

Lesson Two (Drama): The Women of Greenham Common

Subjects: Drama, English, Citizenship, History, Politics

OVERVIEW

Students learn about the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, and discuss their responses to the women-only movement. They then improvise and devise short pieces, based on themes they identify in historical source material.

MATERIALS

Pens/Pencils / PowerPoint / Secondary Materials (printed)

ROOM LAYOUT

6 small 'stations', with room to move in.

All resources available for download from: www.bit.ly/CNDCriticalMass

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- All students should be able to **describe** the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp and its relation to nuclear weapons history, gender identity, and social history in the UK.
- Most students will be able to **evaluate** the relative successes and limitations of the camp, as well as considering the role of gender.
- Most students should **apply** their knowledge of dramatic techniques (speech, gesture, movement, design) to the stimuli material and create theatre.
- Some students will **consider** the relevance of theatre for social commentary and documentary, as well as theatre for social change.

STARTER (15 minutes)

Gates of Greenham (10 mins)

A gate is placed in the middle of the room. This can be a prop, a piece of set, or imagined/mimed (in which case it can assume different shapes, sizes and weights).

Students must take it in turns to improvise scenarios in which they pass through the gate, this will begin as a pair. The activity roughly follows the improvisation activity 'What are you doing?'

- One student mimes an action on one side of the gate (e.g. digging a hole).
- Another student approaches on the other side of the gate, and calls over: 'What are you doing?'
- The original student replies with an action *different* to what they were previously doing (e.g. now mimes knitting), and calls back: 'Want to join?'
- The second student passes through the gate however they wish, and begins enacting the activity (here, knitting a scarf). They then ask the original student: 'Are you staying?'
- The original student can either reply 'Yes', and join in with the second activity (knitting a scarf), or 'No', and leave the improvisation. If they stay, the student who has just asked 'Are you staying?' will reply to the next question.
- The activity is repeated with a new student approaching the empty side of the gate and asking 'What are you doing?', until every student has been able to pass through the gate.

This activity can be adapted so that the 'new' actor asks 'Can I join?', whilst the other actor says 'Only if...', which the 'new' actor then acts out e.g. 'Can I join?' / 'Only if you knit twice as fast as me!'

Suggest that the students think about gates more critically:

- A gate can be a barrier, as part of a wall to keep some people out, but can open to allow people in.
- A gate is a point of transition between two different spaces e.g. drawbridge of a castle (inside/outside), which can be locked if necessary.

PRESENTATION

Our PowerPoint presentation, as well as the further information and supporting materials in this lesson, can help you to provide students with the necessary information about the Peace Camp in an efficient and engaging way.

Discuss in small groups: What happened? or What was Greenham Common?

- Why do you think the decision was taken to go women-only? What could men have done to be involved with the camp's work? Why did the women try hard to avoid framing their protest as 'anti-man'?
- Are there advantages and disadvantages of framing the peace camp as women-only? Was Greenham Common more or less successful because of this?
- How do these images from Greenham Common make you feel? How is womanhood portrayed in these images?

MAIN ACTIVITY: A mile in their boots (30 minutes)

Create several 'stations' around the room using our secondary materials (p.22). In groups of five or six, the students are allocated different stations. They are asked to discuss the themes of these materials together, and pick 3 items (any mixture of text extract, photograph, artefact), from which to devise their interpretation of the Greenham camps. Music can be played whilst this activity occurs. (6 mins)

The following is a possible sequence of developments the students can explore:

- As a group produce three still images, which sum up the source material you have chosen. (9 mins)

Lesson Two (Drama) continued

- Link these still images through movement, counting 4 or 8 beats in the music. (3 mins)
- Each student takes on either the same or different characters in each image. By repeating the movement between each still image, they can experiment with their stance, gesture, facial expression, voice, and interaction with other students. (3 mins)
- Taking these tableaux as a beginning, middle and end, the students improvise small scenes that transition between the still images. They can quote any source material text, or improvise their own dialogue. The small scenes are combined into a short devised piece several minutes in length (up to 10 mins).

