READ·RESIST·REIMAGINE · 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM · 25 NOV – 10 DEC

Books That Changed Us: RASASH's Feminist Reading List

Some books change how we see the world. As part of our Read, Resist, Reimagine campaign for 16 Days, RASASH asked well-known voices, authors, local readers, staff and community groups across the Highlands to name a book that changed how they think about gender, equality and safety. Their recommendations make up this list.

About the campaign

The 16 Days of Activism is a global UN campaign against gender-based violence that runs every year from 25 November to 10 December. For RASASH's Read, Resist, Reimagine campaign, libraries and bookshops across the Highlands are hosting feminist book displays to raise awareness, deepen understanding and encourage conversations about equality, respect and power.

About RASASH

RASASH is a Highlands-wide charity offering free, confidential emotional support, information and advocacy to survivors of sexual violence aged 13 and over. We also work to create safer communities through prevention education, professional training and campaigning.

Need to talk to someone?

Several of these books deal with sexual and domestic violence. If anything here affects you, RASASH is here to support. Find out more at www.rasash.org.uk.

RASASH's Feminist Reading List

1. Delusions of Gender *by Cordelia Fine*

Recommended by: Romy Rehfeld, CEO of RASASH

Synopsis: Psychologist Cordelia Fine takes apart the popular claim that male and female brains are hardwired for different abilities. She shows how the attitudes and expectations surrounding us from birth shape differences we too often assume are innate.

> "This book transformed my understanding of how gender norms and unconscious bias limit our potential, and others', from birth to adulthood. Rigorously researched and written with humour, it made me laugh, made me furious, and left me inspired. Every parent, educator, and leader should read it."

Themes: Science, data and psychology · Parenting and education

2. Bread of Angels *by Patti Smith*

Recommended by: Sydney, The Feminist Bird Club

Synopsis: The musician, poet and author of *Just Kids* looks back across her life, from her childhood to her rise as an artist and the years she stepped away from the stage to raise a family. A memoir about art, love, loss and the creative life.

> "Forever totally inspired by Patti Smith, and her unashamed, unapologetic approach to life and creativity and gender and motherhood."

Themes: Memoir and life writing · Bodies, birth and motherhood

3. On the Problem of Men: Two Feminist Conferences *edited by Scarlet Friedman and Elizabeth Sarah*

Recommended by: Moira Paton, Founder of RASASH

Synopsis: Papers and discussion from two feminist conferences held in the early 1980s, at which women debated men, male power and how feminism should respond.

> "I remember being really energised by the debates – fierce and sometimes diametrically opposed – and inspired to action. I've chosen this book for two reasons. First, because many of the issues are sadly still live (e.g. the chapter on rape could have been written yesterday and there's a hugely funny chapter on what today we'd call mansplaining) and, secondly, because the conferences were designed to bring feminists with wildly different views together to explore, dialogue and debate in a safe and respectful setting, something I wish we could do more of in today's polarised world."

Themes: History · Men and masculinity · Violence against women

4. Birdsplaining: A Natural History *by Jasmine Donahaye*

Recommended by: Deborah, Fern Bookshop

Synopsis: An examination of nature writing, birdwatching and the outdoors through a woman's eyes. Donahaye questions who gets to observe, name and feel at home in the natural world.

> "In this book, Jasmine Donahaye reveals the uniqueness of women's experience of nature and how this isn't captured in natural history writing in general; she helps us see the natural world in a different way, one more familiar to women's experience of it and offering new ways of learning from nature."

Themes: Nature · Memoir and life writing

5. Slug... and Other Things I've Been Told to Hide *by Hollie McNish*

Recommended by: Emma Roddick, MSP

Synopsis: Poems and short prose pieces that tackle the bodily, awkward and taboo parts of life. McNish writes about the things women are taught to keep quiet.

> "It's funny how often something in day-to-day life reminds me of one of the poems. So much of the common female experience remains taboo and difficult for people to hear because it is so rarely spoken about. Work like hers, which breaks those unspoken rules, is incredibly powerful."

