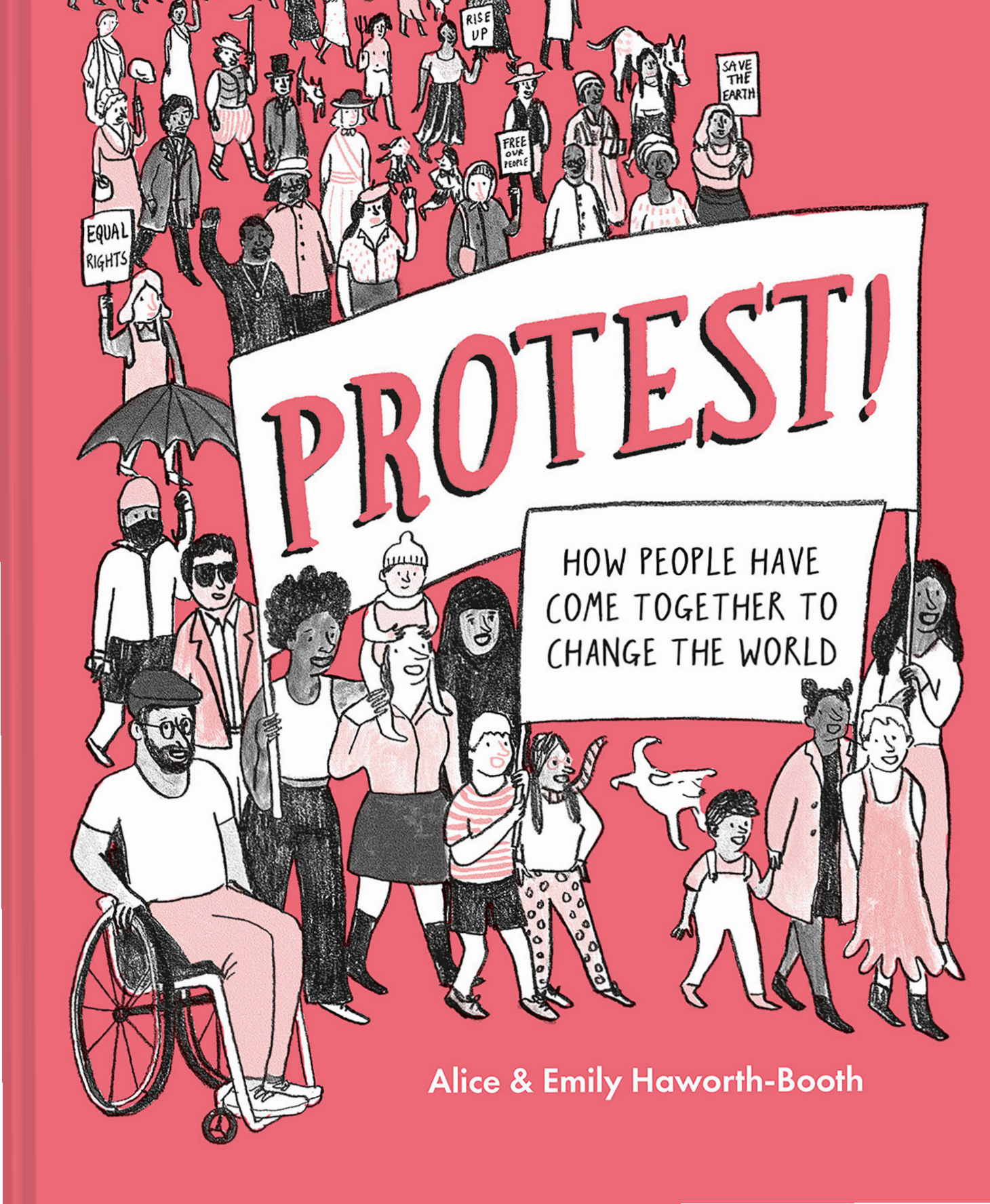