The following is another activity, which focuses on themes:

- Students identify two key themes that runs across their source material e.g. protest, and fear. (4 mins)
- Students use their bodies to make still images that represent the themes they identified: ‘what does protest/fear look like?’ (4 mins)
- In pairs, students alternate between their two themes, so that one strikes their ‘protest’ pose, whilst the other their ‘fear’ pose, they alternate between these poses. Students can also create still images as a group and move between each group together. (2 mins)
- Students think about where their source material came from. E.g. who designed the poster, or wrote the extract? Advise students to think about how the reality of the camp’s actions might be different to what the sources suggest.
- In groups, students improvise/devise a short piece of around 5 minutes based around their source material and the themes they identified. (15 mins)

The teacher moves between the small groups, providing advice as well as more information on the camps.

PLENARY (15 mins)

The class shares some or all of the small pieces (depending on class size), with time allocated for discussion. E.g. ‘why did you choose to stage [x] moment like that?’, ‘what made you speak with that tone?’ Other students are invited to guess what themes the group had identified in their sources.

Using the presentation, sum up the successes of the Peace Camp, then ask students whether they think there were any limitations to the camp’s protests. Ask whether we can be sure that the Greenham Women’s actions alone lead to these ‘successes’.

Can you think of other campaigns or movements that have used identity in similar ways? Answers could be:

- Black Lives Matter (BLM, formed in 2013): <https://blacklivesmatter.com/> ,
- The Youth Climate Strikes (2018/2019): <https://ukscn.org/ys4c> , or
- Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC, formed in 2010): <https://dpac.uk.net/>.

DIFFERENTIATION

Simplify

- Assign students specific pieces of stimulus material and give them a particular concept, such as peace, to identify.
- Focus on ‘narrative’ (representing the stimuli and telling a story), rather than theme, in the Mile in their Shoes activity.

Stretch

- Students can do their own online research during the lesson.
- During the Starter activity: groups of students could try to create a gate with their bodies. Remind students to think about the conditional, joining and dividing aspects of gates, after the previous conversation.

EXTENSION (Homework or subsequent lesson ideas)

Students design Greenham Common for the stage – either through set design (tents, gates, fences, etc.), lighting and sound design, or through costume (different opposing groups). What are the key themes that could be signified? How do the source materials the students worked with relate to their ideas for their design(s)?

This lesson plan has been designed to take 60 minutes, but can be extended across two or more lessons to allow for deeper inquiry and more devising time.

Our teaching pack, Dial M for Missile, explores themes around the Cold War and includes a lesson plan on the Peace Movement. Another teaching pack, Under Pressure, looks at how pressure groups operate including considering non-violent direct action. Both available via our website.

ENRICHMENT

- Look out for any nearby plays that are set in the time period of the Cold War, or that feature women changemakers or activists. Be aware that there is a play by Jill Truman called The Web (later published as Common Women).

Lesson Two (English): The Women of Greenham Common

Subjects: English, History

OVERVIEW

Students practice reaching consensus, and learn about the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. As a class they discuss the strategies used by the peace activists in their protest. They then conduct 'silent conversations' using historical source material regarding the Peace Camp.

MATERIALS

Pens/Pencils / PowerPoint / Secondary Materials (printed)

ROOM LAYOUT

6 small 'stations' for group work.

All resources available for download from: www.bit.ly/CNDCriticalMass

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- All students should be able to **describe** the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp and its relation to nuclear weapons history, gender identity and social history in the UK.
- Most students will be able to **evaluate** the relative successes and limitations of the camps, as well as considering the role of gender played in these.
- Some students will **consider** how language can be gendered, and can be used to emphasise a particular opinion or political goal.

STARTER: Reaching Consensus (10 minutes)

Students are asked a 'silly' hypothetical question e.g. 'Which animal would host the best dinner party?' (the instructions will use this example, but you can ask any question).

