



COMMON GROUND Support Notes



Secondary - Introduction

Have you ever wondered if you can make a difference?

We believe you can!

On 26 August 1981, 36 women started their 110 mile walk from Cardiff to RAF Greenham Common in protest against the Americans holding cruise missiles on common land. Over the next 19 years Greenham Common became home to thousands of women who believed they could create change and leave the world a better place.

Common Ground is an invitation to join us as we track the impact of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camps 40 years on. What can we learn about the present from looking at the past? How can we activate our voices to create change? And what happened to the thousands of women who visited, supported and lived at Greenham Common?

Join us in this Heritage Lottery Funded project to:

- Find out who in your community has memories or experiences of Greenham Common.
- Discover the impact that the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp has had on our lives today.
- Compare and contrast protest movements today with the Greenham Common protests. What themes are still relevant and how have they changed?
- Consider what causes are important to your young people today and how they can amplify their voices.

This project is open to all ages. This pack is an introduction to some of the key themes and ideas and includes suggestions on how you might like to explore some of these ideas in your classroom.

Don't forget to check out our website and Impact Tree for more resources and session ideas to help you and your learners discover more about Greenham Common!



The Impact Tree

The Impact Tree will track the impact of Greenham Common Peace Camps 40 years on. We're exploring the impact of Greenham Common on:

- The women who were there or those who remember the camps.
- Young people today who are discovering Greenham Common and its legacy for the first time.
- The future and how we fight for our planet.

We'll be mapping all the schools who register for Common Ground on the Impact Tree and it will also be home to key resources to support you in the classroom.

We're asking people to submit their projects, interviews and manifestos to our archive by the **12th February 2024** so we can add your findings to the Impact Tree too!

<https://greenhamwomeneverywhere.co.uk/common-ground>

What was the Greenham Common Peace Camp and why did it happen?

The Greenham Common Peace Camp was established in 1981 to protest the siting of 94 American nuclear missiles at RAF Greenham Common in Berkshire. It quickly became the first and only women-led peace camp and its scale and influence was unparalleled in recent history.

Women from all backgrounds and all over the world braved every weather and the wrath of Thatcher's government to protest peacefully and creatively.

The Greenham Women weren't just campaigning against the bomb, they had several political threads that brought and kept them together:

- The Nuclear Threat
- The environment and common land
- Women's rights and feminism

The last of the cruise missiles were removed from the base in March 1991, following on from the ratification of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in June 1988. The Peace Camps remained until 2000 when the land was returned to Common Ground where it is now home to a memorial to honour the disarmament movement.

What is Non Violent Direct Action (NVDA)?

In a time before the internet and mobile phones, Greenham women and their supporters organised numerous large scale demonstrations like "Embrace the Base" in 1982, where 30,000 women held hands around the nine mile perimeter fence making these protests the biggest women led actions since the women's suffrage movement.

NVDA was at the heart of the Greenham Common protests which included an agreement that property but not people could be harmed. The protests were largely women only spaces and they used their position as mothers to empower them to take action for their children's future. Men were not allowed to stay the night at the camps or even be there in the day at Green Gate.

The men who supported the women on large action days often supported them by enabling them to take action. They were not directly part of the protest, rather supporting in the background for example making sandwiches and bringing food and looking after the children. Men were also able to support the work of Cruise Watch.

You can find out more about specific protests within Greenham Common's history in our supporting resources.

Camp Life

Each of the nine gates of the base had a separate camp. Some women came for the day to support the action whilst others camped there for days, weeks, months or years. The camps had no facilities and the conditions were harsh. In winter it was sometimes just a handful of women holding the space.

Jane Phillips remembers:

"My memories are of wood smoke and women. Women of all ages, shapes and sizes. I have the feeling that the reasons for the women being there were diverse. All were passionately anti-nuclear. Most were free-standing women who had a cause to follow. For some Greenham was a refuge – some just needed to be away from men. And some had complex needs and problems that the other women helped them through. I'm sure there were disagreements but the impression I got was of a band of sisters."



