

Representations of Mary Frith Activity



Activity was completed after students read *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith and The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton

Creators:

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Rationale:

Given Mary Frith's queer identity and biographical information, we can look at the images as contemporary artifacts which provide historical context around the person(a) of Mary Frith. Reviewing the images will hopefully lead to a discussion on gender and sexuality, gender relations, and race (particularly with the fourth image). Students will have an opportunity to work with primary source materials other than a text which will introduce them to a variant form of scholarship.

All of the following images are said to be representations of Mary Frith from the early modern period from various museums and collections. We can also see modern versions of the person (a) in adaptations of *The Roaring Girl* ([See the BBC trailer](#)). In *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith*, we get several interpretations of Moll Cutpurse's character from the paratext narrator, first person projections of herself as a prankster and as a repentant soul, as well as popular culture adaptations (plays, woodcuts, paintings, etc.) Each representation differs slightly which gives us leave to establish our own interpretations about her contemporary public acceptance and her self-identification/ perception. For example, Melissa Mowry reads the text as early modern monarchy propaganda rather than an actual autobiography. Other scholars read the text as a fictional narrative. What can these images and perceptions tell us about Moll Cutpurse upon examination? How does the authenticity, or questionable authenticity, change our interpretations? How does the temporal distance complicate our view of Moll's person(a)?

Activity:

- Print enough packets to divide your class into groups of three or four.
- Break into groups of three or four (depending on class size).
- Optional: Before distributing the packets, asks students to sketch what they believe Moll Cutpurse would look like (think of her frequent activities, employment, and dress)
- Distribute the packets of pictures.
- Discuss all of the images, but choose one to compare with a visual moment from *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith* and *Roaring Girl* (you do not need an citation from the text, just an image that stood out from your reading).

- How do these images fit within our perception of Mary Frith? What do they make us think about her person? What can they tell us about how her contemporaries perceived her? Think of methodological frame works, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class. Also, consider the paratexts included in the pictures.
- Come back together as a class to share and discuss our findings

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Make meaningful connections between texts and visuals.
- Identify different voices/points of view in a text.
- Display reading comprehension and content retention
- Engage with theoretical frameworks, such as gender, sexuality, race, and class.