



Shipping Out

The Story of America's
Seafaring Women



This guide is made possible with the support of
The Fund for Labor Culture and History.

A teacher's companion guide

for viewing the documentary *Shipping Out* — includes interactive lessons and bibliography for students young and old.

Shipping Out

Maria Brooks, Producer
wfsoundings@aol.com

Study Guide compiled by Thomas Coons

For additional information on *Shipping Out* and a listing of other maritime documentaries please go to:

www.WaterfrontSoundingsProductions.com

and

www.ShippingOutvideo.com

Shipping Out

The Story of America's Seafaring Women Supplemental Guide to Activities and Research

In the video documentary, *Shipping Out*, we meet a diverse group of women in the U.S. Merchant Marine. These women are professional seafarers working on container ships, tankers, ferries, barges and coastal vessels. As licensed “seamen”, they are succeeding in the highly competitive world of global shipping.

The women appearing in *Shipping Out* are employed in occupations traditionally held by men. In the program we meet these seafarers on the job and learn the reasons they chose shipping as a career. We observe their enthusiasm and skill. One seafarer with 20 years experience tells us the best thing about her job is, “being taken seriously”. Another sailor expresses her enjoyment “being the person in charge”. They describe the dangers of the job. They share memories of fear on the high seas. No matter how treacherous the conditions, the job must be done well.

The modern women in *Shipping Out* represent a broader story of the history of women and the sea. In the documentary, we learn about women in the past who, unknown to most of us, sailed ships hundreds of years ago .

Objectives:

This booklet is a companion guide for teachers and is designed to explore subjects raised in the documentary. *Shipping Out* looks at women’s roles in our society and how these roles are rapidly changing.

The guide offers discussion questions and lists activities for classroom use. It suggests projects that will examine various topics more fully. The booklet provides supporting information not always covered in the video. Each topic is supplemented by a bibliography and a list of websites worthy of further exploration.

Curriculum links:

Shipping Out, the video and the guide, will be useful in classes on American history, civics, women’s history, maritime history, gender studies, occupational studies, and folklore. The video is appropriate for 8th grade and above.

The quotes by seafaring women appearing in this guide come from interviews conducted by the director. A complete set of transcripts from *Shipping Out* can be found at the San Francisco Maritime Library.

Our Maritime Culture

Traditionally, America has been a maritime culture. It shares a rich folk traditions with other seafaring nations in stories, songs and poetry. Sea stories, passed on from one generation to the next, preserve the exploits of men who faced great dangers. Women shared many of these dangers. Often their stories went uncelebrated. Women were invisible in maritime history. But with a little research, we find traces of Pirate Queens who owned their own ships. We find women disguised as men on whaling ships and trading schooners. We find stewardesses on the great Clipper Ships, and other women who worked and died at sea on doomed ships like the *Titanic* and the *Lusitania*.

Pushing the Boundaries

Modern history begins in 1974 for seafaring women when the first maritime academy in America accepted women as cadets in Vallejo, California. (That decision was followed quickly by the National Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, New York opening its doors to females.) Women's right to attend the academies was supported by the Civil Rights Act and federal Affirmative Action policies. Given the opportunity, women entered the academies and after four years of study, graduated as officers. Arriving on board ships, they were the first generation of modern maritime women – and they faced many challenges. They were unwelcomed by their male colleagues, some were harassed. As qualified and licensed seafarers, they fought back. With federal law on their side, women won their right to work.

“They would verbally abuse me, put me down, tell me I was useless, tell me I was worthless, tell me I wasn't doing a very good job despite the fact I was doing it by the book. I was doing the best job that I could do and it was by the book... I went an entire trip where nobody would sit at the table with me when I ate. This isolation had a serious affect on me. I lost fourteen pounds on that ship because of the way it made me feel.”

—Captain Carol Curtiss

Dangerous Work and Daring Women

Working on merchant ships can be dangerous, heavy work. *Shipping Out* was filmed on location as the women worked at their jobs repairing and maintaining engines, piloting ships through river bars and harbors, or steering ships from the bridge. The filmmakers talk to unlicensed women in the stewards' department and deck crews. These sailors discuss their jobs and share their personal stories. We learn of the challenges of maintaining a home life and raising a family when a sailor is away from home for months at a time.

