, young Susan we are told,
Put on a jolly sailor's dress and daubed her hands with tar,
To cross the raging seas for love, on a British Man of War.
2. It was in Portsmouth harbour this gallant ship was moored,
And when young Susan shipped, there were nine hundred men on board.
'Twas then she was contented all bedaubed with pitch and tar
To be with her sweet William on a British Man of War.
3. When in the Bay of Biscay, she aloft like lightening flew,
Respected by her officers and all the jovial crew.
In battle she would boldly run, not fearing wound or scar;
And did her duty by her gun on a British Man of War.
4. She faced the walls of China where her life was not ensured,
And little did young William think that his Susan was on board,
But by a cruel cannon ball she did receive a scar;
And she got sorely wounded on a British Man of War
5. When on the deck young Susan fell, of all the whole ship's crew
Young William was the very first who to her assistance flew.
She said, "My jolly sailor, I've for you received a scar,
Behold your faithful Susan bold on a British Man of War."

Cont./

6. Then William on his Susan gazed, with wonder and surprise;
He stood some moments motionless, while the tears stood in his eyes;
He cried, "I wish instead of you, I had received that scar,
Oh love, why did you venture on a British Man of War?"
7. At length to England they returned and quickly married were;
The bells did ring and they did sing, and banished every care;
They often think upon that day when she received that scar –
When Susan followed her true love on a British Man of War

Glossary

- **Bedaubed:** smeared
- **Pitch and tar:** pitch was a resin, used to help seal the wood of ships to make it waterproof. Tar was used on board to help prevent ships rotting.
- **Man of war:** was a British Royal Navy expression for a powerful warship or frigate from the 16th to the 19th century

Comprehension Questions

Listen to the song.

- 1) Can you tell us all the different things that happen to Susan?
- 2) How might you describe Susan? Brave? Fearless?

Activity: Listening and writing

- **TASK** – Listen to the song
- **TASK** – Write out Susan's story in your own words
- **EXTENSION** – Draw a picture of Susan either in her sailor's costume or her normal clothes.

Additional Resources This resource features 'listening' songs for you to play to your class, and 'learning' songs which you can all learn to sing and join in with. Free downloads of all the songs presented in this pack are available from the EFDSS Resource Bank.



Explore The Full English digital archive

www.vwml.org/thefullenglishproject

Discover more learning resources

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