- In groups of 4 or 5, each student must state which animal they believe would be the best host and why. The group must then decide which animal they all agree is the best host (up to 4 minutes).
- The group of students joins with another group of students (totalling around 10), and together must decide which of their two animals makes the best host (up to 3 minutes).
- As a class, a consensus must be reached on which animal (of the remaining 3) would make the best host. There could be a clear winner, the class could take a vote, or traits of these remaining animals could be combined to make a new creature altogether.

The teacher or a capable student acts as a mediator in the last round, and can use hand signals so that the whole class is involved (e.g. hands up, hands down, or hands in the middle, to indicate levels of agreement with a given point).

Inform class that this is how decisions were taken at Greenham Common Peace Camp. Every woman had the chance to speak and share their thoughts as the camp worked by 'consensus'. You might wish to ask students how they found the consensus activity. Can they imagine any limitations to using consensus decision-making in practice?

PRESENTATION and DISCUSSION (15 mins)

Our PowerPoint presentation, as well as the further information and supporting materials in this lesson, can help you to provide students with the necessary information about the Peace Camp in an efficient and engaging way.

Discuss:

- What happened? or What was Greenham Common?
- What do you make of the Peace Camp? Why? Is this an effective way to make a change?
- Why do you think the decision was taken to go women-only (and that this was upheld)? What could men have done to be involved with the camps' work? Why did the women try hard to avoid framing their protest as 'anti-man'?
- Are there advantages and disadvantages of framing the peace camp as women-only? Was Greenham Common more or less successful because of this?
- How do these images from Greenham Common make you feel? How is womanhood portrayed in these images?

MAIN ACTIVITY: Silent Conversations (20 minutes)

Place our stimulus materials (see p.23-31) around the classroom so that multiple 'stations' are formed. Students are formed into small groups and assigned a station to work at.

Students silently annotate the stimulus material (4 minutes). The groups rotate clockwise around the room, and annotate the next stimulus sheet. At every station but the first, they can annotate not just the source material, but also others' existing responses to the stimulus. With each rotation, the teacher asks a new prompt, such as:

- Can you spot how gender is being used here?
- What questions can you ask of the stimuli? Is this a biased or honest representation?
- Where might conflict be seen in the material, how would it arise, and how might it be dealt with?

Lesson Two (English) continued

- What metaphors (in texts) and imagery (in photographs) are being used? How are these gendered?

PLENARY (10 minutes)

After at least 3 rotations (dependent on time), the students are asked to feedback about the kinds of conversations recorded on the A3 paper at the table they are currently at. They must describe the stimuli, some key questions that were asked of it, and any themes or 'big concepts' (e.g. disruption, authority, gender/femininity, 'greater good' etc.) that they think have arisen (i.e. any common responses?). Teacher to note these on the board, and that these thoughts were generated collaboratively.

The teacher asks questions on the themes that arise – can the students define the words on the board, and explain why they relate to the source material? The teacher can:

- Ask the students to order the themes by how important they consider them to be to understanding Greenham Common. This could be modelled on consensus, with one student suggesting an order and the rest of the class 'signalling' their agreement using hand signals. Link this process back to the Starter activity.

DIFFERENTIATION

Simplify

- Allow for discussion time between each rotation of the silent conversations activity, or hold a spoken discussion for each source as a class.

Stretch

- Field questions from students during the Discussion section, and the silent conversations activity.

EXTENSION (Homework or subsequent lesson ideas)

- Create a piece of creative writing from the perspective of: A woman protestor, a male supporter, a US Air Force worker, a policeman, or a Newbury local.
- Write a critical comparison between two or more non-fiction extracts relating to Greenham (see supporting material).
- Identify the different perspectives in a topical protest or direct action, such as the Youth Climate Strikes (2019). Our teaching pack 'Under Pressure', about how pressure groups operate, contains interactive activities and information on protest. Available via our website.
- Students research another historic peace camp and compare its politics to Greenham. Other camps include: RAF Molesworth, Faslane Peace Camp, Seneca Women's Encampment and the Parliament Square Peace Campaign.

ENRICHMENT

- Look out for any nearby plays that are set in the time period of the Cold War, or that feature women changemakers or activists. Be aware that there is a play by Jill Truman called *The Web* (later published as *Common Women*).

