



Commonweal Reading List: Women Activists

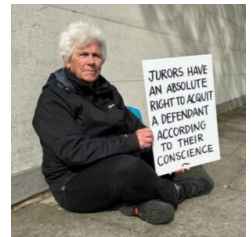
In 2025 we asked students, activists and academics who inspires them. We were pleased to uncover some hidden voices in addition to many well known figures. All but one of the nominations were for women – so here they are, along with a book written by or about them.

The Commonweal Collection is **free** and **open to the public**.

Visit www.commonwealnonviolence.org/ or scan the QR code above for more information.

Angie Zelter “*Her action against hawk jets in the 1990s inspired me to get involved in NVDA.*”

Angie Zelter is a British activist and campaigner. She has founded many campaigns, including the International Women’s Peace Service. Angie has been arrested on many occasions and in 2019 was arrested and then prosecuted for her involvement in the occupation of Waterloo Bridge. She argued in court that humans faced extinction if governments didn’t make changes and was then given a conditional discharge. You can borrow Angie’s most recent book **Activism for Life** from the Collection [here](#) (Hn ZEL).



bell hooks (1952 – 2021)

Gloria Jean Watkins, better known by her pen name bell hooks, was an American author, theorist, educator, and social critic who was a distinguished Professor in Residence at Berea College. She was best known for her writings on race, feminism, and class. She used the lower-case spelling of her name to decentre herself and draw attention to her work instead. The focus of hooks’ writing was to explore the intersectionality of race, capitalism, and gender, and what she described as their ability to produce and perpetuate systems of oppression and class domination. Bell’s book **Black Looks. Race and Representation**, is in the Collection [here](#) (R HOO).



Donella Meadows (1941 – 2001)

Donella Meadows was an academic specialising in conservation and the environment. She founded the Sustainability Institute in 1996 (now known as the Academy for Systems Change) which looks into sustainable systems at all levels of society, global to local. You can borrow Donella’s book **Limits to Growth** from the Collection [here](#) (Qe MEA).



Dora Moono Nyambe (1992 - 2024)

Dora was an activist, humanitarian and educator based in Zambia. Dora founded the charity Footprints of Hope in Mapapa, Zambia and set up a school there. By 2023 there were 350 students at the school. “She will be remembered as a loved mother, heroine, peace philanthropist and an extraordinary woman.”



Under a Zambian Tree, a book about Dora and her work written by Joseph Schmitt is in the Collection [here](#) Hr SCH (Pacifists & Radicals - Africa).

Harriet Tubman (1822 – 1913)

“What she achieved across her life. Her courage – inspirational.”

Harriet Tubman was an American abolitionist and social activist. She was born into slavery but managed to escape and then dedicated her life to the abolition of slaves. Tubman made some 13 missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved people, including her family and friends, using the network of anti-slavery activists and safe houses known collectively as the Underground Railroad.



The Road to Freedom about Harriet Tubman’s life is in the Collection [here](#) Rm CLI (Slavery).

Jennifer E. Jones

Jennifer E. Jones was the first female International President for Rotary International from 2022 – 2023, becoming the first woman to lead the organisation in its history. Jennifer is an influential figure in the global peace and community development landscape.



Jenny Hales

“Jenny would have turned 100 years old this year. She was a real life supergran who took my family, Vietnamese boat people, under her wing in Sheffield in the 80s. She was Welsh-born, but lived and worked far & wide with her husband. Jenny, a former nurse, had 2 children, adopted another, but was mum to the world. She was always kind, gentle, and compassionate. She helped the needy, campaigned for peace, the environment, went to a peace camp in Iraq, smuggled people out of Bosnia during the war and much more.”

Lizzy Bristow

Lizzy Bristow has worked in the fitness industry for many years and created the Body by Daddy brand. Bristow wants to support members of the LGBTQ community by creating bespoke exercise programmes that can help queer folk learn how to use exercise to improve their lives. You can read more about Lizzy on her website [About Daddy](#).



Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai is an activist focusing on education and is the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2012 Malala spoke publicly about girls having the right to an education. Malala was shot in October 2012. Since recovering from her injuries, Malala has continued to campaign for girls’ education and human rights.



I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban can be found [here](#) (Hj YOU)

Mollie Somerville *“Who walks the walk and doesn’t just talk the talk.”*

Mollie is in her 70s with grandchildren and her professional career behind her. Mollie has been arrested multiple times in recent years after actions organised by Just Stop Oil, most recently throwing soup at Van Gogh’s Sunflowers in the National Gallery. The Commonweal Collection has many books about why civil disobedience works, see [Ap](#). For more information about nonviolent direct action (NVDA), see [Ak](#).



Pat Arrowsmith (1930 - 2023)

Pat Arrowsmith was an activist, campaigner and co-founder of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Pat organised the first Alderston march in 1958 against nuclear weapons and campaigned tirelessly over her lifetime, being arrested and imprisoned for nonviolent direct action many times.



The Commonweal Collection holds three of Pat's books - **Jericho** which can be found [here](#) (Cx ARR), **On the Brink: Poems** which can be found [here](#) (Ca ARR), and **To Asia in Peace: Story of a Non-violent Action Mission to Indo-China** which can be found [here](#) (Eb ARR).

Rachel Carson 1907 – 1964

Rachel Carson became a full time nature writer in the 1950s following a successful career as a marine biologist. In the late 1950s her attention turned to conservation and environmental concerns. In 1962 she published **Silent Spring** which explored themes about the environmental and human dangers of pesticides. There was fierce condemnation for her book from the pesticide companies, who tried to ban the book. However the book inspired the ecological movement and led to changes in American policy around pesticide use.



You can borrow the book from the collection [here](#) Qt CAR (Pollution).

Rebecca Masika Katsuva (1966 – 2016)

Rebecca Masika Katsuva was an activist based in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Attacked and raped during the wars that engulfed the Democratic Republic of Congo, she went on to campaign against rape as a weapon of war, and set up an organisation to help others who had similar experiences to her own, the **Association des Personnes Desherites Unies pour le Développement**.



Su Owen and Fi Murray of the Garforth Peace Project, England's first World Peace Flame Monument.

"Su and Fiona have built the project over several years and have been especially inspirational in recent months with events through Peacelink with events in Park Square Leeds and being part of a deputation to the full meeting of Leeds City Council. They are doers, and do vital work with young people in Garforth schools." Their mission is to inspire and encourage others to live peaceful, kind and happy lives by offering them ideas and tools to help them become the change they wish to see in their community, world and future."



More information about the project can be found on the website: Garforth Peace Project. You can borrow Su Owen's children's book **How to Feel Good Even When I Don't** [here](#) (Ke OWE).

Sylvia Boyes

Sylvia is a tireless campaigner for peace and justice. From October 2023 to January 2025 she set up and took part in a daily vigil outside Keighley Bus station calling for a ceasefire in Palestine. She has also taken part in protests outside the American base at Menwith Hill, protested at the DSEI Arms Fair in London, and protested at Faslane, where the submarines that carry Trident nuclear weapons are based.



If you would like to know more about Menwith Hill, read **Lifting the lid on Menwith Hill: The strategic roles & economic impact of the US spy base in Yorkshire**. Available in the Collection [here](#) (Tg CND).