“When I first started working I still had teenage children at home. I missed a lot of their activities when I was gone to work—school sports or things like that. I had to. I did have to miss some things that were pretty important, but working was pretty important for me also.”

—Nikki Rodriguez, steward

Table of Contents

Unit 1 – Women at sea

<i>Shipping Out</i> , questions for discussion	4
Class Activities	5
Vocabulary	6
Tugboat Annie	7
The “first” women seafarers	8
Bibliography	10

Unit 2 – History

Women in Disguise	11
<i>Handsome Cabin Boy</i> text	12
Shanties and Folk Songs	14
Pirates	15
Bibliography	16

Unit 3 – Folklore

Witches, Sirens, Mermaids	17
Bibliography	20



Miss Rothery on the British ship Dimsdale.

Unit 1

Women at Sea

“It was like they just resented women in the workplace and I had a guy say to me once, ‘you should be ashamed of yourself.’ I say why should I be ashamed of myself? ‘Because some guy is on a beach right now starving and he can’t feed his family because of you.’ So in other words I stole his job, and his family’s starving on a beach.”

—Adena Kenny, mate

Questions for discussion after viewing the documentary Shipping Out.

- 1) Seafaring women have been told that they are taking “men’s jobs”. What is meant by the term “non-traditional” occupations for women? How was it decided that men did certain jobs and women did other kinds of work?
- 2) Besides shipping out as a seafarer, what other “non-traditional occupations” have you seen women perform? Do men work in “non-traditional occupations” today? Can you name some of these jobs?
- 3) The documentary makes the point that there were women on ships all through history, although most people are unaware of it and they often are not mentioned in history books. Why do you think that is?
- 4) Only a small percentage of women are seafarers today. Why don’t more women go to sea for a career? What do you think are the advantages disadvantages of a career at sea?



Captain Anne McIntyre, Columbia River Pilot

- 5) In years past, why do you think it was acceptable for women to serve patrons on ships as stewardesses but not acceptable for women to fix engines or drive the ship?
- 6) What is “Affirmative Action”? When Captain Hickman says she might never have had a career at sea without Affirmative Action, what does she mean?
- 7) Who was Anita Hill? How did her testimony in Congress affect the life of Captain Carol Curtiss and other seafarers on ships? Can you think of other jobs that might have been affected by the Anita Hill’s testimony?
- 8) What is sexual harassment? Can you give examples? Why does one person harass another? Does sexual harassment only happen at work? Can men be sexually harassed?
- 9) In the video Captain Sanborn says that when she started going to sea it was presumed that a seafaring woman would not marry or have children. Why did women feel they needed to make this decision? Do you think men seafarers made similar decisions? Can you name other jobs where it would be difficult to get married or have a family?
- 10) Women seafarers say they like their jobs because they get large blocks of time off and don’t have to work nine to five everyday. Would that be important to you in choosing a job? How many other professional jobs can you think of where workers have large blocks of time off?
- 11) In *Shipping Out*, Melissa Parker is saving historic tugboats and supporting her baby as a single mother by selling real estate. She has decided not to ship out and leave her baby in child care. What are her choices? Can you think of ways she might keep her job as a seafarer?

“The assumption wasn’t that you were competent, the assumption was that you were incompetent by the mere fact of your gender. And they were doing everything that they could to create a hostile enough environment that you would leave.”

—Captain Anne Sanborn

Class Activities

- 1) If you live in an area near a port city, locate a woman working in the maritime industry and ask for an interview. Prepare a list of questions. The interview can be conducted on the phone or in person. To locate the women, contact a shipping company, a maritime union hall or a port office. (Instructors might also arrange for a speaker for the class.)
- 2) For information about maritime jobs and academic requirements for jobs at sea, students can contact one of the regional maritime academies in the United States or the National Maritime Academy in Kings Point, New York.
- 3) If students don’t live near a port city, they can interview a woman whose job takes her away from home for long periods of time. (Examples are truck drivers, actors, skilled trades people, military personnel, etc). Students can interview these professionals about their jobs and how they balance a family life. After collecting the interviews, students can discuss the similarities or differences compared to the women’s stories in *Shipping Out*. (Older students can video their interviews to show to the entire class.)
- 4) Every job has a specific vocabulary. Students can make a list of the words used frequently by the worker they’ve interviewed.

