



ONCE A FURY • Dir. by Jacqueline Rhodes • 2020 • 82 minutes

*Once a Fury* profiles former members of the Furies, a notorious 1970s lesbian separatist collective based in Washington, D.C., that published a national newspaper and planned to seize state power. Featuring interviews with 10 of the original 12 Furies, photography by JEB (Joan E. Biren), and archival materials.

The Furies were a 1970s radical collective that developed a lesbian-feminist politic to correct what they called the "zig-zag and haphazard" thinking of the straight women's movement. The collective was thus formed in resistant counterpoint to the larger women's movement, much as that larger women's movement itself was formed in counterpoint to the male-dominated New Left of the 1960s. That is, just as activists in the women's movement experienced sexism in the New Left, lesbian activists experienced homophobia in the women's movement. Such activists formed collectives like the Furies.

The collective was intense and short-lived: twelve women began the group, worked together, and then broke up in under two years. In that short time, they wrote and published a widely read newspaper (*The Furies*) that advanced their ideology and still seems relevant half a century later. The newspaper lives on in libraries, in private collections, in archives, and on the web.

## 50-Minute Lesson Plan

0-5 minutes: Prewriting: *What do you know about protest movements in the 1960s? What have you heard about the US women's liberation movement?*

5-25 minutes Instructor provides background/context (Choose **one** below)

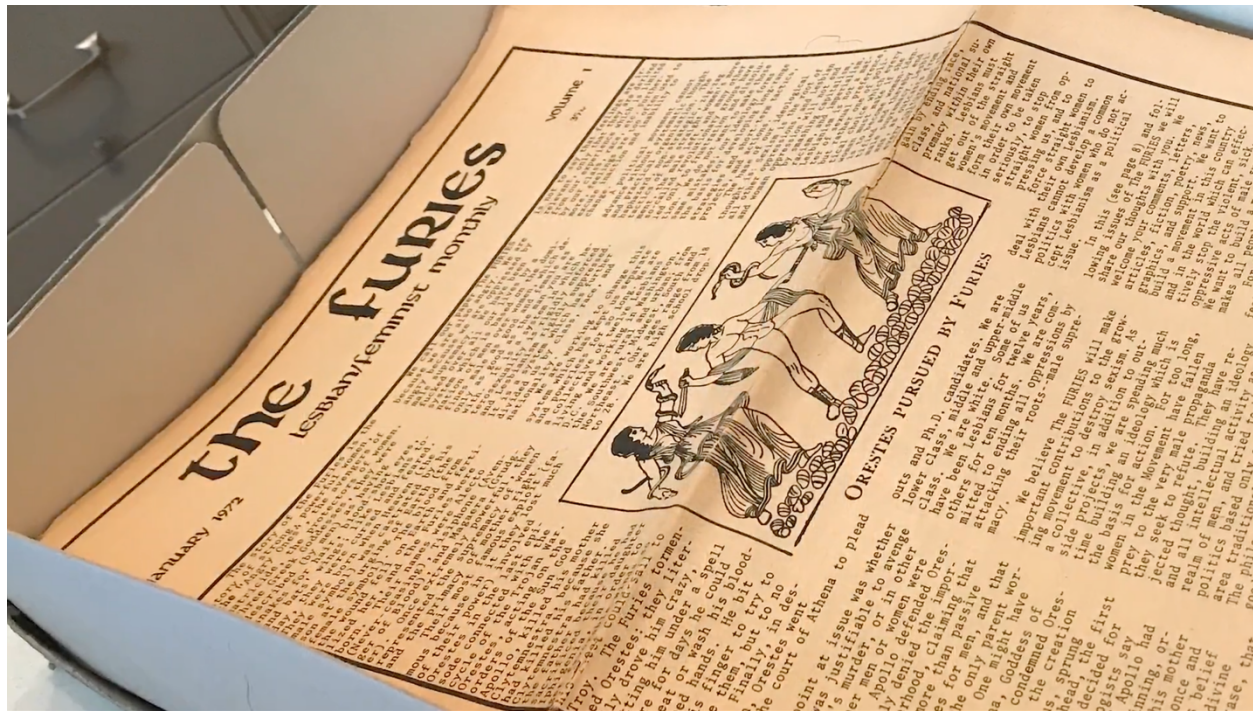
1. **ACTIVISM:** *1960s Civil Rights movement; the Anti-War/Anti-Imperialist Movement • Students for a Democratic Society and the New Left • Gay Liberation Front • The Black Panthers • Chicano Movement/El Movimiento*
2. **WOMEN'S LIBERATION:** *Betty Friedan/NOW • Radicalesbians and the Woman-Identified Woman • New York Radical Feminists • Redstockings Manifesto • Lavender Menace*

25-35 minutes Small groups explore an assigned discussion question (see list)

35-50 minutes Class discussion of film

You can expand this lesson plan greatly:

- Provide **both** contexts (activism in general; women's liberation);
- Have small groups select one event or organization from the "context" sections, do in-class online research on those, and then report out to the class;
- Expand the time spent in small-group discussion and whole-class discussion
- Add an end-of-class writing prompt: *To what extent did the Furies mirror their context? How were they like other liberation groups? How were they different?*



## Project/Essay Prompts

1. This project is a creative/critical piece that asks you to imagine yourself as an activist/writer in the late 1960s/early 1970s. Choose 3-5 historical events and write as if you lived through them (or even participated!). Write a series of poems, or a manifesto, or a journal, or a series of letters describing the events (you may certainly approach the project via another genre; just let me know). This project should be five or six pages long (1250-1500 words).
2. The Furies were writing some 25 years before the advent of the internet. What might they have done had they had access to the internet and social media in their day? Write a social media campaign using excerpts—text and image—from *The Furies* newspaper that works to accomplish the activists' ends.
3. Choose one of the articles in *The Furies* newspaper that you find compelling and analyze to what extent it meets its rhetorical and/or aesthetic goals. Your analysis should identify the exigence of the article (why was it written at the moment it was written?); summarize the article (what is it about? What is the writer's point?); and discuss the writerly choices the author makes (e.g., what appeals? What evidence?). Finally, make a judgment about whether those choices work. As the audience, what do you think?

## Discussion Questions

1. Separatism, political lesbianism, and anti-capitalism were some key elements of the Furies' "lesbian-feminist politic." How do they explain these elements in the film? How did these elements challenge mainstream feminism?
2. What does it mean to be a "vanguard movement?" To what extent were the Furies a vanguard? What other vanguards do they identify in the film?
3. What were some of the community events offered by the Furies? What did these programs have to do with their vision of revolution?
4. Discuss the collective's decision to not raise each other's children. What were the reasons given? What are some of the complications behind the decision?
5. Why did the Furies collective decide to write and publish a newspaper? What were some of the difficulties in making *The Furies* a success?
6. What were the different "women's institutions" founded by members of the collective after its demise? How did those institutions contribute to the Furies' legacy?

## Resources

*The Furies* newspaper at Duke University's Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture: <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/wlmpc/wlmms01033>

Joan E. Biren papers at Smith College, Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History, <https://findingaids.smith.edu/repositories/2/resources/915>.

Rita Mae Brown papers at the University of Virginia, [https://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu03270.xml;query=;](https://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu03270.xml;query=)

Charlotte Bunch papers at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/5025>

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