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**WOMEN'S MARCH
ON WASHINGTON:**
Stronger Together

Hosted by MICHAEL SERAPIO

 **NEWS
IN
REVIEW**

IN THIS ISSUE

Women’s March on Washington: Stronger Together (Duration 20:53)

The election of President Donald Trump deeply divided the United States. Just a day after his swearing-in ceremony, more than one million people took to the streets around the world to protest. Washington was ground zero. The Women’s March on Washington saw an unprecedented number of marchers turn out. They were there to ensure the new administration did not erode women’s rights. Marchers also gathered in Canadian cities to show their solidarity with their American sisterhood.

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WOMEN’S MARCH ON WASHINGTON: Stronger Together

VIDEO REVIEW

Before Viewing

Have you ever participated in a peaceful protest march? If you have, what was the cause? If not, what might motivate you to join in a peaceful protest march?

Viewing

1. Is there evidence to support the argument that Donald Trump is sexist? Provide details.

2. How many people were expected to attend the Women’s March on Washington?

3. What motivated women to attend the march?

4. Name two other locations that hosted a women’s march on the same day as the Women’s March on Washington.

5. One of the fears among feminists in the United States is that abortion will be made a crime again.

True False

6. More white women voted for Trump than Hillary Clinton. True False

7. What argument does Kim Wilson offer to prove that Trump is pro-women?

Non-profit organizations including the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and the American Civil Liberties Union have reported large increases in donations since the election of Donald Trump. How might you explain this increase?

After Viewing

1. Why do you think it is difficult to have a conversation with someone who strongly disagrees with your point of view?

2. Do you think it is important to hear opposing points of view? Why or why not?

3. Where do you stand when it comes to Trump’s treatment of women?

4. Where do you stand when it comes to Trump’s presidency?

THE STORY

Note to teacher: Provocative language is used in this reading. Discuss with students why people use provocative language and how different social norms accept or sanction the use of this mode of expression. Discuss with students how certain explicit or derogatory words can incite emotions, sometimes in a hateful and demeaning way.

What made the Women’s March memorable?

The Women’s March on Washington took on a life of its own as an estimated five million demonstrators in 82 countries took to the streets to draw attention to women’s rights on January 21, 2017. This included 60 000 people in Toronto and just as many in 33 other jurisdictions across Canada. Around 600 Canadians also made the trip to Washington to participate in the march. The march organizers and participants used all eight techniques you are about to read about to increase the chances of getting their message heard.

Protests like the Women’s March on Washington are designed to draw attention to a particular issue or cause — in this case women’s rights. Some of the more common techniques used in peaceful protests to gain attention from the media, politicians and the general population are:

1. Chanting
2. Singing
3. Holding signs, banners
4. Beating drums or playing musical instruments
5. Wearing clothing that identifies you as a supporter of the cause
6. Recruiting celebrities or famous people to march with you
7. Drawing a large turnout

8. Having speeches delivered by people known for their expertise and support for the cause

Three of the most unique techniques used in the Women’s March on Washington were the creation and use of the “pussyhat” and the prevalence of signs and chants.

The Pussyhat Project

The Pussyhat Project was co-founded by screenwriter Krista Sug and architect Jayna Zweiman to draw attention to the Women’s March on Washington and the myriad of companion marches happening around the world. The two were keenly aware of the soon-to-be president’s derogatory use of language when it comes to women and wanted to use this in their approach to protesting. Donald Trump was widely criticised during the election campaign when out-takes from an Access Hollywood episode from 2005 recorded him saying, “When you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything . . . Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything.”

The outrage that followed this crude revelation was palpable. At a pre-election rally in New Hampshire in November 2016, Michelle Obama said, “I can’t believe that I am saying that a candidate for president of the United States has bragged about sexually assaulting women.” She added, “Because this was not a lewd conversation, this was not just locker room banter. This was a powerful individual, speaking freely and openly about sexually predatory behaviour.”

