

## **Sea and Learn – Lesson Plan: Women in the Royal Navy**

**Key Stage:** Three

**National Curriculum Links:** 1b, 1e; 2a, 2b, 2c; 3a, 3c

**Main Subject Focus:** Citizenship & PSHE

### **Learning Outcomes:**

Children will:

- Know that different things contribute to our identity.
- Be able to use their imagination to consider other people's experiences.
- Through discussion, be able to compare the role of women in Nelson's Navy and in today's Royal Navy.
- Understand the democratic voting system and the principles behind a carefully prepared and controlled debate.
- Begin to understand the concept of stereotyping.

### **Resources Required:**

- Timeline relating to women's role in the Navy since Nelson's time to the modern day.
- Voting slips and pencils.

### **Lesson Outline:**

1. Begin by looking at the timeline (OHP Sheets 1 & 2) that shows the changing role women have played in the Navy since 1690. As you work through each aspect, discuss issues of equality and ask children to offer their opinions about the information. Remind children about the validity of primary and secondary sources of historical evidence when investigating aspects of history.
2. Focus on women in the navy during Nelson's time – discuss how women were not deemed important enough to even be recognised on the ship's muster books. Introduce and discuss the word 'stereotype'.
3. Ask children for their opinions about the Navy today and highlight the very recent changes that have been made to integrate women completely in the Royal Navy.
4. Now introduce the idea of a debate and pose the statement, '*Women do not belong in the Royal Navy*' – split the class into 2 groups and ask one group to develop an argument for this idea and ask another group to devise an argument against this idea. Each group will need a spokesperson to collate and arrange their opinions/arguments.
5. Arrange your classroom appropriately to accommodate each group and have an area at the front of the class for the main speakers from each group to put forward their arguments. You may wish to appoint a child as chairperson or undertake this role yourself.

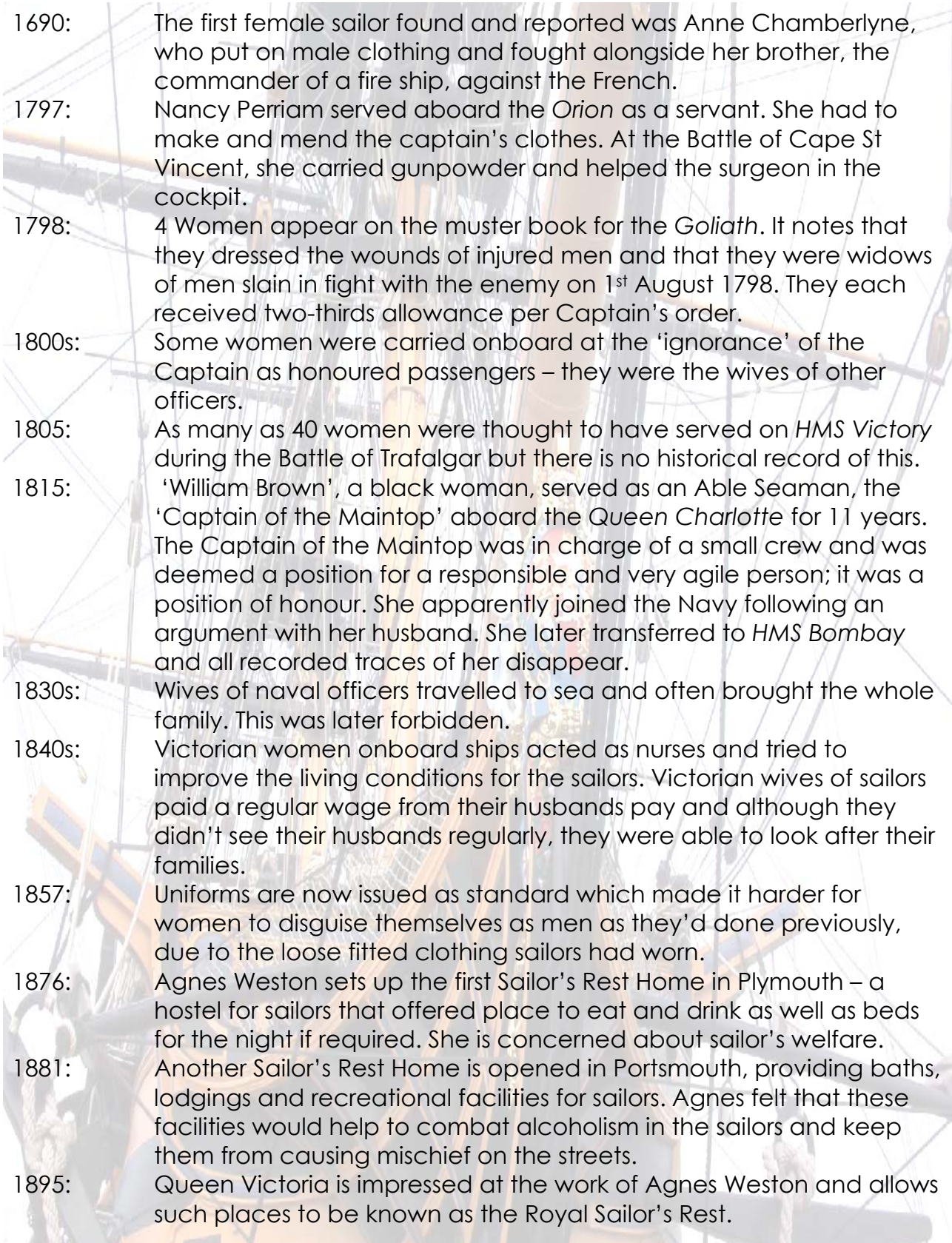
6. Allow each group to put forward their ideas and then the chairperson can ask the audience for questions that spokespeople in each group can answer (in the style of Question Time).
7. Finally, remind children about the democratic voting system and how this works. Then ask each child to vote on the issue. Reveal the results of the vote to the class and discuss how issues of sexual inequality and stereotyping may still affect aspects of life despite equal opportunities law and changing attitudes. Discuss how they can challenge stereotyping, giving some examples to help them.

