

# Colonized Women Talk Back



## Introduction

This 3-part lesson introduces students to African women who challenged colonial rule. It debunks the myth of the submissive African woman.

## Objectives

1. Students will understand that the struggle against colonialism included women and was a collective effort involving multiple strategies.
2. Students will be able to identify major women leaders in the struggle against colonialism in the context of a larger movement.
3. Students will explore similarities and differences between African women activists and the experiences of civil rights activists in the United States.

Lesson 1: Students play the role of an African woman who protested colonial rule.

Lesson 2: Students match the description with the activists.

Lesson 3: Students conduct in-depth research about one the African women activist.

## Lesson 1: The Activist Speaks

### Materials Needed

Name Badges    Discussion Questions

### Procedure

1. Create Name Badge lanyards with the woman's name\* and picture of the woman (if possible) on the front and statements about her on the back. Slip each badge into a plastic name-badge holder. An alternative is to paste the name badges onto index cards, punch a hole in the cards, draw yarn through the hole, and have students wear the badges necklace style.
2. Distribute lanyards, one to each student. Students silently read the information on the back of the lanyard. Provide assistance if students need help pronouncing names or words. If you have more than 23 students you can assign several students to the following groups: Abeokuta Women's Union, Women's March on Bassam, Women's March on Pretoria. The students can read the statements in unison or divide up the sentences.
3. Call each activist's name. Students step forward and read/dramatize their statements.
4. After all the names have been called, engage students in post discussion questions.

### Discussion Questions

1. How did you feel when reading the statement?
2. What are the women fighting for/against?
3. What are their common traits or characteristics? .
4. What strategies did the women use?

\*Pronunciation assistance for African names is available through [Title VI African Studies Centers](#)

# Name Badges

## Queen Nzinga

I rose to power in the 16th century Kongo Kingdom (now Angola). I converted to Christianity, allied with the Portuguese, and seized the throne. I fought the Portuguese when they tried to expand their control of my country.

## Mary Nyanjiru

In 1922, we organized to free Kenyan activist Harry Thuku, jailed by the British. When our men failed to take action, I told them to take my dress and give me their trousers. I led the charge of ululating women against the prison doors. The soldiers killed me and 27 others.

## Nwanyeruwa Ojim

In 1929, my neighbors and I “sat” on a tax collector sent by the British. Igbo women in Nigeria always shamed men by sitting on them and singing insulting songs when they failed to respect women and their work. When the British proceeded with their tax, we attacked British court buildings. The soldiers killed 50 of us. Our revolt is called the Aba Women’s War.

## Graca Machel

I joined the Mozambique Liberation Front resisting Portuguese colonizers. I have been the 1st lady of two countries, Mozambique and South Africa.

## Josina Machel

I joined the Mozambique Liberation Front and cared for children orphaned by the war. I married FRELIMO leader Samora Machel but died when I was only 25. Today my birthday is celebrated as Mozambican Women's Day.

## Miriam Makeba

I spoke out and sang songs against apartheid. The South African apartheid government banned me and refused to let me return to South Africa for thirty years.

## Abina Mansah

I was wrongfully enslaved in the Gold Coast. I escaped to British-controlled territory and in 1876 I brought my case against my former master to a British colonial court. I lost my case but I was heard.

## Albertina Sisulu

In 1954, I helped organize South African women's opposition to oppressive government policies. I was tried for high treason and jailed. My husband and all my children were also imprisoned.

## Lilian Ngoyi

I was a leader of a group that protested against pass laws for black South African women. My friend Helen and I led an historic march in which more than 20,000 women demonstrated in 1956.

## Helen Joseph

I was born in England in 1905 into a white privileged life, but I questioned the treatment of Black people in my adopted country of South Africa. Side by side with my best friend Lilian, we led an historic march in which more than 20,000 women demonstrated against injustice in 1956. Before I died I asked to be buried near Lilian. Side by side we lie in the Avalon Cemetery in Soweto, South Africa,

## Ruth First

I was born into an activist Jewish family in South Africa. I joined the anti-apartheid struggle. I was arrested and jailed. I left South Africa but in 1982, I was killed by a letter bomb sent by South African government agents.