Outraged by Trump, and perhaps inspired by people like Michelle Obama, Sug and Zweiman came up with an idea. It became their mission to have every march participant wear a pink hat (which they called pussyhats). Women who could not participate in a march were asked to

knit, crochet or assemble a pink hat to donate to a woman who could attend. Their efforts were extremely effective as news footage of the marches show a sea of pink pussyhats which Sug and Zweiman believe constituted a “unique collective visual statement which will help activists be better heard.” They explained their rationale for the entire project when they said:

“We chose this loaded word [pussy] for our project because we want to reclaim the term as a means of empowerment. In this day and age, if we have pussies we are assigned the gender of “woman.” Women, whether transgender or cisgender, are mistreated in this society. In order to get fair treatment, the answer is not to take away our pussies, the answer is not to deny our femaleness and femininity, the answer is to demand fair treatment. A woman’s body is her own. We are honouring this truth and standing up for our rights.”

It is interesting to note how pink hats have become trendy, dominating fashion runways and surging in sales with crafters and commercial companies since the women’s marches.

Protest signs

The signs at the Women’s Marches gained a lot of attention. View a selection of these protest signs on the web at: slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2017/01/21/the_best_protest_signs_from_the_women_s_march_on_washington.html

Alternatively, go to Google and search: women’s march January 2017 protest signs.

1. Which signs do you think were most effective? What made them effective?

2. Do you think the signs were effective in getting an important message across to observers?
3. Create three (3) protest signs for a human or animal or environmental rights cause that you feel strongly about.

Chants

Below is a selection of some chants that were heard during the Women’s March.

“Women’s Rights are human rights!”

“Silence is violence!”

“Consent or Convict!”

“Love! Not hate! Makes America great!”

“Love trumps hate!”

“My body, my choice!” / “Her body, her choice!”

“No justice!” / “No peace!”

“Show me what democracy looks like!” / “This is what democracy looks like!”

1. What are the main arguments or messages articulated?
2. Which chants do you think are most effective? Why?
3. Create your own chant (or spoken word poem) on a human or animal or environmental rights cause that you feel strongly about.

Sources:

pussyhatproject.com

womensmarchmichigan.org

Followup

Was the Women’s March really needed? Decide for yourself.

Research Canada’s ranking in terms of gender parity (the state or condition of being equal) using the Global Gender Gap Report from the World Economic Forum. In what key indicators — e.g. economic participation and opportunity, prevalence of gender violence, seats held in parliament — are we closer to parity (equality) and in what areas are we lagging in parity? What do think are the main reasons for lack of parity in key indicators?

Access the report at:

reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/#economy=CAN

The Trump campaign spent \$3.2 million (U.S.) on hats with the slogan, Make America Great Again. The hats were a huge hit among supporters. Do you see the Pussyhat Project as a kind of response to the Trump hat phenomenon?

WHAT IS A FEMINIST

Note to teacher: Provocative language is used in this reading. Discuss with students why people use provocative language and how different social norms accept or sanction the use of this mode of expression. Discuss with students how certain explicit or derogatory words can incite emotions, sometimes in a hateful and demeaning way.

Finding a definition

Do you identify yourself as a feminist? The term “feminist” can be difficult to define. Some definitions cover a broad spectrum. For example, some definitions of feminism are as simple as “people who support equal rights for women” or “people who believe in equality between the sexes.” On the other hand, Cheris Kramarae, a professor of women’s studies, defines feminism as “the radical notion that women are human beings” — a very provocative and insightful definition that calls on the reader to thoughtfully reflect on the word.

Early 20th century writer and feminist, Rebecca West poignantly describes the difficulty in narrowing down the definition of feminism. According to West, “I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat.”

Despite differences in definitions, one fact is clear: historically women have struggled for equality with men. Some feminist scholars refer to three waves of feminism to describe significant surges of progress in women’s rights in Canada.

- The first wave of feminism in Canada occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This early activism focused on the

right to vote, to an equal education, to own property and to be legally defined as a “person.” That’s right, until women won this particular battle, they were not even identified as a person.