Greenham Common Timeline

- September 1981:** The Women for Life on Earth march reaches Greenham Common to protest about NATO's decision to site cruise missiles at Greenham Common.
- March 1982:** The first blockade of the base is staged by 250 women and 34 arrests are made.
- May 1982:** The first eviction of the peace camp takes place and four arrests are made as bailiffs and police move in an attempt to clear the women and their possessions from the site. The camp re-locates.
- December 1982:** 30,000 women join hands to 'embrace the base'. The next day, a mass blockade occurs again.
- January 1983:** On New Year's Day, women enter the base and dance on top of the nuclear silos.
Newbury District Council makes itself private landlord for Greenham Common and starts court proceedings to reclaim eviction costs from women whose address is the peace camp.
- November 1983:** The first cruise missiles arrive at Greenham Common airbase. A total of 95 missiles are to follow in the coming months.
- April 1983:** 70,000 CND supporters form a 14-mile human chain linking Burghfield, Aldermaston and Greenham. 200 women dressed as furry animals enter the base to stage a protest picnic.
- December 1983:** 50,000 women encircle the base, holding up mirrors. Parts of the fence are brought down and hundreds of arrests are made.
- 1987:** Presidents Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev sign the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty – the first agreement between the two powers to actually reduce weaponry. It spelt the end for the Cruise missile and similar Soviet weapons in eastern Europe.
Supporters of the Reagan administration, dismissing the role of the peace campaigners, hailed the Treaty as a victory for the president's 'zero option' of 1981.
At that time, President Reagan sanctioned building up nuclear forces in western Europe until both sides would agree to remove all of their respective intermediate weapons.
- August 1989:** The first cruise missile leaves Greenham Common, as well as other sites in the UK and Europe.
- March 1991:** The US completes removal of all Greenham Common Cruise missiles, as both it and the Soviet Union get rid of their land-based intermediate weapons under the INF treaty.
In total, 2,692 weapons are eliminated – 846 US missiles based across Western Europe and 1,846 Soviet missiles across Eastern Europe.
- 30 September 1992:** The American airforce leaves Greenham Common.
- 1 January 2000:** Women who had remained at Greenham Common campaign to return the site to common land. Once this was achieved, remaining Greenham women began to leave.

Adapted from BBC World Service (1999)

Court Statement – Lesley Davidson

'I believe I had a right to be there as I have a young child and like any other parent I wish to see him grow to adulthood. The presence of Cruise missiles here and the stated willingness of our governments to use them to initiate a nuclear war with Russia, if and when they see fit, makes me very fearful for my son's future. I genuinely believe that the reliance on nuclear weapons for the defence of this country, coupled with the antagonistic and provocative attitudes of the American and British governments towards Russia, makes my son's future so precarious that I have no alternative than to protest and act in any way I can to try to bring attention to this perilous state of affairs.

I believe my duty to try and ensure a safe and secure future for my son justifies my breaking a minor law in order to try to prevent a greater crime being committed. While I recognize that an act of trespass will not directly change the situation, I believe as part of the wider protest, it plays a relevant part. If we fail in our efforts to create a saner and safer future for our children, and the nuclear nightmare becomes a reality, I need to be able to face my son in the knowledge that at least I have tried to protect him. Had I not protested about the dangers to the best of my ability, I would have failed in my duty'.

Source: <https://lacuna.org.uk/protest/memories-of-a-protest/>

Green-Ham Manifesto – Pat Arrowsmith published July 1983, *Tribune*

Greenham Common –
oddly named enclosure,
property of foreigners,
not common land at all;

nor green,
but khaki,
or black/white stark;
nor hamlet,
but floodlight bleached
complex of sharp structures:
blocks, pipes, spikes,
erections,
sinister moulded
lumps and humps, all viciously wired in
with notices declaring,
declaiming,
blaring,
exclaiming:
'In the name of Peace,
Security,
KEEP OUT'.