Vocabulary in Shipping Out

captain	person in command of the ship
pilot	a captain who takes over a ship as it enters a river or harbor, this person is an expert for a particular body of water
mate	licensed officer on deck whose jobs include standing watch, supervising cargo, navigation;
marine engineer	licensed officer in engine room whose job include maintaining and operating the ship's engines;
chief engineer	the person in command of the engine room; she is the supervisor of everyone who works in the engine room
able bodied seaman	unlicensed worker on a commercial vessel who knows the basic seafaring skills on deck, this person is also the helmsman;
helmsman	the person who steers the ship (stands at wheel);
deckhand	an unlicensed person who works on deck;
steward	unlicensed person who works in the kitchen (galley) or laundry, cleans rooms;
purser	a person who keeps the written accounts on a ship;
sounding(s)	a measured depth of water from a ship;
the bridge	the control room where the captain or the pilot stands to see the full expanse of the ship;
mess	the room where meals are eaten;
course	the compass direction the ship is steered;
merchant marine	a nation's ships engaged in commerce (trade).



Captain Deborah Dempsey, bar pilot on flying bridge



Captain Jeannie Pinto, Tugboat Operator

Tugboat Annie

Note to teachers: “Tugboat Annie” stories began in 1931 in the old magazine, “The Saturday Evening Post”. The stories were published, on and off, for thirty years. Most public libraries have access to these old magazines on microfilm. Send students to the library to read an original “Tugboat Annie” story and then write it up, or tell the class about the challenges Annie faced.

Three Tugboat Annie movies were produced by Hollywood. Her character is altered in the movies. (She’s a doting mother in the movies). Rent the movie and compare the differences in the treatment of “Tugboat Annie”. Why was Tugboat Annie changed when she appeared in the movies?



Tugboat Annie in the “Last Laugh”, 1933 The Saturday Evening Post

artist: Anton Otto Fischer

The "First" Women

Some of the seafarers in this show are the first women to hold their jobs. Lynn Korwatch is the first licensed captain of a container ship in the US, and Carlie Westcott was the first licensed Marine Engineer. Students can research other women who were first in their profession or trade and give a presentation to the class, write an essay or make a poster.



Captain Anna Shetinina, first woman captain of an ocean going freighter in the world, 1935

Some Seafaring "Firsts": (All can be found on the Internet)
Victoria Drummond (1896–1978) born in Norfolk, England; the first British woman to serve as Chief Engineer in World War II. She received the Lloyd's War Medal "for bravery at sea". Chief Drummond kept the engines running after her ship was disabled by an enemy bomb.

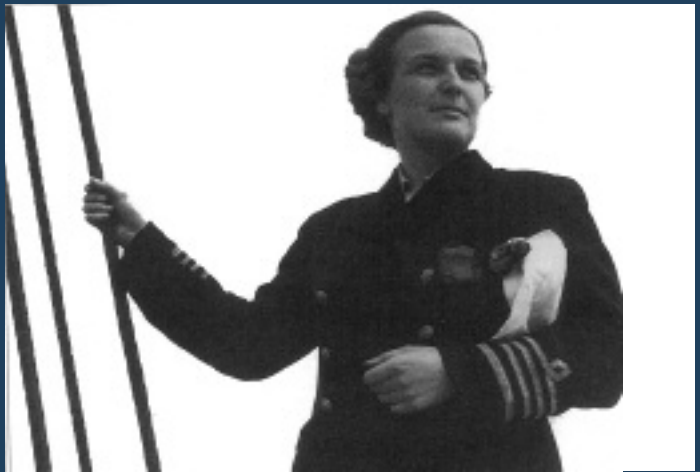
Anna I. Shetinina (1908–1999) born in Siberia, Russia; the world's first woman captain of an ocean going merchant ship in 1935. Commanded Liberty ships from America to Russia during World War II. She received the Medal of the Soviet Union for her courage at sea.

Molly Kool (1916–) born in New Brunswick, Canada; first registered woman sea captain in North America (1939). After five years as captain, she retired from the sea to get married.

