

ACTIVITY SHEET

ORDINARY WOMEN: CHING SHIH

SUMMARY

"One of the most famous and feared pirates who ever lived was Ching Shih, a young Cantonese woman who became the ruler of one of the largest pirate fleets in history, and the mastermind behind a floating criminal empire so powerful that even the Chinese military couldn't stop it."

STOPPING POINTS/VIDEO BREAKDOWN

- 0:25** Introduction to Ching Shih
- 0:50** Accepting a woman as leader
- 1:20** Characteristics
- 1:40** Rules and conduct
- 2:25** Ching Shih as entrepreneur
- 3:00** Government negotiations
- 4:05** Later years: Transformation

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & THEMES

1. What do we typically think of when we think of pirates? How does Ching Shih confirm the assumptions we make about pirates as both fictional characters and as historic figures? How did she redefine the role?
2. When her husband died, Ching Shih stepped in as leader in a time when female leadership was incredibly rare. What characteristics did Ching Shih have that lead to this occurrence, and how can we relate her experiences to other female leaders' experiences today?
3. Western texts describe Ching Shih as a remarkable beauty and likened her to a goddess, while more reliable texts emphasize her practical approach to leadership and her abilities as a military strategist as the foundation for her success. Why does this discrepancy in accounts exist, and what does it tell us about the representation of women in both history and fiction?
4. While it should be noted that the Ching Shih was often brutal in the discipline of those who worked for her, her organizational skills and ability to take her career into her own hands made her an effective leader in many ways. What can we learn from her abilities as a leader? What criticisms might we have for her approach to leadership, and what alternative methods of management can we propose instead? For example, Ching Shih turned to violence to manage her fleet – what effective alternatives to violence can we explore in leadership practices?

ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES (SCHOOL-BASED OR EXTRA-CURRICULAR)

1. Consider the archetype of the pirate as portrayed in various forms of media (movies, novels, fairytales) and pirates who existed in history, and compare these figures with Ching Shih. In making this comparison, consider what made Ching Shih exceptional in her life as a pirate.
2. Ching Shih managed her business as leader of a pirate fleet through a strict code of conduct and a clear business model. Conduct further research on her business and leadership structure, and compare this with other historical ventures of a similar scale. In engaging in this comparison, consider how her leadership and business techniques contributed to her success.

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COMMUNITY-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES (COMMUNITY GROUPS, YOUTH CAMPS, WRITING GROUPS, MUSEUMS)

- 1. WRITING GROUP ACTIVITY:** While Ching Shih was a real person in history, writers often use historical figures as inspiration for characters and stories. In this activity, use Ching Shih's character and life as a model to develop a complex female character in a pre-existing story of yours, or reimagine a character that already exists in another story. This can involve playing around with approaches to responsibility and leadership, a character's interactions with others, and general characterization.