And yet close by –
hard by
(all things considered) –
camp-fire flickers,
breathes woodsmoke,
smoulders orange,
glows on overhang
of sloping canvas,
pan of simmering
leaf-bean supper,
lights slanting poles
of strong withstanding
women's tabernacle,
bend of boughs,
evergreen protecting
all those people,
peacemakers,
who proclaim this poem:

Every embryo,
Every foetus,
Every infant
Every child,
Every adolescent,
Every adult,
Every middle-ager,
Every old person
shout this message so loud
that even journalists
and politicians hear:

No Cruise
No Trident
No missiles
No atom bombs
No
No
No

To nuclear obliteration.

Pat Arrowsmith (born 1930) is a British peace activist, author and poet. She was an early campaigner against nuclear weapons, first with the Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War and then with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. She was one of the organisers of the first Aldermaston March in 1958 and has been active ever since, being imprisoned many times for her actions. Much of her poetry reflects her anti-militaristic beliefs, her experiences in prison and her feminist politics.

The Day I Once Dreamed – Pat Arrowsmith

from 'Nine Lives: Poems, 1968-89', published Brentham Press, 1990

This is the day I first thought of
in my closed eyes,
deep in my eyes,
the day I first thought of;
with the sun strands weaving,
sun drops sparkling
in the high streams,
on the high seas –
the day I once dreamed.

This is the day I first saw
down in my mind,
deep in my brain,
the day I first saw;
with the wind gulls calling,
barley sheen swishing
in the high wind
on the high hill –
the day I once dreamed.

This is the day I first heard
far away in my head,
away out of sight,
the day I first heard;
with the streets all glittering,
coloured throng shimmering
on the bright lights,
under the lamps –
the day I once dreamed.

That was the day I then saw,
the day I then heard,
when I opened my eyes,
when I unblocked my ears;
the day I then knew
when I focused my mind,
the day I then knew;
with the huge cloud thundering,
thick sky asphyxiating
right overhead,
night overhead,
all over the land –
that was the day I then knew:
the terrible night,
the night of the Bomb,
the night of the doom.
That was the night I then knew –
the night of the end of the world.

Pat Arrowsmith (born 1930) is a British peace activist, author and poet. She was an early campaigner against nuclear weapons, first with the Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War and then with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. She was one of the organisers of the first Aldermaston March in 1958 and has been active ever since, being imprisoned many times for her actions. Much of her poetry reflects her anti-militaristic beliefs, her experiences in prison and her feminist politics.

Campfire's Burning

By Dr Rebecca Johnson

I ONLY meant to protest at Greenham nuclear base for a week, but ended up living at the Women's Peace Camp for five years. In that time I met some amazing women from all over the world, danced on the nuclear silos, occupied the US air traffic control tower, locked myself in the cab of one of the massive "transporter erector launchers" just as it was about to be loaded with cruise missiles for a nuclear exercise, got beaten up by American soldiers and a police sergeant, and imprisoned in Holloway maybe a dozen times. Campaigning against global annihilation wasn't what I'd planned to do with my life. But being at Greenham made me feel incredibly alive, and what I learnt in those years has compelled me to devote my life to working against the justifications and weapons that fuel patriarchal violence and war.

The early 1980s were one of the most dangerous periods of the Cold War, with 50,000 nuclear warheads just poised for someone to make a mistake. We respond to nuclear fears in different ways. It was 1981 when I returned to London after a few years travelling and teaching. American generals and politicians were talking about winning a nuclear war in Europe with a different kind of nuclear weapons that could "melt into the countryside". Images from the museum in Hiroshima seeped into my dreams, a recurring nightmare of waking up and seeing the broken dome of St Paul's across a wasteland of bones and dust.