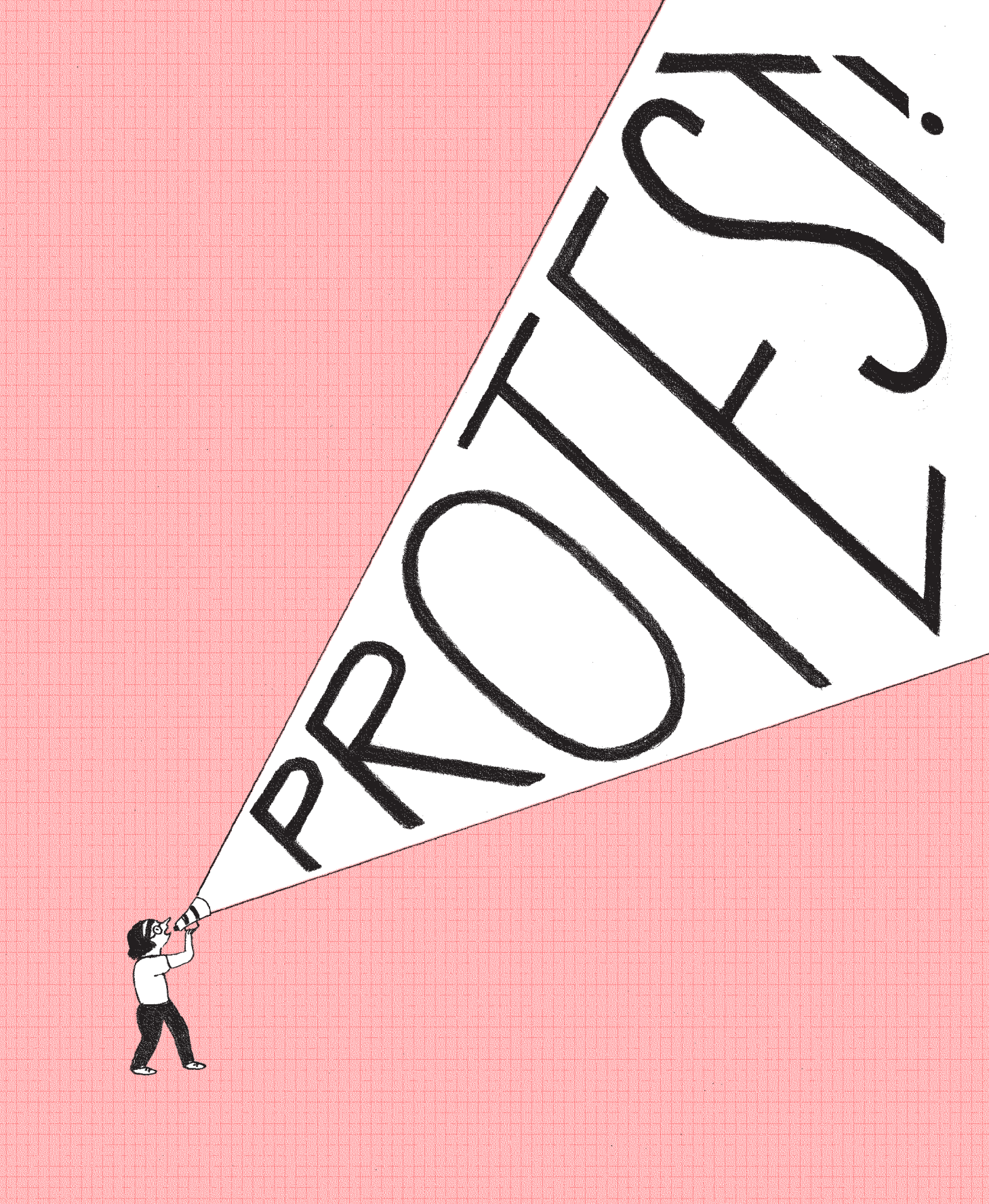