## Fatima Meer

My father was the editor of Indian Views, an anti-colonialist newspaper. I protested social injustice in South Africa using Gandhi's nonviolent methods. In 1952, I was imprisoned without a trial for six months and banned for five years.

## Charlotte Maxeke

In 1913, I demonstrated against government laws that forced Black South African women to carry passes. As we marched, we shouted, "We have done with pleading; we now demand."

## Yaa Asantewaa

In 1900, I led a 6th month siege against the British. I was commander-in-chief of the combined Asante forces and had my own army. The British exiled me to the Seychelle Islands far from Ghana. I died there in 1921.

## Nehanda

I was a Shona spiritual leader living in colonial Rhodesia. When the British imposed taxes on us, we rebelled. In the 1890s I led the resistance. The British hanged me. Today places all over Zimbabwe are named for me.

## Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti

I began wearing Yoruba dress and speaking Yoruba in public to demonstrate my nationalism and opposition to British colonialism. I traveled to England in 1947 to protest a British crafted constitution.

## Huda Sha'arawi

I was born in Egypt in 1879. When Egyptian women left harems all over Egypt to protest British rule, I stepped forward to organize the protests. In 1923 founded the Egyptian Feminist Union. We focused on various issues, including women's suffrage and education. That year I also removed my veil in public, shocking many. Yet within the decade, most woman in Egypt had removed their veils as well.

## Djamila Bouhired

I was born in 1935 in French-ruled Algeria. When I was growing up, all children were instructed to say every morning, "France is our mother." I refused and instead would shout "Algeria Is Our Mother!" Of course, I was punished for this. As I grew, I continued to protest French control of my country. In 1957 I was tried for bombing French soldiers and sentenced to the guillotine. Public outcry saved me.

## Abeokuta Women's Union

In Nigeria in 1946 our women's women began to organize against the British particularly the taxation of market women. Fifty of us died charging British courts buildings.

## Dona Beatriz

I was born in 1689 into a wealthy Christian family in the Kongo Kingdom (now Angola). My vision of Catholicism was Kongo-centered. I recognized the pope's authority but opposed corrupt European missionaries who were unsympathetic to the needs of Kongolese Catholics. I was declared a heretic and burned at the stake on the orders of Catholic monks.

## Field Marshal Muthoni wa Kirima

In 1952 when I was 20 years old, I became a spy for the Mau Mau fighters who had camped in the forests of Kenya. I still have the dreadlocks I had when I opposed the British Imperial Army. I'll cut my locks when the fruits of independence are enjoyed by the people who sacrificed most.

## Women's March on Grand Bassam

In 1949, five hundred of us marched on Grand Bassam prison in Ivory Coast to protest the incarceration of our husbands and brothers by French colonialists. We were stopped and beaten by French soldiers. This statue honors our protest.

## Women's March on Pretoria

On 9 August 1956 in South Africa, thousands us – Blacks, Indians, Coloreds, Whites, – staged a march on the Union Buildings of Pretoria to protest against the abusive passes the Apartheid government was forcing African women to carry. There were over 20,000 of us – some carrying young children on our backs, some wearing traditional dresses and sarees, and some in domestic work uniforms – taking part in the resistance against apartheid.

## Lesson Two: Which Activist am I?

### Materials Needed

Name Badges  
Clue Sheet  
Clip Board  
Answer Key

### Procedure

1. Redistribute the role play lanyards.
2. After distributing Name Badges, encourage students to carefully read and memorize the name of the person on their badge. Allow students quiet time to memorize the name and important facts about the person's life from the back of the card.
3. Distribute the clue sheet ( a clipboard is helpful)..
4. Students use the descriptions on the Clue Sheet to query the other students, e.g. "Did you rise to power in the 16th century Kongo Kingdom?" They only answer with yes or no.
5. When the description matches the activist, the student write the name of the activist on the Clue Sheet in the blank space provided.
6. Model the process with a student.
7. Tell students to put on their name badges and begin.
8. When most of the students have finished or there are only ten minutes left in the class period (whichever comes first), end the activity.
9. Ask students to take their seats. Share the correct answers.
10. Ask students to share some reflections about the activity. You can prompt the discussion with questions such as: What did you learn that surprised you? What did you know already? What new information did you learn?
11. Close by explaining that the next time you meet, students will research one of the women activists.