Going to Greenham was my way to stop the nightmares. What I discovered was how to make a dream I could live with. The Greenham so many women created was populated with waves of feminist, non-violently committed, punky/dykey/witchy/anarcho revolutionaries loving life, loving each other, and stopping the machines of war. Which we did, time and time again. Till we banned the ones in Greenham and sent them back to America where they were dismantled in accordance with the 1987 US-Soviet Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

The Women's Peace Camp developed out of a walk from Cardiff to the Greenham US base, 120 miles away, to raise awareness of the new generation of cruise, Pershing and SS20 missiles being deployed by America and Russia. When threatened with eviction, we occupied part of the base. When sent to prison for "breach of the peace" we mobilized over 30,000 women to Embrace the Base, circling it with linked hands and decorating the nine-mile perimeter with symbols of why we wanted to prevent war. Then we closed the base with the bodies and songs of thousands of women who blocked all the gates for days on end. Hundreds stayed or came back, giving rise to camps all round the base, coloured with rainbow names. At the heart of each camp was the fire, with blackened kettles and endless discussions, punctuated by evictions and nuclear exercises when women were forcibly moved and the fires extinguished... always to return, relight and make another cup of tea.

So the protest grew into an unusual, creative crucible that challenged and changed prevailing expectations of peace activism and sexual politics. As Greenham inspired and involved more and more women from around the world, we took on the racism, colonialism and sexual violence embedded in militarism and nuclear politics, and tried out crazy (but generally effective) ways to undermine military machines and oppressors with nonviolent – but not at all passive – direct action.

As part of a feminist movement that didn't want to have or provide leaders, Greenham women insisted that everyone has the power and responsibility to connect with each other and change the world. That was the symbolism of the spiderwebs we wore as ear-rings and wove across the gates of the base (years before the world-wide-web was born).

Today Greenham women are scattered. We are older and face different challenges. But many of us still feel the need to take action to tackle violence and injustice of all kinds, to confront climate destroyers and sexual predators, rapists and traffickers, violent extremists and wealthy weapons sellers, buyers and users. Look, and you will still see us, as Women in Black, anti-Trident activists or marching with Million Women Rise.

This year, 30 years after Greenham women played such a major part in bringing the US and Russia together to ban nuclear-armed missiles from Europe, we are celebrating a new milestone. In September, the United Nations formally opened the recently concluded 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons for states to sign. Once again, women played a leading role in making this happen. Together with nuclear-bomb survivors, doctors, diplomats and many more, we highlighted the humanitarian arguments for banning and abolishing all nuclear weapons, and created unstoppable momentum to bring the majority of UN governments to the negotiating table'.

(Campfire's Burning was first published in 2017 by *Perfect Bound* magazine, and remains the copyright of Dr. Rebecca Johnson)

The Women's Peace Camp,
RAF Greenham Common

To the Newbury District Councillors

They used to burn witches and the law of the time endorsed it. At one time it was illegal for a married woman to retain her property. The Law is not a creature which exists independently. Laws have been wrong and they have been changed. When laws clash with the developing moral standards of the time then these laws are put aside – ignored. Human beings make, break, change laws and ignore laws that are morally wrong.

If the Women's Peace Camp is destroyed due to part of a law (a very old one, I believe 1925?) then the people who try to endorse such a law, who go against morality in this way by trying to remove the women at the camp, they, YOU are responsible for that action. Don't blindly obey laws that go against Truth and Life – simply ignore them – just as wrong laws have been ignored in the past and eventually changed.

The people who try to move the women at the camp must not hide behind hindering laws – and must not let themselves be pressurised into enforcing them . . . Nature is in the balance. Certain sections of our society have the power to actually destroy the Earth – our home. We at the peace camp seek to alter this suicidal course. We see the realities of the situation and must try to stop this senseless state of affairs.

The protection of life on this planet goes beyond the Law and politics. To overcome the confusions of Law and politics takes only two things – common sense and the ability to see the truth (reality) behind the actions of human beings.

