



# ***A Sailor's Life***

## ***Unit 4: Life Below Decks***

### ***Key Stage 2***

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## **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](http://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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## **Life Below Decks**

The captain and his high ranking men lived in pleasant conditions aboard the ship. However, for the lower ranking sailors' conditions below decks were very crowded.

Below decks is where the men would eat, sleep and relax. The Royal Navy supplied sailors with a good diet because they wanted a strong healthy crew. In fact, most sailors enjoyed a better diet than they would on shore. They ate meat, ship's biscuits, vegetables, cheese and oatmeal and they had a daily ration of alcohol such as beer or *grog* (made up of rum and water). They drank alcohol because at that time they did not know how to purify water to make it safe to drink.

During their free time sailors would relax below decks. To pass the time they would play games, tell stories, sing songs, play music, dance, gamble, mend their clothes and craft ornaments. When it came to the end of their shift sailors would also sleep below decks in narrow rows of hammocks.

### **The Ship's Biscuit**

**Activity:** Make your own ship's biscuit.

- First mix 2 cups of wholemeal flour, half a cup of water, and half a cup of salt.
- Roll the dough with a rolling pin and cut with a biscuit cutter.
- Cook in the oven and 180 degrees Celsius for 30 minutes.

## **Song 5 - Leave Her, Johnny, leave her!**

This is an old traditional sea shanty, which means that it was a work song that would have been sung in the Merchant Navy, rather than the Royal Navy. This particular song was sung towards the end of voyages, and the sailors would often make up verses to complain about the conditions or their fellow shipmates! It is a great song to sing, having a call and response form in the verses as well as a chorus. The form of the song also makes it perfect for making up your own verses about conditions at sea.

## Lyrics

1. Oh the times was hard and the wages low,  
Leave her, Johnny, leave her!  
But now once more ashore we'll go,  
And it's time for us to leave her!

Chorus:

*Leave her, Johnny, leave her!*  
*Oh, leave her, Johnny, leave her!*  
*For the voyage is done and the winds don't blow,*  
*And it's time for us to leave her!*

2. Oh the work was hard and the voyage was long,  
The sea was high and the gales were strong.
3. The food was bad and the ship was slow,  
But now ashore again we'll go.
4. And the captain was bad but the mate was worse,  
He could knock you down with a sigh and a curse
5. Oh the wind was foul, all work, no pay,  
To Liverpool docks from Frisco Bay.
6. We was made to pump all night and day,  
And we were half-dead had nowt to say.
7. We'd be better off in a nice clean jail,  
With a long night in and plenty of ale.
8. The sails are furled and our work is done,  
And now on shore we'll have our fun.

## Glossary

- **Pump:** All ships leak, and crews had to pump the leaked-in water (bilge water) out of the ship.
- **Furled:** Sails would be gathered in carefully to be stored and strapped against a mast. Furling was the technique used to roll the sail appropriately.



## Comprehension Questions

Listen to the song

- 1) What do you think the refrain 'Leave her, Johnny, leave her!' means? Who does 'her' refer to?
- 2) What can you tell us about the conditions on the ship?
- 3) This song is a traditional song that sailors would have sung at sea – **does anyone know the name for that type of song?** (sea shanty)
- 4) Sea shanties are always very rhythmic, you could easily tap your foot along to the beat! This is because they were sung by a group of sailors whilst doing a job such as hoisting a sail, or hauling the anchor. **Why do you think it would be good to sing a rhythmic song whilst doing these jobs?**

**Activity:** Singing and performing the song

- Don't forget your warm ups! See p7
- **TASK** – Learn the refrains and the chorus of the song, then divide into smaller groups to learn a verse each. Sing the song as a class, with the small groups singing their verses and everyone singing the refrains and choruses.
- **EXTENSION** – Write your own verses using what you have learnt about conditions at sea, keeping the refrains and chorus from the original version.

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Leave her, Johnny, Leave her

.....

And it's time for us to leave her

## Leave Her Johnny, Leave Her

Oh the times was hard and the wa - ges low, Leave her John - ny

leave her, But\_ now once more a - sho - re we'll go, And it's

time for us to leave her. Leave her John - ny le - ave her, Oh\_

leave her John - ny le - ave her, For the voyage is done and the

winds don't\_ blow, And it's time for us to leave her.

**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](http://www.vwml.org/thefullenglishproject)

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