Noteworthy Women of the Sea:

Mary Patten (1837–1861) American; the only woman to take command of a clipper ship after the Captain, Patten's husband, was incapacitated in 1857. Patten, expert at navigation, was pregnant at the time.

Ida Lewis (1842–1911) American; a lighthouse keeper in Newport Harbor, RI, Lewis is officially credited with 18 lifesaving rescues in the water by the the US Coast Guard. A Coast Guard vessel was commissioned in her honor in 1997.



Captain Molly Kool, photo from "Women at Sea in the Age of Sail" By Donald Baird

Additional Discussion Questions

- 1) Ask students to name a famous woman sailor – either fictional or real? Can they name any women sailors in the movies? How are women depicted in movies about the sea?
- 2) Tugboat Annie was a fictional character. What contradictions can the audience see in Tugboat Annie? We learn she's a competent sea captain – but we laugh at her. Why?
- 3) The Tugboat Annie stories were written by Norman Reilly Raine. Does the fact that the writer is a man affect how we see Annie? If the book had been written by a woman, would Annie's personality and accomplishment be seen differently?
- 4) Author Barbara Sjöholm says in *Shipping Out*, “Tugboat Annie is independent, she shows that she doesn't need a man to make a living and get along. But a big woman and an old woman in our culture has very mixed messages.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What do you think these mixed messages are? Can you name some famous women who illustrate your point of view?
- 5) Rent a video with a maritime theme. Some examples are: “Master and Commander”, “The Pirates of the Caribbean”, “Mutiny on the Bounty” or “The Perfect Storm”. How are women portrayed in the film? What work do they do?

Classroom Projects

- 1) Assign students to research other women seafarers or investigate other professions to find the first women. Examples of pioneering women are: Valentina Tereshkova, first woman in space, Sally Ride – first American woman in space to orbit Earth.
- 2) Look through magazines and newspapers and clip out or photocopy pictures of women working in non-traditional jobs and post them around the classroom.
- 3) Find a local woman who was the first in her profession or trade and interview her, then make a presentation to the class or write up the interview.

“I really enjoy making things work, knowing that I turned this valve and made this happen and I'm making the ship move. That is such a satisfaction. It's a great feeling. I like the edginess of it. I don't want anything to break, but if it does, I can take the thing apart and find out what happened.”

—Michelle McCoy, engineer

Selected Bibliography

- Baird, Donal. *Women at Sea in the Age of Sail*. Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2001.
- Belcher, P., *Women Seafarers, Global Employment Policies and Practices*. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2003.
- Carroll, Olive J. *Deep Sea 'Sparks': a Canadian Girl in the Norwegian Merchant Navy*. Vancouver: Cordillera Publishing Company, 1993.
- Cordingly, David. *Women Sailors and Sailors Women, an Untold Maritime History*. New York: Random House, 2001.
- Creighton, Margaret S. and Lisa Norling, ed. *Iron Men, Wooden Women, Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Dempsey, Deborah Doane and Joanne Reckler Foster. *The Captain's Woman: Tales of a Merchant Mariner*. Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1998.
(note: Captain Dempsey appears in *Shipping Out*)
- de Pauw, Linda Grant. *Seafaring Women*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982
- Druett, Joan. *Hen Frigates: Wives of Merchant Captains under Sail*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.
- Druett Joan. *She Captains, Heroines and Hellions of the Sea*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000.
- Drummond, Cherry. *The Remarkable Life of Victoria Drummond, Marine Engineer*. London: Institute of Marine Engineers, 1994.
- Jensen, Vickie. *Saltwater Women at Work*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995.
- Lutz, Jeanne. *Changing Course: One Woman's True-Life Adventures as a Merchant Mariner*. Far Hills N.J: New Horizon Press, 2003.
- Raine, Norman Reilly. *Tugboat Annie, Great Stories from the Saturday Evening Post*. Indianapolis: Curtis Publishing Company, 1977.

Unit 2

History

Women in Disguise

We don't know how many women put on men's clothing and sailed on ships. There could be many. Lucy Brewer, Almira Paul, and Eliza Allen are names we know of women who went to sea 'as men'.



