The suffragettes

by Sarah Gavron

SOMMAIRE DU DOSSIER

Introduction……………………………….p.2

- Film poster and trailer…………..p.3
- Talk about the film……………….p.5
- Women’s rights in the UK and in the world…………………………….p.7
- Improve your English with the Suffragettes……………………….p.9
- More feminist icons………………p.11

Tasks……………………………………………p.13
1/ Briefly, explain the situation of women before, during and after the second world war.

2/ What was a suffragette? Explain the meaning of the word.

3/ What did the suffragettes want? Why? When did this take place, and where?

4/ Can you name a famous suffragette and tell what she’s remembered for?
1/ Describe the film poster in a few words. What can you see? Who are the people and what are they doing?

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__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

2/ Watch the trailer of the movie and answer the following questions.

- How do you react to this document?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

- Where and when does the story take place? Justify.

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

- Who is the movie camera mainly focused on?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

- What is the general atmosphere like?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

- Write down the first two sentences that are heard in the background (voice over).

__________________________________________________________________________________________
What are the girls then shouting while throwing stones at shop windows? What are they demanding?

What do we learn about the main protagonist?

Which historical figure is first referred to, then appears in the document? What do you know about her?

Which social categories of men are represented in this document? Describe their attitudes and reactions towards these women. Pick out some sentences or phrases said by some of them.

What about the main protagonist’s husband?

How does the director show the determination of these women?

Does the trailer make you want to go and see the movie?
1/ Maud’s evolution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maud at the beginning of the film</th>
<th>Maud at the end of the film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2/ What do we know about Maud’s life before the film begins?

__________________________________________
__________________________________________

3/ How did Maud find herself committed to the Suffragettes? What were her motivations? How did her involvement in the movement evolve?

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

4/ Why did Maud go to prison? How were the suffragettes treated in jail? What was their reaction to imprisonment?

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________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
5/ Did Maud’s husband support his wife and her cause? Why? Did all husbands share his opinion?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

6/ Which sacrifices did she have to make? From what you see in the film, do you think they were worth it?

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________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

7/ The suffragettes’ evolution: What actions did they lead to fight for their rights? How did these actions evolve in time and why? Did everyone in the movement agree with that evolution? Why? Was it a clever move? How did they finally manage to attract public attention?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

8/ A battle of sexes: Why do you think men were opposed to women’s vote? Do you think all men shared this opinion? Are all men depicted as enemies in the film? The director of the film is a woman. Do you think the Suffragettes would have been a different film if it had been directed by a man? Is Sarah Gavron trying to rally women viewers to the feminist cause?
1/ Suffragettes in the UK

Which characters from the film do you think are real historic characters?

a) First, make a list of all things you’ve learned about these characters in the film. Then, search the web for more info about these characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERS</th>
<th>INFO FROM THE FILM</th>
<th>INFO FROM THE WEB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emmeline Pankhurst</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith New</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Edith Ellyn in the film)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd George</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) The two main characters, Maud and Violet, were invented. Why do you think director Sarah Gavron chose to focus on imaginary characters and not historical ones?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

Women’s rights in the UK and in the world
c) Which social class do the heroines belong to? Do you think they were the only social class involved in the Suffragettes movement? Can we see Suffragettes from the higher society in this film? If so, how is the fight different for them?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
2/ Women’s rights to vote in the world

a) At the end of the film, what was shown on the screen? Why did the director choose to end the film on this? What is the produced effect?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

b) Search the web and complete this chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Voting rights for women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koweit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment on these dates. Are some of them surprising?
1/ Learn new word and expressions.

Read the following text and try to guess the meaning of the words in bold characters.

The Suffragettes believed it was time they had the same rights as men. Their leader, Emmeline Pankhurst, wrote pamphlets to encourage women to speak up against male domination. They marched to the Parliament to protest against gender inequalities and unfair laws. They demanded the right to vote so that their voices could be heard. Their claims were met with brutal police response. Few women dared to commit to the cause for fear of their husbands’ and neighbours reactions. The activists who got involved in civil disobedience were sent to prison. Some Suffragettes went on hunger strikes to attract public attention but the guards force-fed them to avoid scandal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expressions</th>
<th>Possible meaning</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A right/ rights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To speak up (against)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To march</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To protest (against)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender inequalities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair laws</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To demand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A claim/ to claim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To dare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To commit to the cause</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An activist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get involved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil disobedience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger strike</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be force-fed</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Now, write 5 new sentences using 5 expressions from the chart.
2/ Expressions of oppression and persecution

From what you’ve seen in the film, complete the following sentences.

At the beginning of the 20th century, British women could not.................................................................................................

They had to..................................................................................................................................................................................

They were not allowed to..............................................................................................................................................................

They were forbidden to...............................................................................................................................................................

Women were expected to...............................................................................................................................................................

They could only.............................................................................................................................................................................

They could not.............................................................................................................................................................................

The Suffragettes wanted to..........................................................................................................................................................

They were seen as........................................................................................................................................................................

They were treated as....................................................................................................................................................................

They were forced to....................................................................................................................................................................