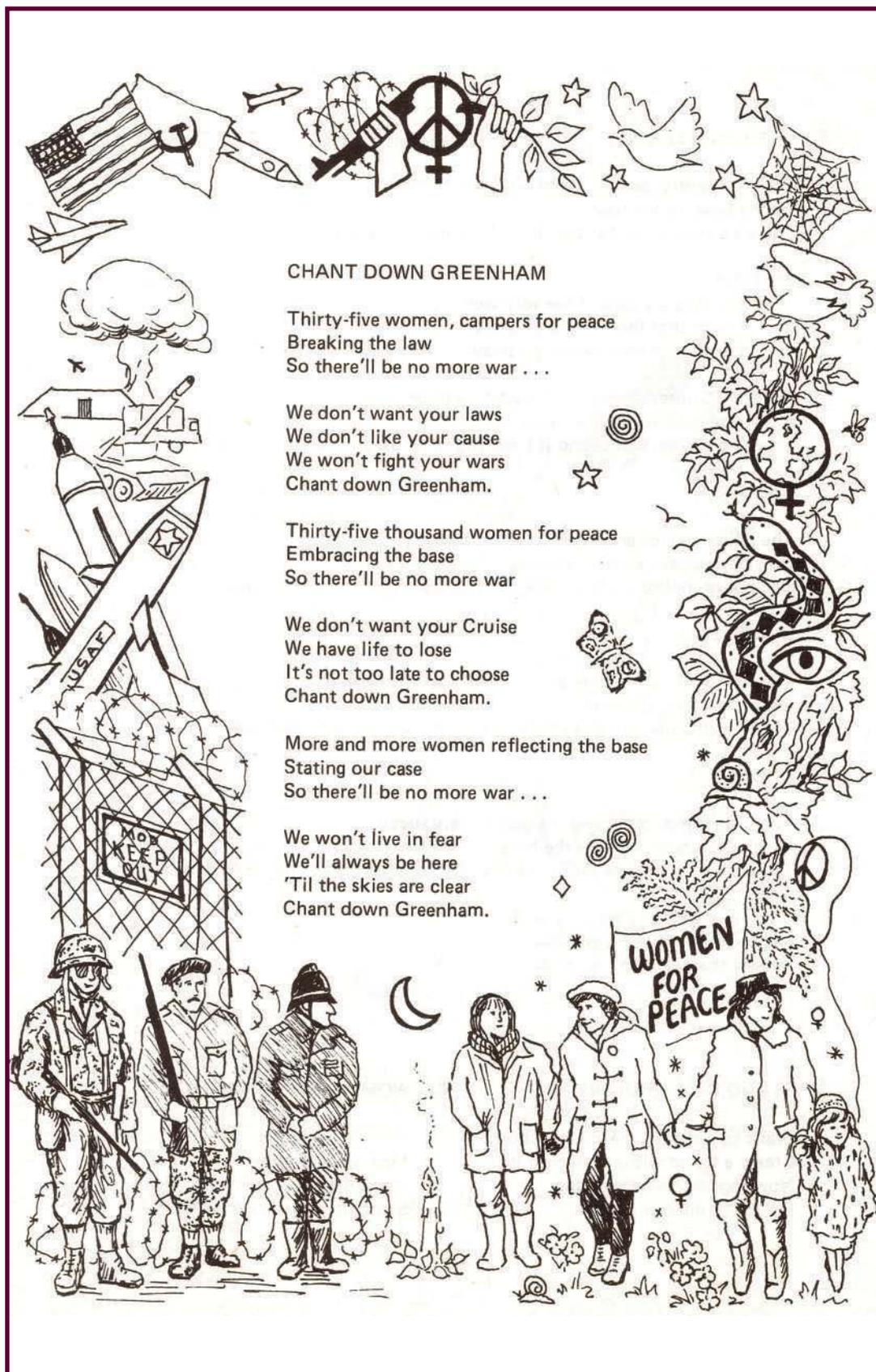
The problem of nuclear disarmament and the protection of life is a nationwide/worldwide problem and it is not the place of a small local council to allow itself to be a pawn in the dangerous military game.

There was no reply.

From *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire*. By B. Harford and S. Hopkins.
The Women's Press Ltd. (1984)



Photos and postcards of 'camp life', with thanks to The Women's Library and LSE Library, where the Greenham Common and CND collections are based.



CHANT DOWN GREENHAM

Thirty-five women, campers for peace
 Breaking the law
 So there'll be no more war . . .

We don't want your laws
 We don't like your cause
 We won't fight your wars
 Chant down Greenham.