Discussion Questions

1. Why would a woman want to disguise herself? What were the advantages of going to sea for a woman? What kinds of problems might a woman have faced when she lived on board a ship pretending to be a man?
2. Many women were successful in disguising themselves as men. Why, in your opinion, did the male sailors not suspect anything?
3. Using the bibliography and the Internet, find out more information about these women and others who dressed as men and went to sea as sailors. Did the women come from similar backgrounds? Why did the women go public with their experiences? Are some stories unbelievable? Why?
4. The seafarers in *Shipping Out* tell us their reasons for choosing a career at sea. How do their reasons differ from those historical women who crossed-dressed?

Bibliography

Cohen, Daniel A. *The Female Marine and Related Works*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997.

de Pauw, Linda Grant. *Seafaring Women*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982

Stark, Suzanne. *Female Tars: Women aboard Ship in the Age of Sail*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996. (note: Stark is featured in *Shipping Out*.)

See also: <http://www.mariner.org/women/> (The Mariners' Museum at Newport News, VA has an extensive website on women's maritime history)

The Handsome Cabin Boy

There are several folk songs that refer to women disguising themselves as men and going to sea. Handsome Cabin Boy, probably the most famous of the cross-dressing folk ballads, is performed in *Shipping Out*. Read the poem aloud and review the story line with your class.

The Handsome Cabin Boy

It's of a pretty fair maid
As you shall understand
She had a mind for roving
Into a foreign land
Attired in sailor's clothing
She boldly did appear
And engaged with the Captain for
To serve him for a year.

She engaged with the Captain
A cabin boy to be
The wind it was in favour
They soon put out to sea
The Captain's lady being on board
She seemed it to enjoy
So glad the Captain had engaged
A handsome cabin boy

So nimble was that pretty maid
And done her duty well
But mark what followed after,
As she herself can tell
The Captain with the pretty maid
Did often kiss and toy
For he soon found out the secret of
The handsome cabin boy

Her cheeks appeared like roses
And with her side-locks curled
The sailors oft times smiled and said,
He looks just like a girl
But eating Captains biscuit
Her colour did destroy
And the waist did swell of pretty Nell
The handsome cabin boy

As through the Bay of Biscay
Their gallant ship did plough
One night among the sailors
There was a pretty row
They bundled from their hammocks
It did their rest destroy
And they swore about the groaning
Of the handsome cabin boy

O doctor, O doctor
The cabin boy did cry
The sailors swore by all that's good
The cabin boy would die
The doctor ran with all his might
And smiling with the fun
For to think a sailor lad should have
A daughter or a son

The sailors when they heard the joke
They all began to stare
The child belonged to none of them
They solemnly did swear
The lady to the Captain said
My dear I wish you joy
For it's either you or I betrayed
The handsome cabin boy

So they all took up a bumper
And drank success to trade
And likewise to the cabin boy,
Though neither man nor maid
And if the wars should rise again
The sailors to destroy
We'll ship some other sailors like
The handsome cabin boy.



Almira Paul served for three years as a sailor dressed as a male.

Discussion questions:

1. What was the job of a cabin boy on a ship?
2. What was the secret of the Cabin Boy that the Captain found out?
3. Why did the sailors like the cabin boy?
4. Why was the cabin boy groaning and caused the sailors to get out of bed one night and call the doctor?
5. What was the “joke” that caused the sailors to stare?
6. Who did the sailors think had betrayed the cabin boy?
7. In the last verse, we are told that the Handsome Cabin Boy was “neither man nor maid”. What does the song mean by this?

Classroom Projects

1. Write a song/poem about a job or a sports activity you do. Find music you like and match the song to the music. Write a song/poem about an event in the news. Find music to match the emotions in the poem.

Sea Shanties (Chanties)

Unlike folksongs, sea shanties are work songs that were sung to coordinate work in the days when men performed the heavy labor rather than machines. There were special songs for working at the capstan, halyard, windlass and pump. (These are words to define.)

Classroom Projects:

Look up sea shanties on the Internet. How are women portrayed in these songs? List descriptions or adjectives pertaining to women mentioned in the shanties.

Compose a shanty to accompany the work you do around the house, such as mowing the lawn or washing dishes. You might even write a shanty for a sports activity.

Reference

A book with an accompanying cassette:

Grasso, Glenn. *Songs of the Sailor*. Mystic, CT: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1998.

