

ACTIVITY 2

DEEDS NOT WORDS

The inspirational and stirring film *Suffragette* tracks the story of the foot soldiers of a civil rights movement in Great Britain — women who were forced into a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse with an increasingly brutal government. Opening this fall and starring Carey Mulligan, Helena Bonham Carter, and Meryl Streep, *Suffragette* will empower all who are striving for equality in our own day and age.

As shown in the film, the British suffragettes adopted tactics sharply different from those of the women's suffrage movement in the United States. Determined to force change, Emmeline Pankhurst (played by Meryl Streep) launched a “deeds not words” campaign that used civil disobedience, hunger strikes, and vandalism — but not threats to human life — to demand public attention and challenge the legal authority that denied women social equality.

1. DISCOVERY

Use these resources to learn more about the Suffragettes’ “deeds not words” campaign. What reactions would such a campaign provoke today?

• **Read “Fourteen Reasons for Supporting Women’s Suffrage” (c. 1918):**

www.bl.uk/learning/images/makeanimpact/suffragettes/large12615.html

• **Learn about those who opposed the Suffragettes:**

www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/21cc/struggle/suffrage/sources/source7/opponentsview.html

• **Learn how the fight for women’s suffrage spread across Europe:**

www.dhr.history.vt.edu/modules/eu/mod02_vote/context.html

• **Examine a timeline of women’s suffrage in Britain:**

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/britain1906to1918/timeline/g4_timeline.htm



Photo by Jose A. Navas

2. DISCUSSION

Debate the following statements denouncing and endorsing the Suffragettes.

- “Well, in Great Britain, we have tried persuasion, we have tried the plan of showing... that we are capable people. We did it in the hope that we should convince them and persuade them to do the right and proper thing. But we had all our labour for our pains, and now we are fighting for our rights, and we are growing stronger and better women in the process. We are getting more fit to use our rights because we have such difficulty in getting them.”
— Emmeline Pankhurst, “Why We Are Militant”
(http://www.dhr.history.vt.edu/modules/eu/mod02_vote/evidence_detail_03.html)
- “The woman voter would be pernicious to the State not only because she could not back her vote by physical force, but also by reason of her intellectual defects. A woman’s mind arrives at conclusions on incomplete evidence; has a very imperfect sense of proportion; accepts the congenial as true, and rejects the uncongenial as false; takes the imaginary which is desired for reality; and treats the undesired reality which is out of sight as nonexistent — building up for itself in this way, when biased by predilections and aversions, a very unreal picture of the external world.”
— Almroth Wright, *The Unexpurgated Case Against Woman Suffrage* (www.dhr.history.vt.edu/modules/eu/mod02_vote/evidence_detail_05.html)

Following are similar statements on some campaigns for equality in our own day. How do the positions expressed here and the tactics employed in today’s world compare to those from a century ago?

- “We need to de-militarize this situation—this kind of response by the police has become the problem instead of the solution. I obviously respect law enforcement’s work to provide public safety, but my constituents are allowed to have peaceful protests, and the police need to respect that right and protect that right.”
— Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill in the wake of the riots in Ferguson (www.mccaskill.senate.gov/media-center/news-releases/mccaskill-in-ferguson-time-to-de-militarize-this-situation)
- “The United States Supreme Court ruled...that the Constitution guarantees every American the right to marry the person they love. Even with this ruling, GLAAD will continue to push for accelerated acceptance of LGBT people, couples, and families across the U.S. Marriage equality is a benchmark, and not a finish line.”
— Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (www.glaad.org/marriage)

Now, debate how people today would react to the Suffragettes’ tactics in comparison with how people react to the tactics advanced by the groups cited above.

Finally, create a position statement outlining the approach you would use in a struggle for an equality issue of your choosing (e.g., gay marriage, prison reform, religious liberty, etc.).

SUFFRAGETTE

MOTHERS DAUGHTERS REBELS

Movie Website: SuffragetteTheMovie.com

Social Action Website: FightsNotOver.com

Social Action Essay Contest Website: <http://suffragette-myvoice.com>

IN THEATERS THIS FALL



Photo by Janelle Bouie