Themes: Fiction and poetry · Bodies, birth and motherhood

6. The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love *by bell hooks*

Recommended by: Peter Mackenzie, Highland Violence Against Women Partnership

Synopsis: bell hooks explains how patriarchy harms men as well as women, teaching boys to cut themselves off from their emotions and so from love.

> "bell hooks' theory is that patriarchy teaches men to suppress their emotions and disconnect from love, but that through self-awareness, vulnerability, and feminist values, men can heal and build more authentic, loving relationships. I feel that this book is particularly relevant, especially to the role that I play in HVAWP, because it links gender inequality, emotional socialisation, and men's wellbeing, offering insights into how healthy masculinity can contribute to preventing violence and building more respectful relationships."

Themes: Men and masculinity · Violence against women

7. Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men *by Caroline Criado Perez*

Recommended by: Ross Barnett, author of The Missing Lynx'

Synopsis: An overview of how a world designed around data collected from men, from medicine and car safety to town planning and workplaces, often fails women. While this bias is rarely intentional, its impacts are felt every day and can sometimes be deadly.

> "The book really opened my eyes to how the bias against women in STEM, the leaky pipeline that forces so many promising researchers out of the fields they are interested in, has caused lasting harm not just in our education system but in our day-to-day world."

Themes: Intro to feminism · Science, data and psychology

8. African Queens *by Onyinye Iwu*

Recommended by: Nadine Aisha Jassat, Carnegie-nominated author

Synopsis: An illustrated collection for young readers that celebrates African women's leadership that is too often left out of history lessons.

> "This beautifully illustrated book tells the stories of twelve queens from across the continent of Africa, spanning 2,000 years of history! I believe in the power of education and storytelling to change not just individuals, but the world, and *African Queens* is a real gem that I would have adored as a young reader, and now treasure as an adult."

Themes: Young readers · History · Global voices

9. Reclaiming Childbirth as a Rite of Passage *by Rachel Reed*

Recommended by: Lisa Bell, Highland Home Birth

Synopsis: Midwife and academic Rachel Reed reframes birth as a rite of passage rather than a medical event, drawing on physiology, history and anthropology.

> "One of the most thought-provoking and empowering birth books, and life-changing for me personally. The book explores the history of women and how our oppression has shaped society's current views on birth, including over-medicalisation, which is harming women and their babies. Mothers should be nurtured and celebrated, and as a society we have lost that."

Themes: Bodies, birth and motherhood · History

10. Woman at Point Zero *by Nawal El Saadawi*

Recommended by: Marie, RASASH staff member

Synopsis: Based on the author's meeting with a real prisoner, the novel tells the story of Firdaus, a woman awaiting execution in a Cairo prison. Her account of abuse, exploitation and defiance exposes the systems that confine women in Egyptian society.

> "A short novel which contains a lot! The lived experience of life as a woman in Egypt, while looking for freedom from men."

Themes: Fiction and poetry · Global voices · Violence against women

11. Everyday Sexism *by Laura Bates*

Recommended by: Lindsay, RASASH staff member

Synopsis: Growing out of the Everyday Sexism Project, which Laura Bates founded in 2012 to collect women's experiences, the book documents the harassment and discrimination women and girls face daily. It shows how small, normalised incidents add up to a culture of inequality.

> "Is there a man in your life who perhaps just doesn't 'get' it? And by 'it' I mean the reality for women and girls under patriarchy and sexism? Perhaps he doesn't quite 'see' the many ways women and girls negotiate and navigate gendered hurdles and barriers. If you know a Dave in Denial or an Apolitical Andy, then pass him a copy of *Everyday Sexism* – it's high time he educated himself!"

Themes: Intro to feminism

12. The Walnut Tree: Women, Violence and the Law – A Hidden History *by Kate Morgan*

Recommended by: Kirsten, RASASH Trustee

Synopsis: A history of British legal cases involving violence against women, largely from the 19th and early 20th centuries. It reveals the injustices women faced in courtrooms and how individual cases gradually changed the law.