- The second wave of Canadian feminism focused on women in the workforce, the need for equal pay, addressing violence against and abuse of women, and concerns over women’s reproductive rights. This wave occurred in the 1960s and 1970s.
- The third wave of Canadian feminism began in the 1990s and continues to this day. Third-wave feminists are associated with grassroots organizing, anti-racism, anti-colonialism and anti-capitalist movements. Third-wave feminists stress the diversity of women’s experiences, intersectionality (see the column item for a definition), and acknowledge the ways that women can discriminate against and dominate one another.

Intersectionality describes how people can be discriminated against on multiple levels based on things like race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and class. For example, a white woman might experience discrimination based on her gender but enjoy privilege based on her race, while a black woman might experience discrimination based on her gender and race. Watch this introductory video for a definition of intersectionality [youtube.com/watch?v=w6dnj2lyYjE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6dnj2lyYjE). Why do you think intersectionality has become an important aspect of social just and human rights cases?

Unfortunately, feminism has become a contentious word for some people with insulting variations of the word coming in the form of terms like “femi-nazi.” Social justice authors

Ozlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo note with regret how “conservative pundits have managed to take the idea of equality for women and equate it with Nazism, and how such absurd perversions of the term have been so normalized that many young women today don’t want to be associated with feminism.”

Do you think of feminism in a positive or negative way? Why?

However, for many other people, the word feminism is a constructive expression of support for diversity and equality. As a powerful and privileged white male, Prime Minister Trudeau seems to be completely at ease with the positivity associated with the word feminism. He repeatedly refers to himself as a feminist and notes how Twitter explodes with responses, both positive and negative, whenever he does so. When Trudeau put his first cabinet together he made sure there were an equal number of women and men in leadership roles because, in his words: “It’s 2015.” His speech to the UN’s 60th session of the commission on the status of women was extremely well received especially when he said, “I am going to keep saying loud and clear that I am a feminist until it is met with a shrug.”

Perhaps one of the best ways to think about feminism is to consider a range of women’s voices on the topic. Read the selected quotes and answer the questions that follow.

“When a man gives his opinion, he’s a man. When a woman gives her opinion, she’s a bitch.”
– Bette Davis, celebrated actress of the 1950s

“When men are oppressed, it’s a tragedy. When women are oppressed, it’s tradition.”
– Letty Cottin Pogrebin, social activist

“I am a Black Feminist. I mean, I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my blackness as well as my womaness, and therefore my struggles on both of these fronts are inseparable.”

– Audre Lorde, activist and poet

“The worst thing you can call a girl is a girl. The worst thing you can call a guy is a girl. Being a woman is the ultimate insult. Now tell me that’s not royally f----- up.”

– Jessica Valenti, author of *Full Frontal Feminism*

“We need to reclaim the word ‘feminism.’ We need the word ‘feminism’ back real bad. When statistics come in saying that only 29 per cent of American women would describe themselves as feminist — and only 42 per cent of British women...I used to think, What do you think feminism IS, ladies? What part of ‘liberation for women’ is not for you? Is it the freedom to vote? The right not to be owned by the man you marry? The campaign for equal pay? ‘Vogue’ by Madonna? Jeans? Did all that good shit GET ON YOUR NERVES? Or were you just DRUNK AT THE TIME OF THE SURVEY?”

– Caitlin Moran, author of *How to Be a Woman*

Followup

1. What quote do you agree with the most? Why?
2. Which quote do you disagree with the most? Why?
3. What do you think is the most important next step for women’s equality?
4. How are feminists portrayed in the media (whether mainstream or social media)?
5. Create and plan a thought provoking campaign, assembly, interactive display or social media campaign that highlights the contemporary struggle of women.

Sources:

Sensoy, O. and DiAngelo, R. (2012). Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education. Teachers College Press.

The Associated Press. (March 17, 2016). Justin Trudeau: When I call myself a feminist, Twitter explodes. The Guardian. Retrieved from: theguardian.com