



Ways of Listening: Worksheet

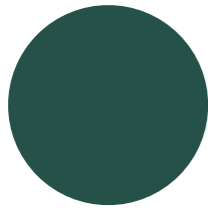
12 Years and Above

By Francesca Mackenney

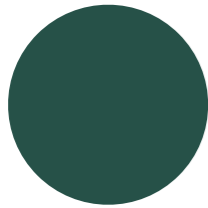
Funded by Creative Scotland. With special thanks to the University of Bristol, the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project, the Wordsworth Trust, the British Association for Romantic Studies, the British Library's Sound Archive and the School of Scottish Studies.

Learning Objectives:

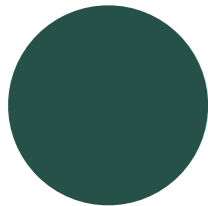
By the end of the lesson, I will be able to....



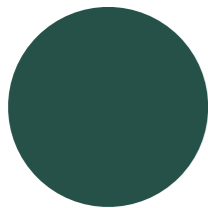
Identify birds by their sounds, and observe and record wildlife



Analyse and compare representations of birdsong in science, music and poetry



Think critically about how human beings have historically thought and written about the natural world



Respond individually and creatively to the song of birds



1. Listening In...

Listen. What can you hear? Write down as many sounds noises as you can — e.g. wind, rustling leaves, birdsong, traffic. Make notes below.

1. Robin



4. Skylark



2. Match the Birds with the Sounds

Look at the pictures below. Listen to the recordings of these birds singing. Listen again and match the birds with the sounds. Number the pictures in the order you hear them.

CITIZEN SCIENCE: Help scientists by taking part in citizen science projects such as the British Trust of Ornithology's Weekly Garden Birdwatch (<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw>).

EXPANSION ACTIVITY: Keep a Natural History Journal recording all the things you see and hear in your local area, and how they made you feel. Keep a record of the place, date and time of day.

2. Blackbird



5. Nightingale



3. 'Jenny' Wren



6. Corn Crane



3. Sound-map

Look at the sound-map opposite.
Create your own sound-map
representing all the sounds you
hear.

4. Mnemonics

Read the mnemonics below.

Yellowhammer:

A little bit of bread and no cheese.

White-throated sparrow:

