

ACTIVITY SHEET

ORDINARY WOMEN: EMMA GOLDMAN

SUMMARY

Once dubbed one of the most dangerous people in America by J. Edgar Hoover, activist and speaker Emma Goldman defied history with her revolutionary support for labor rights, women's rights and "everyone's right to beautiful radiant things."

"I demand the independence of woman, her right to support herself; to live for herself; to love whomever she pleases, or as many as she pleases," [...] "I demand freedom for both sexes, freedom of action, freedom in love and freedom in motherhood."

STOPPING POINTS/VIDEO BREAKDOWN

- 0:48** Background of Emma Goldman
- 1:20** Beginnings of her life as an activist in the US
- 1:35** Anarchism & her philosophy
- 1:50** Rise to fame
- 2:15** At odds with suffragists
- 3:00** Quote by Emma Goldman
- 3:15** Controversial ideas
- 3:40** Deportation
- 4:05** Final US speaking tour
- 4:30** Dying wish
- 4:50** Quote about liberty

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & THEMES

1. "For Goldman, a revolution without dancing was not a revolution worth having." Discuss this quote in the context of contemporary movements – Where do we see this kind of criticism in contemporary activism?
2. Goldman was a public speaker whose words were often likened to that of a sledgehammer. How does this description relate to how women with overt opinions are treated in the media today?
3. Do you think suffragists were correct in seeking the right for women to vote, or do you believe they should have done as Goldman suggested and attempted to address systemic issues directly? How might we as a society continue this line of thinking in our own contemporary contexts to seek systemic change?
4. Once sent back to Russia by the American government, Goldman returned to a country that had just undergone a revolution. However, in spite of this the people found themselves still living under an oppressive regime. Following periods of political turmoil, how do citizens hold their governments accountable in support of positive systemic change?
5. "A trail of bonfires marked Goldman's rampage through life." A historian described Goldman's life in this way – Do you think her unapologetic approach to activism helped her in reaching her audience? What do we have to learn from the commitment she showed to her convictions?

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ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES (SCHOOL-BASED OR EXTRA-CURRICULAR)

1. Consider Emma Goldman's early history and the role education played in her decision to pursue activism as her life calling. Compare her story with those of contemporary girls and women today who are advocating for equality and/or education for girls and the social expectations they reject in doing so.
2. Goldman was imprisoned multiple times in her life for her beliefs and what she suggested to those who listened to her speak. This activity asks you to research another figure in history who has been imprisoned for their beliefs, and to explore the societal context for their imprisonment.
3. Goldman celebrated the efforts of workers and anarchists in Spain who fought against fascism during the Spanish civil war. Research a movement or revolution, and consider their underlying approach to protest and activism. Compare this with the revolution in Spain which Goldman so strongly praised.

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

1. Attend, participate in or hold a public speaking event related to a cause of concern, and consider during this activity how Emma Goldman communicated her own concerns and made connections as an activist. For example, this activity would assist new active members of unions in mobilizing and communicating concerns to a collective audience or to engage in debates regarding the interests of collective members.
2. As a collective, develop and/or host an event which both raises awareness for a cause supported by your community organization and that is created with Goldman's philosophy in mind regarding the universal right to "beautiful, radiant things".
3. Create a promotional video, website or pamphlet for your community organization that acknowledges shared values related to the Ordinary Women video on Emma Goldman, and takes into account her philosophies and approach to widespread community activism.