**Extension/Homework Ideas:**

- Ask children to work in small groups to perform a short drama piece that shows how they can challenge stereotyping and prejudices at school, in the workplace etc.

## Sea and Learn – OHP Sheet (1)

### Women in the Navy Timeline

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- 1690: The first female sailor found and reported was Anne Chamberlyne, who put on male clothing and fought alongside her brother, the commander of a fire ship, against the French.
- 1797: Nancy Perriam served aboard the *Orion* as a servant. She had to make and mend the captain's clothes. At the Battle of Cape St Vincent, she carried gunpowder and helped the surgeon in the cockpit.
- 1798: 4 Women appear on the muster book for the *Goliath*. It notes that they dressed the wounds of injured men and that they were widows of men slain in fight with the enemy on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1798. They each received two-thirds allowance per Captain's order.
- 1800s: Some women were carried onboard at the 'ignorance' of the Captain as honoured passengers – they were the wives of other officers.
- 1805: As many as 40 women were thought to have served on *HMS Victory* during the Battle of Trafalgar but there is no historical record of this.
- 1815: 'William Brown', a black woman, served as an Able Seaman, the 'Captain of the Maintop' aboard the *Queen Charlotte* for 11 years. The Captain of the Maintop was in charge of a small crew and was deemed a position for a responsible and very agile person; it was a position of honour. She apparently joined the Navy following an argument with her husband. She later transferred to *HMS Bombay* and all recorded traces of her disappear.
- 1830s: Wives of naval officers travelled to sea and often brought the whole family. This was later forbidden.
- 1840s: Victorian women onboard ships acted as nurses and tried to improve the living conditions for the sailors. Victorian wives of sailors paid a regular wage from their husbands pay and although they didn't see their husbands regularly, they were able to look after their families.
- 1857: Uniforms are now issued as standard which made it harder for women to disguise themselves as men as they'd done previously, due to the loose fitted clothing sailors had worn.
- 1876: Agnes Weston sets up the first Sailor's Rest Home in Plymouth – a hostel for sailors that offered place to eat and drink as well as beds for the night if required. She is concerned about sailor's welfare.
- 1881: Another Sailor's Rest Home is opened in Portsmouth, providing baths, lodgings and recreational facilities for sailors. Agnes felt that these facilities would help to combat alcoholism in the sailors and keep them from causing mischief on the streets.
- 1895: Queen Victoria is impressed at the work of Agnes Weston and allows such places to be known as the Royal Sailor's Rest.

## Sea and Learn – OHP Sheet (2)

### Women in the Navy Timeline (continued)

- 1917: The Women's Royal Navy Service (WRNS) is created with the aim of replacing male sailors serving onshore with women. Initial jobs for the 'Wrens' were domestic chores, but this soon changed to include jobs previously considered beyond their capabilities.
- 1918: Agnes Weston made Dame of the British Empire for her work in the welfare of sailors.
- 1919: The WRNS is disbanded following the end of the First World War.
- 1938: The WRNS is reformed as the prospect of World War Two looms.
- 1944: During the war, over 72,000 women were serving in the WRNS, doing over 200 different jobs.
- 1947: A permanent WRNS is created but numbers were reduced to 3000 with much fewer trades on offer than the 200 available to women in 1944. The clear divide between what did and did not constitute suitable work for women became increasingly irrelevant, however, the Wrens were not allowed to go to war on fighting ships and did not receive the same status or pay as men.
- 1977: The WRNS was brought into line with the Royal Navy and was subject to the Naval Discipline Act. This allowed a greater number of trades to be undertaken and was the first step to integration with the Royal Navy.
- 1993: The WRNS disbanded as women now join the Royal Navy on an equal footing with men.
- 1994: Women began officially serving at sea alongside their male colleagues on Royal Navy vessels.
- 2005: Women now serve on at least one-third of all ships and the only areas of work they are excluded from are submarines and diving but this is being reviewed. They are now equal in jobs, pay and working conditions.

*Information compiled from: The Royal Naval Museum, [www.hms.org.uk](http://www.hms.org.uk), the Imperial War Museum, The National Archives and the Royal Naval Archives*



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## **Sea and Learn – Teacher's Notes (1)**

### **Women at sea at the time of Nelson**

Officially, women were only permitted to put to sea with the authority of the Admiralty.

There is evidence to suggest that many warships had at least one woman living onboard at all times and possibly more. Officially, the women living on the lower deck did not exist. Their names never appeared in the ship's muster books, and even if they died at sea, the fact was rarely recorded.

The women who made it to sea were usually the wives of warrant officers, the boatswain, the gunner and the carpenter. There were also reports confirming that the wives of the cooper, the Sailmaker and the cook.

They assisted with the laundry and no doubt helped with the cooking onboard. They were generally steady, reliable and motherly, looking after the youngest members of the crew, particularly the boy servants.

Nelson railed against lower deck women and in a letter to John Jervis, Earl of St Vincent, said *'They will always do as they please. Orders are not for them – at least I never knew one who obeyed'*