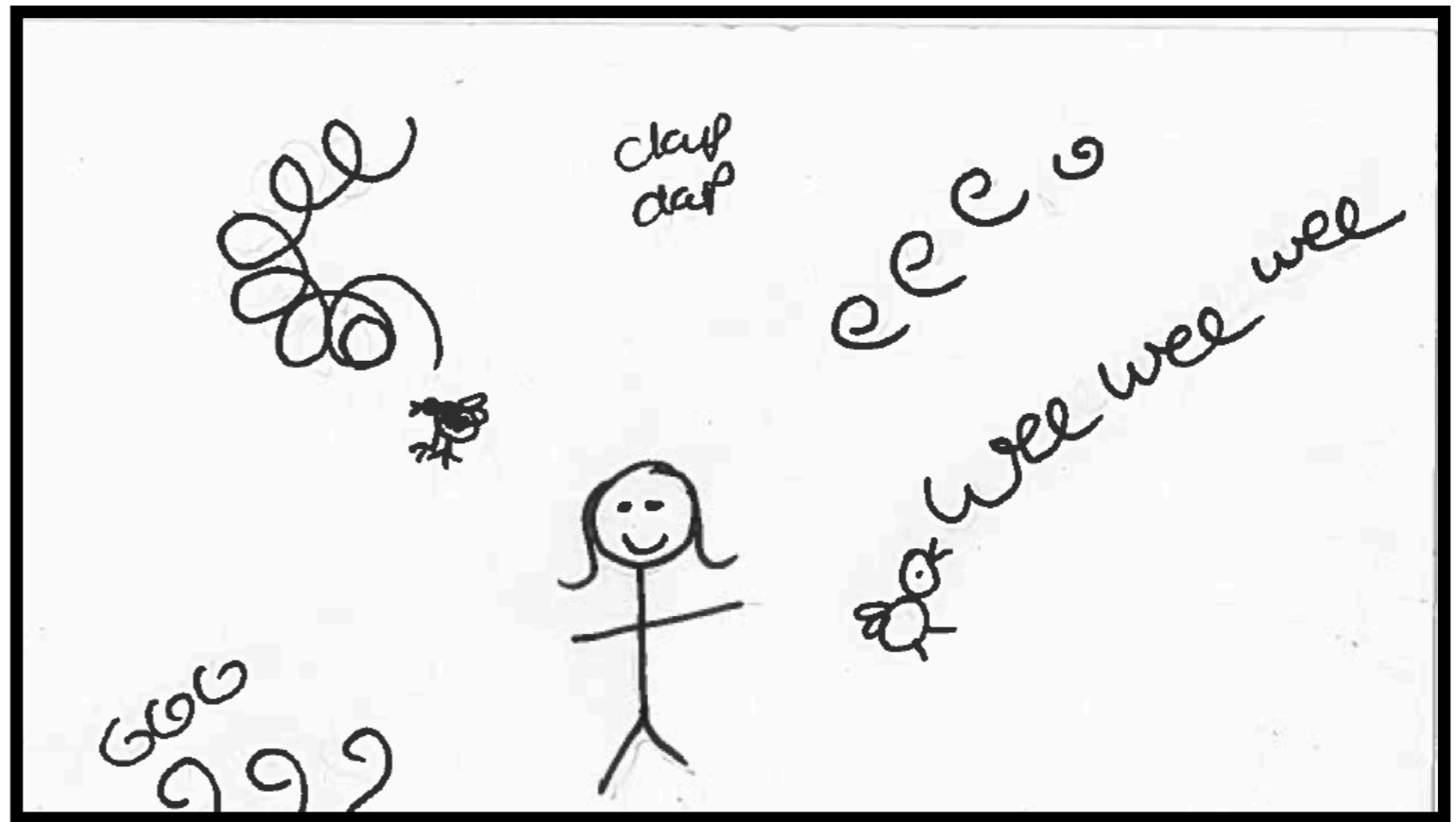
*Old Sam Peabody, Peabody,
Peabody.*

Eastern towhee:

Drink your tea!

How accurately do you think these
mnemonics capture the sounds the
bird is making?

Write your own birdsong
mnemonic:



Sound Map: Mandy Lievers, Education Manager, Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project

5. Music

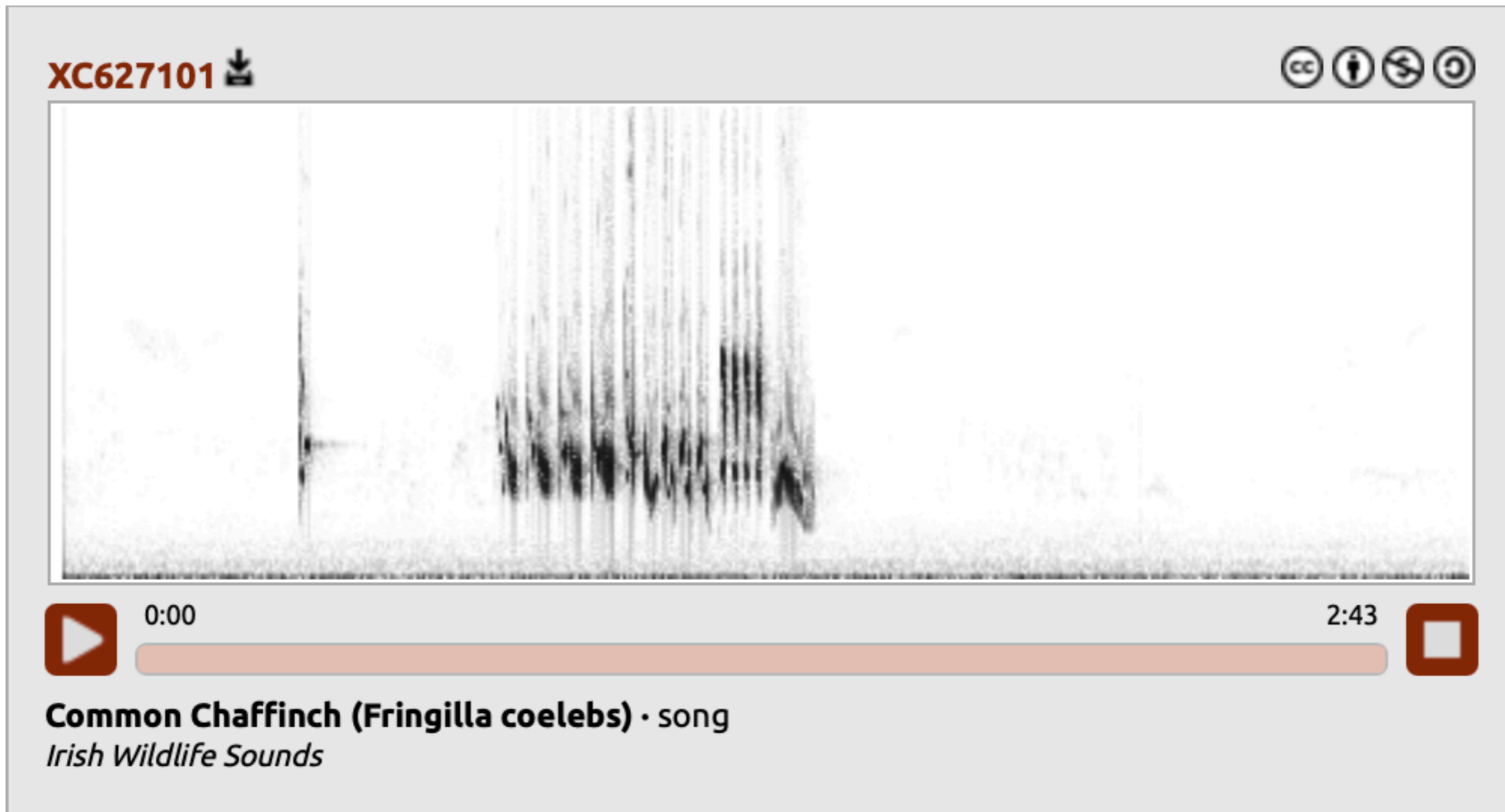
Listen to how human beings have
represented sound in music.