A book with lyrics and music:

Hugill, Stan. *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, Mystic CT: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1994

For other versions of “Handsome Cabin Boy” see the following web site:

[Mysongbook.de/msb/songs/r_clark/cabinboy.htm](http://mysongbook.de/msb/songs/r_clark/cabinboy.htm)

Another traditional song about a woman who goes to sea is “The Female Rambling Sailor” see:

www.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/15151/transcript/1

And: <http://www.mariner.org/women/goingtosea/songs.htm>

<http://www.contemplator.com/sea/>

“There were street ballads at that time on political subjects—anything that was happening, somebody wrote a ballad about it. Somebody was hanged, they'd write his last words, telling how he regretted he lived so bad. There were street ballads on all subjects, they'd sell them for a quarter or a penny. Those ballads loved to get hold of a story about a woman who went to sea to find her lost (sweetheart).”

—Suzanne Stark, author

PIRATES



Cristina Tattini as pirate from Shipping Out

Shipping Out mentions the names of three famous pirates – Anne Bonny, Mary Reade and Grace O’Malley. There were many others.

Classroom Projects:

Research a woman pirate, one listed above or discover new ones. The Internet will be a great help. Students can break up into small groups to research different pirates. When students have assembled short biographies of the pirates, they can compare notes. What do the pirates share common? Were they poor? Were they fatherless? Did they have strong willed mothers? Or maybe it’s none of the above.

After the students have researched real pirates, show a pirate movie. (Suggestions: “The Pirates of the Caribbean” and “Cutthroat Island”) How do the real pirates compare to Hollywood’s portrayal?

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why did a few women in the past become pirates? Do the same reasons exist today – or has society changed? If you were a girl living in past, might you have chosen to be a pirate? What would you sacrifice to become a pirate? What would be the rewards?
- 2) Pirates still sail on the oceans today, preying on merchant ships. Go on the Internet or to the library and research modern day pirates. What countries do they come from? Are there women pirates today? Are their reasons for becoming pirates different from those of the pirates in the past. What are they stealing from the ships?

Classroom Projects:

- 1) Interview a pirate. One student can role play the part of a pirate, while another can portray a reporter. (The pirate should be a real character from history whom the student has researched.)

- 2) Reenactments – students can take the role of pirates and be “guests” on a tv talk show. (This is a variation of the interview) A student can dress the part of a pirate and be introduced to the audience who can then ask the pirate questions about her trade.
- 3) Pirates could not place their stolen loot in banks so they often buried it or hid it somewhere. Stage a “treasure hunt” in which students must find out information about seafaring or other exceptional women. Use the library and websites. Set up teams to see which group can find the most women who accomplished a “first”, or can locate women who are working in unusual jobs or have produced something unique in the arts or sciences.
- 4) Write a letter home after being captured by Grace O’Malley, the Pirate Queen. What does she look like? How does she treat the captives? How does she treat her male crew, her fellow pirateers?
- 5) Describe a fictional meeting with Grace O’Malley and Queen Elizabeth or with Condaleeza Rice or with Hillary Clinton or with another prominent woman.

Bibliography

Cook, Judith. *Pirate Queen, the Life of Grace O’Malley 1530-1603*. Cork, Ireland: Mercier Press, 2004.

Eastman, Tamara and Constance Bond. *The Pirate Trial of Anne Bonny and Mary Read*. Cambria Pines by the Sea, CA: Fern Canyon Press, 2000

Klausmann, Ulrike. *Women Pirates and the Politics of the Jolly Roger*. New York: Black Rose Books, 1997.

Lorimer, Sara. *Booty: Girl Pirates on the High Seas*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002.

Scott, Sir Walter. *The Pirate*. London: The Waverly Book Company: London, 1900

Sjoholm Barbara. *The Pirate Queen, In Search of Grace O’Malley and other legendary women of the sea*. Emeryville CA: Seal Press, 2004. (note: Sjoholm is featured in *Shipping Out*)

Stanley, Jo. *Bold in her Breeches: Women Pirates across the Ages*. London: Pandora, 1996.

Yolen, Jane. *The Ballad of the Pirate Queens*. New York: Voyager Books, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995

And see also:

www.deadmentellnotales.com

www.beaglebay.com/womenpirateslist.htm

...many others under “women pirates” ...