Thirty-five thousand women for peace
 Embracing the base
 So there'll be no more war

We don't want your Cruise
 We have life to lose
 It's not too late to choose
 Chant down Greenham.

More and more women reflecting the base
 Stating our case
 So there'll be no more war . . .

We won't live in fear
 We'll always be here
 'Til the skies are clear
 Chant down Greenham.

'Chant Down Greenham', from Chant Down Greenham illustrated songbook.

With thanks to The Women's Library and LSE Library, where the Greenham Common and CND collections are based.

WOMEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH SAY 'NO CRUISE MISSILES AT GREENHAM COMMON'

Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp,
Main gate, USAF/RAF Base,
Greenham Common, Newbury,
Berkshire.

14 October 1982

Dear women,

The US air base at Greenham Common in Berkshire is the first place in Europe where 96 Cruise missiles are to be sited in December 1983. Since September 1981 women have been camping outside the main gate of the air base, protesting against this decision which has been taken without consulting the people of this country.

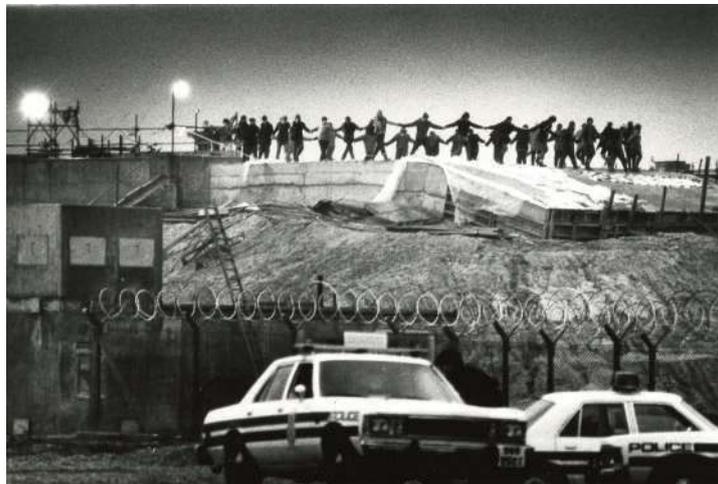
The women who set up the Peace Camp have made personal sacrifices because they feel so strongly about this issue. They have left their families and friends, and given up jobs to live in tents and borrowed caravans without electricity or heating throughout the severe cold of last winter. They have already faced 2 evictions and some of them have spent time in prison - but they are still here and will continue to stay and make a peaceful stand. We all feel that we cannot rely on those in power to protect our lives. The women who have left their families feel that they are taking the greatest responsibility in caring for their children by stopping Cruise missiles coming to this country. We are all individuals with a responsibility to sustain and nurture life - something we can do together, with mutual support.

The Peace Camp has been a women's initiative. Reversing traditional roles, women have been leaving home for peace, rather than men leaving home for war. The camp involves women of different ages and backgrounds. Some have never taken part in any political action before; others have been members of the Labour Party or women's groups, but all feel the urgency of the nuclear threat and are determined not to remain silent. As women we have been actively encouraged to stay at home and look up to men as our protectors. But we reject this role. We cannot stand by while others are organising to destroy life on our earth. It is not enough to go on demonstrations. We must find other ways of expressing the strength of our opposition to this madness. We have one year left in which to reverse the Government's decision about Cruise missiles. There is still time to stop them.

We are inviting women from all over Britain, Europe and the world to come to Greenham Common on December 12 and 13 to take part in a mass action that will show our strength and our intention not to allow Cruise missiles to be sited here. The 2 days will express the spirit of peace and the politics of peace. We want this to be an international action as it is important that people from all the countries facing the threat of these weapons should not remain isolated in their struggle, but should join together and gain strength from each other.

Open letter from Women for Life on Earth.

With thanks to The Women's Library and LSE Library, where the Greenham Common and CND collections are based.



Photographs of actions taken at Greenham Common by Raissa Page.
Copyright: Adrienne Jones – courtesy of Richard Burton Archives, Swansea University.