**Expansion Activity: Choose
three pieces of music that
imitate animal sounds.**

**You can choose any kind of
music you like (Gaelic singing,
classical music, contemporary
music).**

**Which do you prefer and why?
How would you represent these
voices in your own music?**

6. The Science of Birdsong



Expansion Activity: Choose a bird or any other animal. At home or with your teacher at school, do some research and find out all about this animal. Where does it live, what does it sound like? How does it see, hear, smell, touch and taste? Write a poem or any other piece of creative writing imagining the world from your chosen animal's perspective.

7. “HARK!”: NIGHTINGALES IN ROMANTIC POETRY

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem’ (1798)

'Most musical, most melancholy' bird!
A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!
In Nature there is nothing melancholy.
But some night-wandering man whose heart was
pierced
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
Or slow distemper, or neglected love,
(And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
Of his own sorrows) he, and such as he,
First named these notes a melancholy strain.
[...]
'Tis the merry Nightingale
That crowds and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
Of all its music!

— Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘The Nightingale’ in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Routledge, 2005), ll. 12-22, 35-59.

2. John Clare

Chee chew chee chew chee
chew—cheer cheer cheer
chew chew chew chee
—up cheer up cheer up
tweet tweet tweet jug jug jug

wew wew wew—chur chur
woo it woo it tweet tweet
tweet jug jug jug

tee rew tee rew tee rew—gur
gur—chew rit chew rit—chur-chur chur
chur will-will will-will tweet-em
tweet em jug jug jug jug

grig grig grig chew chew

wevy wit wevy wit
wevy wit—chee-chit
chee-chit chee chit
weeit weeit wee
wit cheer cheer
cheer—pelew
pelew pelew—
bring a jug bring a
jug bring a jug

— John Clare, *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. by Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 311.

3. John Clare, 'The Progress of Ryhme' (1824-32)

The more I listened & the more
Each note seemed sweeter then before
& aye so different was the strain
She'd scarce repeat the note again
— 'Chew-chew chew-chew' & higher still
'Cheer-cheer cheer-cheer' more loud & shrill
'Cheer-up cheer-up cheer-up' — & dropt
Low 'Tweet tweet tweet jug jug jug' & stopt
One moment just to drink the sound
Her music made & then a round
Of stranger witching notes was heard
As if it was a stranger bird
'Wew-wew wew-wew chur-chur chur-chur
'Woo-it woo-it' could this be her
'Tee-rew tee-rew tee-rew tee-rew
'Chew-rit chew-rit' — & ever new
'Will-will will-will grig-grig grig-grig'
The boy stopt sudden on the brig
To hear the 'tweet tweet tweet' so shrill
Then 'jug jug jug' & all was still
A minute—when a wilder strain
Made boys & woods to pause again.

—Clare, 'The Progress of Ryhme' in *Poems of the Middle Period, 1822-37*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P. M. S. Dawson, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996-2003), III, ll. 239-66.

8. "ECHO MOCKS THE CORNCRAKE"

1. 'Echo Mocks the Corncrake' by Anonymous

O' the lass that I lo'ed first o' a'
Was handsome, young and fair,
Wi' her I spent some merry nichts
Upon the banks of Ayr.
Wi' her I spent some happy nichts,
Whaur yonder burnie rows,
And echo mocks the corncrake
Amang the whinny knowes.

— Traditional Scots Song, performed by Archie Fisher on *The Man With the Rhyme* (1796).

2. Norman MacCaig, 'A Voice of Summer' (1965)

Something that it could say cannot be spoken—
As though the language of a subtle folk
Had lost a word that had no synonym.