3/ Passive women?

Use passive voice to express the repression women had to undergo every day.

1. Prison guards force-fed the inmates.

2. Violet’s husband beat her up.

3. The police tracked down and arrested Emmeline Pankhurst.

4. The Draytons adopted Maud’s son George.

5. The King’s horse killed Emily at the derby.

6. Detective Steed did not arrest Maud after she injured her boss.

7. The director abused the young women of the laundry without any consequences.

8. Edith organized meetings and attacks from her pharmacy.

9. Lloyd George did not pass the bill supporting women’s right to vote.

10. Sonny did not support Maud, he kicked her out of their house.
Read the following text and answer the questions.

Often lauded as the first feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was a political writer and revolutionary advocate of equality who wanted women to reach their full potential within society. She was the first British writer to ‘put the claim of women’s rights to equality into the shape of a theoretical thesis’. Her works significantly contributed to both political thought and educational theory, and her treatise on the rights of women, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, is considered one of the great classics of feminist ideology.

As a young woman, Wollstonecraft helped her sister Eliza to escape from an abusive marriage. In 1783 she became a schoolteacher. The two women established a school and Wollstonecraft became convinced that her female students had been indoctrinated to be subordinate to men. Her experiences inspired her to write Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, in which she criticized traditional teaching methods and suggested improvements on how to teach girls. In 1791 she published her revolutionary political work, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.

In her Vindication, Wollstonecraft boldly attacked the view of female education advanced by political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who claimed that women were incapable of reason. She condemned the educational conditions which perpetuated the ‘slavish dependence’ of women, and criticized society for condoning ‘exquisite sensibility and sweet docility of manners’ all desired attributes of women. Wollstonecraft firmly believed that women must be educated in order to get a sense of self-worth derived not from their physical appearance, but from ‘reason, virtue and knowledge’. She contended in Vindication that women deserved to be granted both civil and political rights, and that for social equality to be realized both ‘monarchical and priestly power’ must be overthrown. Wollstonecraft’s revolutionary ideology engendered prodigious controversy, with Vindication considered shocking by political radicals.

Mary Wollstonecraft was disparaged by many of her contemporaries for her love affairs, suicide attempts and having had an illegitimate daughter, and after death her reputation was effectively destroyed by the publication of a revealing memoir in 1798. It was not until the burgeoning feminist movement of the twentieth century that Wollstonecraft’s works became fully recognized for their inestimable value. Today she is widely acclaimed as not only an important Enlightenment era political philosopher, but also as one of the founders of feminist philosophy.

a) Name?  
b) Born?  
c) Died?  
d) Job?  
e) Publications?  
f) Opinions?  
g) Public image?
2/ Malala: Peace Nobel Prize at 16 years old. (CO)

3/ Modern day feminism: Femen (CE)

Fearless and topless: Femen activists in the UK (the Guardian)

They started out in Ukraine, established headquarters in Paris and last year succeeded in ambushing Vladimir Putin during a visit in Germany. Now the controversial activists of Femen, notorious for their topless protests on issues such as prostitution, abortion and the wearing of the hijab, are planning to target Britain. In London to promote a documentary on the group’s activities, founder member Alexandra Shevchenko said Femen UK would focus on issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and the sex industry. «No one is talking about FGM in England,» she said. «People assume it is too violent and extreme to exist here, that it only happens in Africa and the Middle East, but the UK has some of the highest levels in the west.»

The setting up of a new British arm of Femen’s operations is likely to generate mixed feelings among indigenous feminist groups. A succession of topless protests since the group’s formation in 2009 was greeted with bafflement and amusement, although there is no doubting its members’ courage when facing violent police repression. «Becoming a member of Femen takes more than just a few days,» said Shevchenko. «You must be physically and psychologically prepared. Of course, you have to support our ideology as a starting point, but it is also a question of being fit in your body and mind to fight – to be arrested and struggle with police. Our main enemy is patriarchy and its three manifestations – dictatorship, religion and the sex industry. These issues are universal.»

Femen UK would, according to Shevchenko, be an addition to, not a substitute for, other forms of feminist campaigning in Britain. She claimed that there is an appetite among young women all over Europe for a new, more dynamic form of resistance. «There is real feminist pride in the UK, which is why Femen appeals to women. But many are becoming disappointed with classical feminism, which is like library feminism,» she said. «Of course, we still need those who make theory, but feminism should be like an army.»

Adapted from The Guardian, Saturday 19 October 2013 Written by Zoe Holman

Now answer the following questions, quoting the text to justify your point:

1/ Who are the Femen? What do you think their name sounds like?
2/ What are they fighting against?
3/ How are they different from other feminist groups? What sort of actions do they lead?
4/ How are they perceived by other feminists? Why? Explain the expression «library feminism».
5/ Do you think the Femen are very different from the Suffragettes? Why? Do you think the Suffragettes practiced «library feminism»?
5/ Essay (200-300 words): What do you think of Femen? Why do you think they act topless? Do you think it’s a good idea? Search the web to see some of their recent actions. Do you support their methods or not? Why? Do you think they should be considered as terrorists?
Tasks