# PROTEST!

## HOW PEOPLE HAVE COME TOGETHER TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Alice & Emily Haworth-Booth


PROTEST!

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**By Emily and Alice Haworth-Booth**

To our rebellious parents

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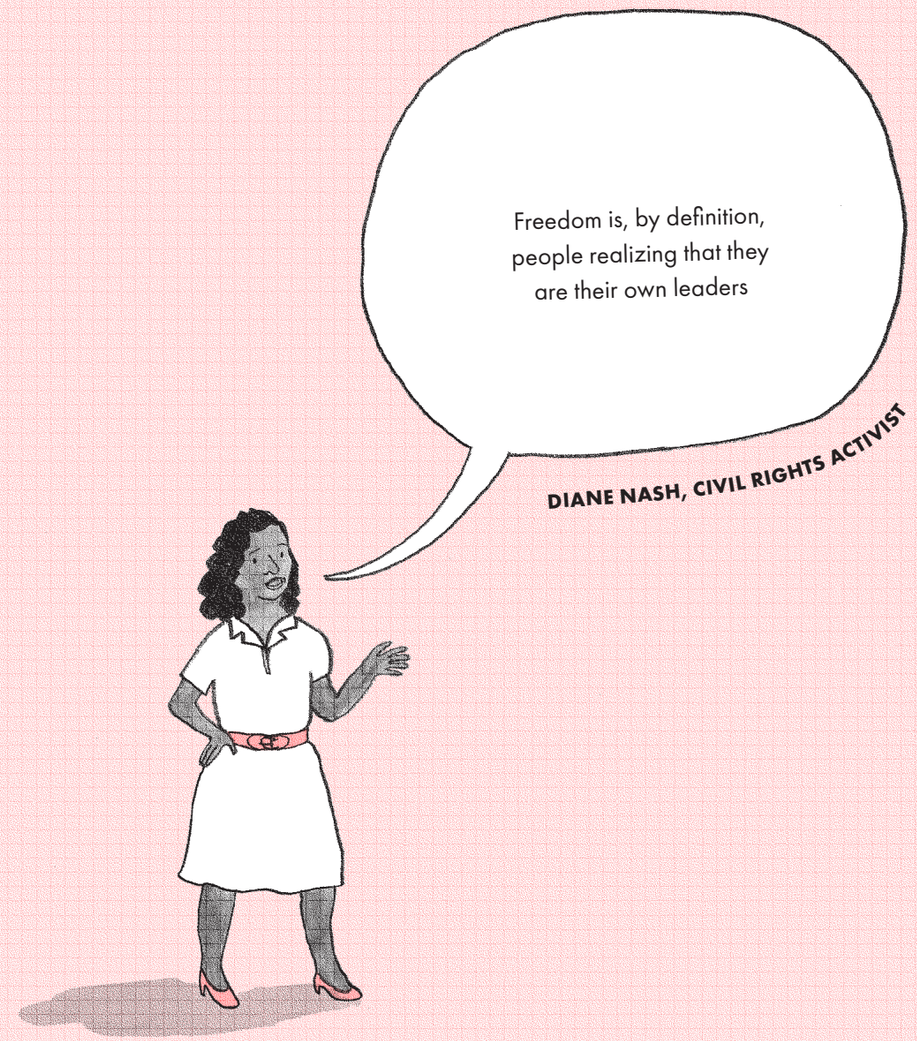



DIANE NASH, CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

# INTRODUCTION

The first big protest we remember going to was the march against the Iraq war in London in 2003. We weren't sure what to expect when we got there, and on the train we exchanged nervous smiles with other people holding placards. When we arrived we saw more people than we'd ever seen together in one place pouring out of the station. But it didn't take long for us to feel at home in the crowd. As the march set off, we took over the streets, singing and chanting together in a huge chorus. We were there to protest something sad, but the main feeling was one of love for humanity.

Because tens of millions of people took part in the protests all over the world, and because the war still happened, it made many people wonder if there was any point in protesting anymore. But marches are only ever part of a larger movement for change. There is no formula for a successful protest, no matter how many people agree with you, and success doesn't always match what's written on your placard.

The way protests work can be mysterious. Sometimes victory means building movements rather than achieving goals, and sometimes it's simply about sustaining hope and joy by coming together. Karl Marx saw revolution as a mole that is underground most of the time, making its way steadily forward, until suddenly it comes to the surface. Sometimes it seems like nothing is happening, but nevertheless, progress is being made.

Since that first march we have discovered that protest can take almost any form. Climbing up buildings, sitting at lunch counters, posting yourself wrapped up as a parcel, taking your TV set out for a walk, growing vegetables, camping in the mountains, singing songs, sticking a loaf of bread on the end a pole and carrying it around... all these things have changed the course of history. Protest is a creative art that is constantly reinventing itself. But at its heart is the idea of people coming together to speak the truth and change the world.

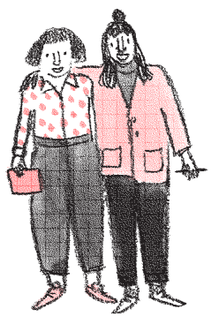


Many of history's most famous protests have an equally famous name attached to them. Figures like Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi have brought brilliant ideas and leadership to their movements, but they are individuals in what is most importantly a collective endeavour.

It is groups of people coming together to take action who are the real heroes of the stories in this book. It is their actions rather than their names that have entered the history books and changed the world, which have won breakthroughs in the struggle for civil rights, gay rights and trans rights, brought us things like votes for women and the eight hour working day, ended dictatorships and freed countries.