> "A history of legal cases against women over the 1800s and early 20th century that outline the great injustices suffered and how individual cases changed the British legal system for the better. Having been bought this book by my 12-year-old (fellow-feminist) daughter for Christmas, I found it both staggering and utterly unsurprising in its coverage of how sexual violence against women was seen by society at the time and through the eyes of the jurors (all men, of course)."

Themes: History · Violence against women

13. Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants *by Robin Wall Kimmerer*

Recommended by: Jane, RASASH Trustee

Synopsis: Botanist and Citizen Potawatomi Nation member Robin Wall Kimmerer weaves together Indigenous teachings and Western science in essays on our relationship with the living world. She makes the case for gratitude and reciprocity with the land in place of endless taking.

> "This is one of my favourite books ever. It explores reciprocal relationships between humans, the land and nature in such a beautiful, wise and impactful way. The author draws on her experiences as an Indigenous scientist, a mother, and a woman, and reminds us how to reconnect with the gifts, voices and lessons of the natural world. I savoured every page and it is beautiful in audiobook form too!"

Themes: Nature · Science, data and psychology · Global voices

14. The Poisonwood Bible *by Barbara Kingsolver*

Recommended by: Eileen, RASASH Chair of Trustees

Synopsis: In 1959, evangelical Baptist Nathan Price takes his wife and four daughters to a village in the Belgian Congo, on the eve of the country's independence. Told in turn by the five women, the novel traces the family's unravelling against a backdrop of colonialism and political upheaval.

> "This is one of my favourite books. It is a gripping story of a missionary family moving from the US to the Belgian Congo in the 1950s. The story highlights the inextricable link between the oppression of women and nature, and demonstrates how women can lead resistance through their stronger connection with the natural world and empathy for local communities. Definitely worth a read!"

Themes: Fiction and poetry · Nature

15. Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times *by Katherine May*

Recommended by: Emma, RASASH staff member

Synopsis: Katherine May reflects on a hard season in her own life, drawing on nature, myth and the turning of the year to argue that fallow periods are a necessary part of living. A gentle case for rest, retreat and recovery.

> "Not explicitly feminist, but rest is a feminist issue (in my opinion, anyway!). I find myself spending quite a bit of time in conversations with women advocating for their right to rest! I loved the exploration of rest through the lens of nature and the natural world threaded throughout the book too."

Themes: Rest and wellbeing · Nature · Memoir and life writing

16. A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains *by Isabella Bird*

Recommended by: Cal Flyn, award-winning author

Synopsis: Written as letters to her sister, this classic follows Bird's 1873 journey on horseback through the Colorado Rockies. It is a vivid portrait of a Victorian woman who travelled on her own terms.

> "Isabella Bird (1831–1904) would not have called herself a feminist, but she embodies many values I think of as feminist: she travelled independently when that was rare for a woman, rode horses astride (and 800 miles solo through the Colorado Rockies), climbed active volcanoes, ignored many social conventions and generally did whatever the hell she liked. I love this account of her American journey, which I read and was hugely inspired by when I was about to embark on my own thru-ride of the Colorado Trail with my partner and three horses."

Themes: Memoir and life writing · Nature · History

17. Fatwa: Living with a Death Threat *by Jacky Trevane*

Recommended by: Mya, African Caribbean Asian and Mixed Heritage Association

Synopsis: The memoir of an Englishwoman who married an Egyptian man and endured years of abuse before escaping with her two young daughters. Her escape left her living in hiding under a death threat.

> "A pivotal moment in this book is when Jacky decides to escape from her abusive husband with her two young daughters. After suffering years of physical and emotional abuse, she realises that she must take action to protect herself and her children. This moment is life-changing because she chooses to face the danger and uncertainty of escaping rather than continue living in fear. It demonstrates her courage, determination and love for her daughters. Her decision marks the beginning of her journey towards freedom and a safer future. I [also] left an abusive relationship with nothing to my name but my life, and I vowed to make sure it counted for something."