Mary Read, pirate

Unit 3

Folklore

Witches, Sirens and Mermaids

Shipping Out briefly discusses traditional attitudes toward women and the sea in Western culture. Stories, carvings, paintings, mythologies from ancient sources to modern day depict images of women, usually from men's points of view. Students can research these images and stories and compare them. How do the perceptions of the past compare to today's modern perceptions of women?

MACBETH

First Witch

I myself have all the other:
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I' the shipman's card.

I will drain him dry as hay:
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid;
He shall live a man forbid:
Weary seven-nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine:
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost....

(Act 111, Scene 3)

The following are a few mythological perceptions of women in connection to the sea. All can be researched on the Internet.

Sirens:

Sirens were bird women, buxom, winged and sometimes bearded, they almost always had the talons of birds of prey. Sometimes they needed arms when they accompanied their irresistible chant - their supreme attribute - with the lyre, cymbals or drums. The price of listening to the song of the Siren was death.

With wings spread or folded, the earliest Sirens were depicted looming over sailors at sea. One of their duties was to carry off the dying.

Ran:

Scandinavian legends tell of the goddess Ran, the ravisher, who caused storms at sea and captured dying sailors in a huge net. She entertained the drowned men in a great hall beneath the sea. Her nine daughters were temptresses who reached out their arms and dragged young sailors to the seabed.

Lorelei:

Lorelei a witch, similar to the Sirens, on the Rhine River in Germany was thought to cause whirlpools near Goarshausen and to sink ships. She sat on the rocks combing her golden hair and singing. Sailors' minds became clouded and their ships were pulled into the whirlpools.

Mermaids:

In Western Culture mermaids are beautiful women with fishy tails. They lure sailors with their beauty to join them under the sea, which causes the sailor's death.



In his logs, Christopher Columbus reported the sightings of three mermaids off the coast of Haiti



Odysseus passing the sirens

Discussion Questions and class activities:

- 1) What mythical powers were women thought to have had at one time? Do you think women today have mystical powers that men don't possess? What is meant by the expression, "women's intuition"?
- 2) For thousands of years, sailors have recorded sightings of sirens, mermaids and other mythical creatures. What do you think they really saw in the oceans? Why do you think these images were female—and not male?
- 3) Write down your description of a witch? How does your description compare to the ancient mariners' images? What powers does your witch possess? Why do you think there were so many more women accused of witchcraft than men?
- 4) Stage a mock trial of a sea witch in the classroom. Choose students to sit on the jury. Choose defense and prosecuting 'attorneys' who will ask questions of the alleged witch. The witch may have been accused of casting spells that caused a ship to sink. (see *Macbeth*) Student 'witnesses' can testify for and against the witch. Did they see the witch acting suspiciously? What is the jury's verdict? If the witch is guilty, what is her punishment?
- 5) Compile a list of maritime superstitions. There are many. The following websites will help:
http://pacificoffshorerigging.com/nautical_superstitions.htm
<http://www.geocities.com/oighrig1/Superstitions.html>
- 6) Question: Who can whistle? Even today it is considered "bad luck" to whistle on ships, especially for women. What reason can you think of that would explain this superstition? Why do superstitions come into being? What superstitions do you believe?

Bibliography

For Witches

Klausmann, Ulrike. *Women Pirates and the politics of the Jolly Roger*. New York: Black Rose Books, 1997.

Sjoholm Barbara. *The Pirate Queen, In Search of Grace O'Malley and other legendary women of the sea*. Emeryville CA: Seal Press, 2004. (note: Sjöholm is featured in *Shipping Out*)

For Macbeth:

William Shakespeare

<http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare/macbeth/4/> (Macbeth)

For Ran:

Cordingly, David. *Women Sailors and Sailors Women, an Untold Maritime History*. New York: Random House, 2001.

See also: <http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~rebis/ts-artic2.htm> (for Ran)

For Lorelei:

(<http://www.meredith.edu/stones/rhine.htm>)

For Mermaids:

rubens.anu.edu.au/student.projects/mermaids/ (for mermaids)

<http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/mermaids/>

For Sirens:

(<http://www.thanasis.com/sirens.htm>) (for sirens)



Erin Bostrom, Able bodied Seaman



*Study Guide supported by
The Fund for Labor Culture and History*