## Clue Sheet

### Which Africanist Am I?

**Student's Name** \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: You are responsible for completing your clue sheet by asking your classmates yes or no questions. You must also respond to people who are trying to figure out who you are. You can give only yes or no answers when asked about your identity. Move around the classroom, ask if the information matches the person's identity. Each time you identify a woman, write her name in the blank next to the clue. Hand your Clue Sheet to the teacher when you are finished.

1. I rose to power in the 16th century Kongo Kingdom (now Angola). I converted to Christianity, allied with the Portuguese, and seized the throne. I fought the Portuguese when they tried to expand their control of my country. \_\_\_\_\_

2. In 1922, we organized to free Kenyan activist Harry Thuku, jailed by the British. When our men failed to take action, I told them to take my dress and give me their trousers. I led the charge of ululating women against the prison doors. The soldiers killed me and 27 others.  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. In 1929, my neighbors and I "sat" on a tax collector sent by the British. Igbo women in Nigeria always shamed men by sitting on them and singing insulting songs when they failed to respect women and their work. When the British proceeded with their tax, we attacked British court buildings. The soldiers killed 50 of us. Our revolt is called the Aba Women's War.  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. I provided food & supplies for our Kikuyu men fighting the British in Kenya.  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. I joined the Mozambique Liberation Front resisting Portuguese colonizers. I have been the 1st lady of two countries, Mozambique and South Africa. \_\_\_\_\_

6. I joined the Mozambique Liberation Front and cared for children orphaned by the war. I married FRELIMO leader Samora Machel but died when I was only 25. Today my birthday is celebrated as Mozambican Women's Day. \_\_\_\_\_

7. I spoke out and sang songs against apartheid. The South African apartheid government banned me and refused to let me return to South Africa for thirty years.  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. I was wrongfully enslaved in the Gold Coast. I escaped to British-controlled territory and in 1876 I brought my case against my former master to a British colonial court. I lost my case but I was heard. \_\_\_\_\_

9. In 1954, I helped organize South African women's opposition to oppressive government policies. I was tried for high treason and jailed. My husband and all my children were also imprisoned. \_\_\_\_\_

10. I was a leader of a group that protested against pass laws for African women. My friend and I led an historic march in which more than 20,000 women demonstrated in 1956. \_\_\_\_\_

11. I was born in England into a white privileged life, but I questioned the treatment of Black people in my adopted country of South Africa. Side by side with my best friend Lillian, we led an historic march in which more than 20,000 women demonstrated against injustice in 1956. Lillian and I are buried side by side next to each other.  
| \_\_\_\_\_

12. I was born into an activist Jewish family in South Africa. I joined the anti-apartheid struggle. I was arrested and jailed. I left South Africa but in 1982, I was killed by a letter bomb sent by South African government agents. \_\_\_\_\_

13. My father was the editor of Indian Views, an anti-colonialist newspaper. I protested social injustice in South Africa using Gandhi's nonviolent methods. In 1952, I was imprisoned without a trial for six months and banned for five years. \_\_\_\_\_

14. In 1913, I demonstrated against government laws that forced Black South African women to carry passes. As we marched, we shouted, "We have done with pleading; we now demand!"  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. In 1900, I led a 6th month siege against the British. I was commander-in-chief of the combined Asante forces and had my own army. The British exiled me to the Seychelle Islands far from Ghana. I died there in 1921. \_\_\_\_\_

16. I was a Shona spiritual leader living in colonial Rhodesia. When the British imposed taxes on us, we rebelled. In the 1890s I led the resistance. The British hanged me. Today places all over Zimbabwe are named for me. \_\_\_\_\_

17. I began wearing Yoruba dress and speaking Yoruba in public to demonstrate my nationalism and opposition to British colonialism. I traveled to England in 1947 to protest a British crafted constitution. \_\_\_\_\_

