



A Sailor's Life

Unit 2: The Press Gang

Key Stage 2

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The Full English Extra

The Full English Extra was an initiative to preserve and promote the folk arts, building on the success of EFDSS' flagship project The Full English, which created the world's largest digital archive of folk songs, dances, tunes and customs, and a nationwide learning programme that reached more than 16,000 people. The project was led by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Full English Extra saw the collections of Mary Neal, suffragette, radical arts practitioner and founder of the Esperance Girls Club, and folk dance educator Daisy Caroline Daking added to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library online archive (www.vwml.org), alongside its collection of 19th century broadside ballads and songsters.

The Full English learning programme worked with three national museums – the Museum of English Rural Life at the University of Reading, the National Coal Mining Museum for England near Wakefield in West Yorkshire and the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London – combining folk arts and museum education to provide powerful new learning experiences for schools and music hubs.

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Unit 2: The Press Gang



The Press Gang

Most sailors freely made the choice to join the Royal Navy for a life at sea. However, during wartime the Royal Navy often struggled to find enough skilled sailors so the Navy used press gangs to force men on to their ships. The press gangs would kidnap men who were usually skilled and experienced sailors.

Working and living conditions were very poor for most sailors. Many of the duties on board involved hard physical labour and there were many dangers at sea. There were also strict rules that sailors had to abide by. For a homesick, seasick, scared or exhausted sailor there was great temptation to run away. Some sailors did desert the Navy when their ship docked, but when caught the punishment could be brutal.

The Cat-o'-nine-tails

This type of whip was called the *cat-o'-nine-tails*.

Which part of the whip is the cat and which part is the nine tails?

The cat-o'-nine-tails was used for punishing sailors. Punishments could be given for lots of reasons including laziness, disobedience, drunkenness and desertion.

Activity 1: Someone in the class has broken the rules by taking an extra ship's biscuit. This disobedient sailor must stand trial. Half the class should make an argument for the sailor to be punished. The other half should argue for the sailor to be pardoned. The captain (teacher) will decide the outcome.

Song 3 - The Press Gang

This folk song is a combination of two original sources. Verses 1-4 are from Mr James Sutton from Winterton, Norfolk, collected by E.J.Moeran, in July 1915. Verses 5-7 are from Mr Thomas Taylor from Ross, Herefordshire, collected by Cecil Sharp, on 10 September 1921.

The song tells the story of a man who is pressed to go to sea and how badly he is treated. It works well as a listening song as it has a narrative, and the refrain of each verse is very easy to join in with. You could also divide up the verses to sing in smaller groups as an extension.

Lyrics

1. As I walked out on a London street
A pressgang there I chanced to meet
They asked me if I'd join the fleet,
On board a man o' war, boys
On board a man o' war
2. Pray, brother shipmates, tell me true,
What sort of usage they give you,
That I may know before I go
On board a man o' war, boys
On board a man o' war
3. But when I went, to my surprise,
All that they told was shocking lies.
There was a row and terrible row
On board a man o' war, boys.
On board a man o' war
4. The first thing they did, they took me in hand:
They flogged me with a tarry strand;
They flogged me till I could not stand
On board a man o' war, boys.
On board a man o' war
5. They hung me up by my two thumbs
And they cut me till the blood did run;
And that was the usage they gave me
On board a man o' war boys.
On board a man o' war

Glossary

- **Man of war:** was a British Royal Navy expression for a powerful warship or frigate from the 16th to the 19th century
- **Tarry strand:** a stick or whip that is covered in tar

Comprehension Questions

- 1) **Why do you think it's called a cat o'nine tails?**
9 cords - cords acted a bit like *claws*, and were sometimes called that
- 2) **Discussion** - What would a press gang do today? How would they persuade you to join the Navy?

Activity 1: Listen to the song

- **TASK** – Look out for where the cat o' nine tails is used – put your hands up when you hear that part of the song.

Activity 2: Learn the song

- **Don't forget your warm ups!** See p7
- **TASK** – Learn the refrain and sing along

Activity 3: Song writing

- **TASK** - As a class, use your discussion suggestions to make your own song with the refrain.
- You can use the table below to help you make the words fit the rhythm of the tune:

<i>As</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>walked</i>	<i>out</i>	<i>on a</i>	<i>Lon-</i>	<i>don</i>	<i>street</i>

<i>A</i>	<i>press</i>	<i>gang</i>	<i>there</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>chanced</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>Meet</i>

.....

.....

And that was the usage they gave me

On board a man of war boys

Additional Resources: This resource features 'listening' songs for you to play to your class, and 'learning' songs which you can all learn to sing and join in with. Free downloads of all the songs presented in this pack are available from the EFDSS Resource Bank.

The Press Gang

As I walked out on a Lon-don street a press gang there I
chanced to meet, They asked me if I'd join the fleet, On
board a man of war boys On board a man of war.



Explore The Full English digital archive

www.vwml.org/thefullenglishproject

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