Image by Sandie Hicks

Protest and Symbolism

Non Violent Direct Action (NVDA) was at the heart of the Greenham Common protests which included an agreement that property but not people could be harmed. The protests were largely women only spaces and they used their position as mothers to empower them to take action for their children's future. Men were not allowed to stay the night at the camp or be there in the day at Green Gate. The men who supported the women on large action days often supported them by enabling them to take actions or by making sandwiches rather than being directly involved in the protests themselves.

Photographs:

The Greenham Women were fighting for future generations and were motivated by their position as mothers. Although the media often questioned why they weren't at home looking after their families.

As a form of protest the women attached photographs of their children to the fence as a representation of the things they loved.

They also lit candles to mourn their children's future.

Doves:

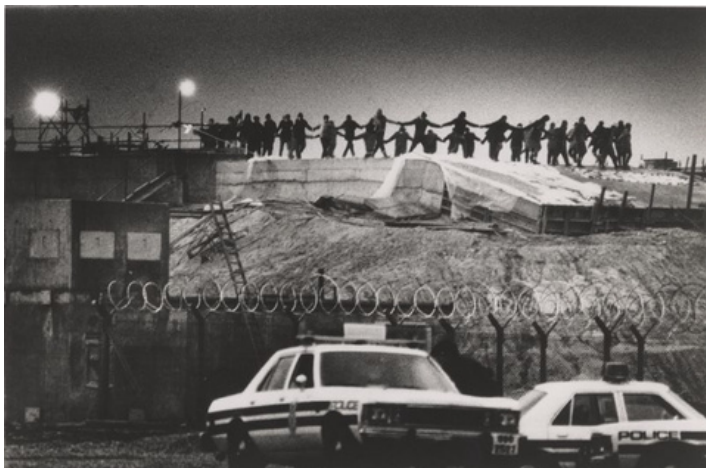
The dove is traditionally a symbol of peace. During one action Greenham Women attached paper doves to the fence.

Song:

Song was an integral part of life and protest at Greenham Common helping boost morale and create camaraderie.

During 'Embrace the Base' in 1982 30,000 women held hands around the nine mile perimeter fence singing songs.

On New Years Eve 1982, 44 women broke into the base and climbed on top of the silos where the missiles were stored. They held hands, danced and sang for hours.



Photograph by Raissa Page. Copyright: Adrienne Jones – courtesy of The Richard Burton Archives, Swansea University. Not to be used without permission

Spiders Web:

The spiders web was used to represent fragility and resilience – qualities that also represented the Greenham Women.

Women at the base often wove spiders webs and used the image of the web on banners and posters.

Witches:

The Greenham Women were often negatively portrayed in the media as witches with the camp being described as a 'coven' but the women embraced this idea.

Kathy Trevelyan remembers one particular night: *"We all took witches' hats and cloaks and stuff like that, and we all hid in the woods. And I think all around the base there were women hiding in the woods. and I can't remember what time it was, but there was some pre-arranged signal, and we all came out of the woods, and we were singing 'Who are the witches, where do they come from? Maybe your great-great-grandmother was one! Witches are wise, wise women they say. There's a lot of witch in every woman today'."*

Teddy Bears:

Teddy bears represented the children whose safety and future the Greenham Women were fighting for.

On the 1st of April 1983, 200 women dressed as Teddy Bears and broke into the base to hold a teddy bears picnic.

Mirrors:

Another big action was 'Reflect the Base' on 11 December 1983, when 50,000 women circled the base and held up mirrors as to allow the base to look back at itself and reflect on its actions. Later the women pulled down large sections of the fencing leading to hundreds of arrests.

What were Greenham Women protesting for?