— Norman MacCaig, 'A Voice of Summer' in *The Poetry of Birds*, ed. By Simon Armitage and Tim Dee (London: Penguin, 2009), ll. 14-16.

3. Kathleen Jamie, *Findings* (2005)

‘Can I ask you why you like them? Corncrakes I mean.’

‘Well,’ he said. ‘They’re like... little gods of the fields, aren’t they?’

I could have punched the air. If corncrakes are rare, animism is rarer still. Anyone can clear his throat and talk about biodiversity, but ‘Corncrakes...little gods of the field’ will not get you published in ornithologists’ journals. That’s how I picture them now, however; standing chins up, open-beaked, like votive statues hidden in the grass.

— Kathleen Jamie, *Findings* (London: Sort of Books, 2005), p. 98

4. Jackie Kay, ‘Extinction’ (2015)

We closed the borders, folks, we nailed it.
No trees, no plants, no immigrants.
No foreign nurses, no Doctors; we smashed it.
We took control of our affairs. No fresh air.
No birds, no bees, no HIV, no Poles, no pollen.

— Jackie Kay, ‘Extinction’ in *The Guardian* (2015).

DISCUSSION:

Which ‘way’ of writing about birdsong do you like best, and why? What techniques does the writer use (onomatopoeia, repetition, simile, rhyme)? And how do they contrast with other ‘ways’ of thinking and writing about birdsong?

EXPANSION ACTIVITY:

Find your own ‘way’ of writing about birdsong. Write your own poem. It can take any form you like (a sonnet, an ode, a haiku). You can look back at all the things you’ve done (your notes, your sound map, your music project, your natural history journal) and use these to help you. You can send us your poems, sound-maps and other creations, and we’ll upload them to our website waysoflistening.net.

ANSWERS:

1. Blackbird 2. Corncrake 3. Wren 4. Nightingale 5. Robin 6. Skylark

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

This project began as a series of guided walks designed to introduce young people to the different 'ways' which scientists, musicians and poets have developed for listening to birdsong. A symposium at the University of Bristol brought together academics with school teachers and wildlife charities, such as the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project. With support from the Wordsworth Trust and the British Association for Romantic Studies, a second series of walks was designed for young people in Cumbria. When these activities were sadly cut short due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I applied for funding from Creative Scotland's Sustaining Creative Development Fund to produce a podcast-style resource that young people could access at home or at school. It is a pleasure to acknowledge here the support of all the individuals and organisations who have supported this project along the way, and particularly to thank Mandy Leivers and Sophie Thomas, who offered valuable insights and creative input to the resource as it developed. For further information relating to this project, contact Francesca Mackenney (waysoflisteningtobirdsong@gmail.net).

IMAGES:

(Cover Image): Blackbird Singing Evening. Pixabay License: Free for Commercial Use. Singing Honey-eater (*Ptilotis sonorus*) illustrated by Elizabeth Gould (1804–1841). Rawpixel, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. Robin: Keven Law, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. Blackbird: Stutje1979, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. Wren: Joefrei, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. Skylark: Imran Shah from Islamabad, Pakistan, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. Nightingale: Bernard DUPONT from FRANCE, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. Corn Crake: Isle of Man Government, CC BY 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. Sound-Map: Mandy Leivers, Education Manager, Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project (2021). Sonogram: Irish Wildlife Sounds, Xeno-Canto (2021. Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0))

SOUND RECORDINGS:

The vast majority of the wildlife recordings included in this resource were sourced and reproduced with permission from the British Library's Sound Archive. No changes were made. For further information on individual recordings, contact the library's reference team: <https://sounds.bl.uk/Information/contact-us>. With special thanks to Cheryll Tipp for her support and patience in providing the recordings. Other sources include: Stuart Fisher, XC103121. Accessible at www.xeno-canto.org/10312. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5, and Manuel Sanchez,, XC96411. Accessible at www.xeno-canto.org/96411. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5. In accordance with the license agreement, no changes were made to either of these recordings. Joan MacKenzie's rendition of 'Hin-da-la-ho ro hì (Leac na Gàdaig)' was provided by the School of Scottish Studies (<http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44663>). Olivier Messiaen's mimicry of the nightingale is taken from Oliver Mille's documentary film, *Olivier Messiaen: La Liturgie de Cristal* (2007).

POETRY READINGS:

Poetry readings of Coleridge's 'The Nightingale' and Jackie Kay's 'Extinction' by Zakiya McKenzie. Zakiya was one of Forestry England's first writers in residence and is currently doing a PhD in literature on the tradition of black British journalism from the 1940s onwards. She has a pamphlet in shops, published by Rough Trade Books, titled *Testimonies on the History of Jamaica Vol. 1 or a General Survey of Things That Have Been Said About That Island*.

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