Themes: Memoir and life writing · Violence against women

18. The New Age of Sexism: How the AI Revolution Is Reinventing Misogyny *by Laura Bates*

Recommended by: Laura Bates, award-winning feminist writer

Synopsis: With misogyny baked into their design, new AI-driven technologies are putting women and marginalised groups in danger, their rights and safety sacrificed at the altar of profitability and reckless speed.

> "The New Age of Sexism is about recognising the impact of AI on women and marginalised groups: from deepfake image abuse to so-called AI 'girlfriends' to embedded bias in sectors like recruitment, finance and healthcare. This book isn't anti-tech, but I hope it will make people think more carefully about how we design and regulate so that technological advancement benefits us all, instead of making a small group of billionaires even richer at the expense of some of the most vulnerable in our society."

Themes: Technology and AI

19. A Kind of Spark *by Elle McNicoll*

Recommended by: Jen Grainge, Scottish Book Trust

Synopsis: Eleven-year-old Addie is autistic and lives in a small Scottish village where, centuries ago, women were tried and executed as witches. Seeing parallels with how she is misjudged and mistreated herself, she campaigns for a memorial to the accused women.

> "We love how this book advocates for standing up against bullying and harassment and demonstrates the need for systemic change for both girls and women and neurodiverse people."

Themes: Young readers · Fiction and poetry · History · Neurodiversity

Further Recommended Reading

20. Men Who Hate Women *by Laura Bates*

Synopsis: Laura Bates goes inside online communities of incels, pick-up artists and men's rights activists to investigate the spread of extreme misogyny. She traces how it reaches boys and young men, and what can be done to stop it.

Themes: Men and masculinity · Violence against women

21. Normal Women: 900 Years of Making History *by Philippa Gregory*

Synopsis: Historical novelist Philippa Gregory turns to non-fiction to chart the lives of ordinary women from 1066 to the present day. Drawing on court records and local archives, she shows women working, resisting and shaping history.

Themes: History

22. Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions *by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

Synopsis: Written as a letter to a friend who asked how to raise her baby daughter as a feminist, Adichie offers fifteen warm, direct and practical suggestions. Brief and accessible, it doubles as a primer on feminism for any reader.

Themes: Intro to feminism · Parenting and education · Global voices

23. Hex *by Jenni Fagan*

Synopsis: On the night before her execution in 1591, Geillis Duncan, a young woman accused in Scotland's North Berwick witch trials, is visited in her cell by a woman from the future. A short, lyrical novella about the persecution of women, then and now.

Themes: Fiction and poetry · History · Violence against women

24. Feminism for a World on Fire *by Natasha Walter*

Synopsis: Writer and campaigner Natasha Walter, founder of the charity Women for Refugee Women, argues that feminism must widen its focus to meet an age of climate breakdown, conflict and displacement. Drawing on decades of activism, she makes the case for a movement rooted in solidarity, care and hope.

Themes: Intro to feminism · Nature · Global voices

25. The Feminist Bird Club's Birding for a Better World *by Molly Adams*

Synopsis: Molly Adams founded the Feminist Bird Club to make birdwatching welcoming to people who have often felt shut out of the outdoors. Part practical guide and part manifesto, this illustrated book shows how to get started with birding, find community in nature, and connect it to wider work for social justice.

Themes: Nature · Social justice

26. Not Too Late: Changing the Climate Story from Despair to Possibility *edited by Rebecca Solnit and Thelma Young Lutunatabua*

Synopsis: Climate scientists, activists, Indigenous leaders and writers argue that despair is premature and that the future is still being decided. This short collection of essays offers grounded, evidence-based reasons for hope and makes the case for collective action.

Themes: Nature · Social justice · Global voices

27. Things That Fruit in Darkness *by Sharon Black*

Synopsis: A collection of poems that explore the challenges we encounter in life and our resilience to them.

Themes: Fiction and poetry