Women's rights and feminism

Lots of women went to Greenham because it was women only. It was a chance to live without looking after men, to escape male violence or to share experiences with other women of oppression and to develop their understanding of intersectional and second wave feminism. Being immersed in each other's company and living without leadership was a radicalising experience for thousands of women and swelled the ranks of the feminist movement nationally. Women from Greenham went on to be part of campaigns that effected women and lesbians, such as the campaign against Section 28 (which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality), the campaign for equal wages and Reclaim the Night marches across the UK.

By the 60s women had significantly contributed to the war effort in two world wars and gained the vote and they were continuing to fight for women's rights. Second wave feminists (1960s-1980s) believed in social, sexual and reproductive freedom. They:

- Saw gender as a social construct
- Saw beauty ideals objectified and held women back
- Rejected domesticity

Find out more in the BBC archive: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/second-wave-feminism/zdhw382>

The Nuclear Threat

Following on from World War II both Russia and America continued to build nuclear weapons during the Cold War. RAF Greenham Common opened in 1942, it was used by the United States Air Force during World War II and during the Cold War, and as a base for American nuclear weapons.

The threat posed by the arms race between America and Russia in the 1980s created a visceral fear of nuclear war. Lots of women also felt that in a world run by men, displays of military power were used as status to the risk of everything and everyone else on the planet.

Today the Cold War is over but countries such as the UK, America, Russia, France, India and China still have nuclear weapons.

Some countries like South Africa, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine have given up their nuclear weapons, while other countries such as Iran are trying to establish their own nuclear defences.

Today there are still lots of divided opinions about nuclear programmes. You can find out more at CND: <https://cnduk.org/education/>

The environment and the common land

Many Greenham Women saw the threats to the environment that activists and scientists warn us of today and this was a big part of their campaigning. Most of the camp was vegan or vegetarian and the women used art and creativity in their protests and campaigns to draw attention to our links to and dependence on the natural world, just as we see climate crisis campaigners doing today.

While the Greenham Women were protesting they were often portrayed negatively in the press, they were banned from local pubs and the local community were hostile towards them. A few sympathetic local businesses allowed Greenham Women to use their facilities so they had some access to toilets and running water. Today we might see them as heroes.

Protestors from organisations such as Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion are also represented negatively in the media. How do you think we will view them in 40 years' time?

As well as campaigning for the removal of the nuclear cruise missiles, the Greenham Women stayed till 2000 when the military base was returned to common land - ground we all have the right to be on.

Common Ground

Common Ground is an opportunity for your young people to find out more about the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, and to take inspiration from the thousands of women who stood up for what they believed, to consider what causes are important to them today.

Your project can be tailored to suit your young people and your wider learning objectives but here are some initial ideas to help you get started. At the end of your project we'd like your young people to write their own manifesto outlining their hopes and commitments for the future.

We'll be adding all research, manifestos and projects submitted by 15 December 2023 to our archive so your project will live on, inspiring future learners as we reflect on the impact the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camps have had on our lives.

Greenham and your community

Tens of thousands of women visited and stayed at the Greenham Common camps over their 19 years of activity before returning to their homes up and down the country.

What connections does your local community have to Greenham Common. Who remembers it on TV? Did anyone go?

Why not conduct your own interviews to learn more about life at Greenham Common.

Curriculum links: History, English, Citizenship

Write your own protest song or poem

Song was an important part of daily life at the camps as well as during key protests from small actions to large action days.

Sometimes the songs were inspired by contemporary music. Sometimes they carried a message. What causes are your learners passionate about today? Why not write your own protest song or poem either inspired by Greenham or about a cause you are passionate about.

Curriculum links: Music, Literacy, Citizenship

Take Action

The camps were a hotbed of creativity and the women often made posters, banners and flags to support their actions and communicate their message to a wider world.

Could you make your own poster, banner or flag to amplify your voice?

Curriculum links: Art and Design, English, Citizenship

Wall of hope

RAF Greenham Common was surrounded by metal fencing. Often the women would attach things to the fence including symbols that represented the people they loved and the things they were fighting for.