18. I was born in Egypt in 1879. When Egyptian women left harems all over Egypt to protest British rule, I stepped forward to organize the protests. In 1923 founded the Egyptian Feminist Union. We focused on various issues, including women's suffrage and education. That year I also removed my veil in public, shocking many. Yet within the decade, most woman in Egypt had removed their veils as well. \_\_\_\_\_

19. I was born in 1935 in French-ruled Algeria. When I was growing up, all children were instructed to say every morning, "France is our mother." I refused and instead would shout "Algeria Is Our Mother!" Of course, I was punished for this. As I grew, I continued to protest French control of my country. In 1957 I was tried for bombing French soldiers and sentenced to the guillotine. Public outcry saved me.. \_\_\_\_\_

20. In Nigeria in 1946 our women's women began to organize against the British particularly the taxation of market women. Fifty of us died charging British courts buildings. \_\_\_\_\_

21. I was born in 1689 into a wealthy Christian family in the Kongo Kingdom (now Angola). My vision of Catholicism was Kongo-centered. I recognized the pope's authority but opposed corrupt European missionaries who were unsympathetic to the needs of Kongolese Catholics. I was declared a heretic and burned at the stake on the orders of Catholic monks. \_\_\_\_\_

22. In 1952 when I was 20 years old, I became a spy for the Mau Mau fighters who had camped in the forests of Kenya. I still have the dreadlocks I had when I opposed the British Imperial Army. I'll cut my locks when the fruits of independence are enjoyed by the people who sacrificed most. \_\_\_\_\_

23. In 1949 five hundred of us marched on Grand Bassam prison in Ivory Coast to protest the incarceration of our husbands and brothers by French colonialists. We were stopped and beaten by French soldiers. The statue honors our protest. \_\_\_\_\_

24. On 9 August 1956 in South Africa, thousands us – Blacks, Indians, Coloreds, Whites, – staged a march on the Union Buildings of Pretoria to protest against the abusive passes the Apartheid government was forcing African women to carry. There were over 20,000 of us – some carrying young children on our backs, some wearing traditional dresses and sarees, and some in domestic work uniforms – taking part in the resistance against apartheid. \_\_\_\_\_

# Colonized Women Talk Back: Teacher's Answer Sheet

1. Queen Nzinga
2. Mary Nyanjiru
3. Nwanyeruwa Ojim
4. "Mau Mau" supporter
5. Graca Machel
6. Josina Machel
7. Miriam Makeba
8. Abina Mansah
9. Albertina Sisulu
10. Lilian Ngoyi
11. Helen Joseph
12. Ruth First
13. Fatima Meer
14. Charlotte Maxeke Ok
15. Yaa Asantewaa.
16. Nehanda
17. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti
18. Huda Shaarawi
19. Djamila Bouhired
20. Abeokuta Women's Union
21. Dona Beatriz
22. Field Marshal Muthoni wa Kirima
23. Women's March on Grand Bassam
24. Women's March on Pretoria

## Lesson Three: Research an Activist

### Resources

Menkart, Deborah. *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching*. Teaching for Change, 2004.

Sheldon, Kathleen. *The A to Z of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Scarecrow Press, 2010.

Sheldon, Kathleen. *Historical Dictionary of Sub-Saharan Women*, Scarecrow Press; 2005.

*UNESCO Women in African History*. <https://en.unesco.org/womeninafrica/> U.N. Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization,

### Procedure

1. Students can create a list of questions of what they would like to know about the woman they represented.
2. Students can use the resources noted above and Internet resources to find the answers to their questions.
3. The teacher identify a format for the students to document and share what they have learned.
4. Once the students have learned more about their African activist, the teacher and students can discuss and answer the following question
  - What qualities do social justice activists possess?
  - What were the issues and forms of repression addressed by women activists?
  - How did the women demonstrate their courage? Name various ways.
  - Identify sources of inspiration, skills, organizing strategies, and experiences of women activists.
  - Compare the list you made above to the sources of inspiration, experiences, skills, organizing strategies, and experiences of civil rights activists in the United States. Make a list of similarities. Then make a list of differences.

Created by Brenda Randolph, Howard University, 2015 updated 2018  
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