Can you create a wall of hope in your learning space that captures your young peoples' hopes for the future?

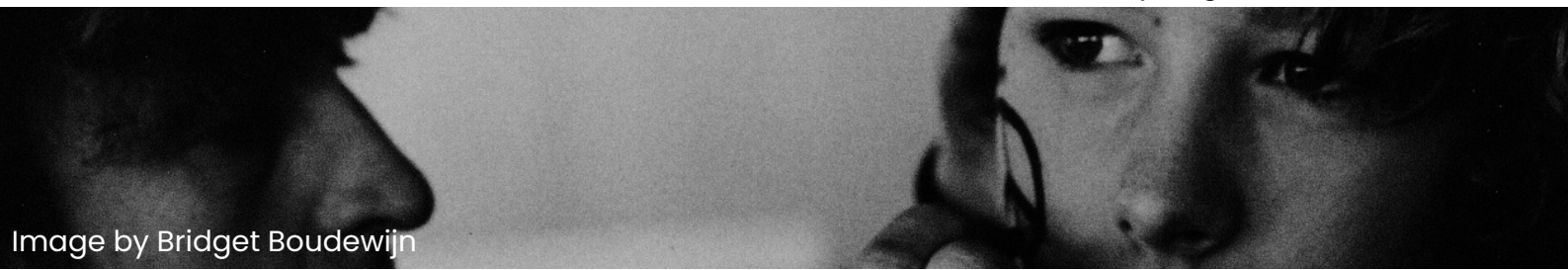
Curriculum links: Art and Design, Citizenship

In the media

The Greenham Women were often portrayed negatively in the press. How are protestors portrayed today in the media? How do you think we will view their actions in 40 years?

Could you make your own podcast or short film that explores Greenham or a movement you've been involved in.

Curriculum links: History, English



Additional Resources

Our website will be packed with resources to support you as you discover more about the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in your classroom. Here are some other resources you might find helpful:

Greenham Women Everywhere:

Greenham Women Everywhere (GWE) is an archive of interviews collected from people who lived at, visited, supported or experienced Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. In the spirit of Greenham, this archive celebrates and foregrounds the voices of women.

<https://greenhamwomeneverywhere.co.uk>

The Women's Library:

The Women's Library is the oldest and largest library in Britain devoted to the history of women's campaigning and activism.

www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary

London Metropolitan Archives:

Holds hands-on sessions to introduce KS2 and KS3 students to archives and their role and relevance in society in the belief that the immediacy of working with archives offers a unique way of bringing the past to life.

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk>

CND Peace Programme:

CND's Peace Programme empowers students with knowledge on nuclear weapons and peace issues.

<https://cnduk.org/education/>

The Heroine Collective:

The Heroine Collective is an online UK publication dedicated to the heroic women, past and present, who have played a crucial part in creating positive cultural change in the world today.

<http://www.theheroinecollective.com/>

Imperial War Museum:

Blog post exploring Women, War and Peace.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/blog/partnerships/2021/05/the-sounds-of-greenham-common-womens-peace-camp>

Glasgow Women's Library:

Glasgow Women's Library is the only Accredited Museum in the UK dedicated to women's lives, histories and achievements.

<https://womenslibrary.org.uk/>

Greenham Common: Women at the Wire ed. Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins (The Women's Press, 1984):

A collection of primary source material, diaries and testimonies, from the first 20 years of the camp. Widely considered to be one of the seminal texts about the camp's early days and a vivid introduction to the movement.



Image by Sandie Hicks

Next Steps

To register your interest in 'Common Ground' or for all enquiries email hannah@greenhamwomeneverywhere.co.uk

For resources to support your project check out our website and join our mailing list to find out when new resources are uploaded.

Don't forget to submit your projects for inclusion in our archive by the 12th February 2024. We can't wait to find out how the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp has impacted you and your learners.