The next chapter will be written by you.

**Alice & Emily Haworth-Booth, 2020**



## Note to reader

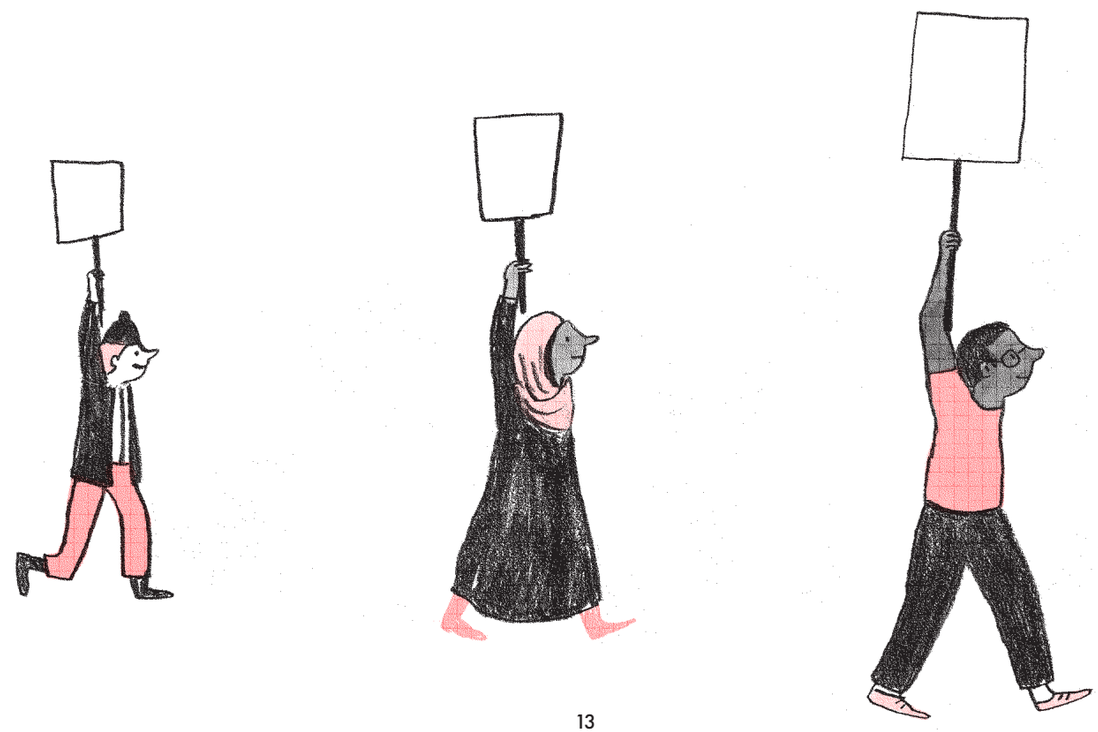
This book is not a complete history. It includes a selection of famous and less well-known movements, focusing on non-violent protest. Rather than describe a handful of protests and their contexts in-depth, we have chosen to present a broad range to give a sense of the many possibilities of what protest can be. And yet there is so much we have left out, because the history of protest is as big as the history of the world itself. Despite this, many movements have not been officially recorded in history, because it is not usually in the interests of the powerful to keep stories of resistance in the public memory.

We have written this book from the perspective of the protesters, and in line with our own sympathies. Protests have diverse aims, not all of which are ones we agree with. Because we want this book to inspire, on the whole we have chosen examples where people are protesting for democracy and human rights and against oppression.

With some exceptions where movements overlap, or where it has felt more helpful to group things together in themes, we have told the story of protest chronologically. You can dip in and out or read it through from beginning to end, seeing how the influence of individual protests often unfolds across time, living on in future movements. The tactics sections at the end of each chapter collect together examples of particular ways to protest, like camping, theatre or making noise.

The experience of protest can be very different depending on where you are and how you are seen by the authorities. Although we have found lots of examples of people successfully finding creative ways to protest safely even when protests are banned, some of the stories in the book don't have happy endings, and many involve police or state violence. That is why it is so important to know your rights and understand that there are sometimes risks involved.

Experienced activists always do their research, prepare thoroughly and use a buddy system so their friends know where they are. If you are planning to protest, look up the laws in your country, take a friend or parent with you, and make sure you do what you need to do to stay safe.



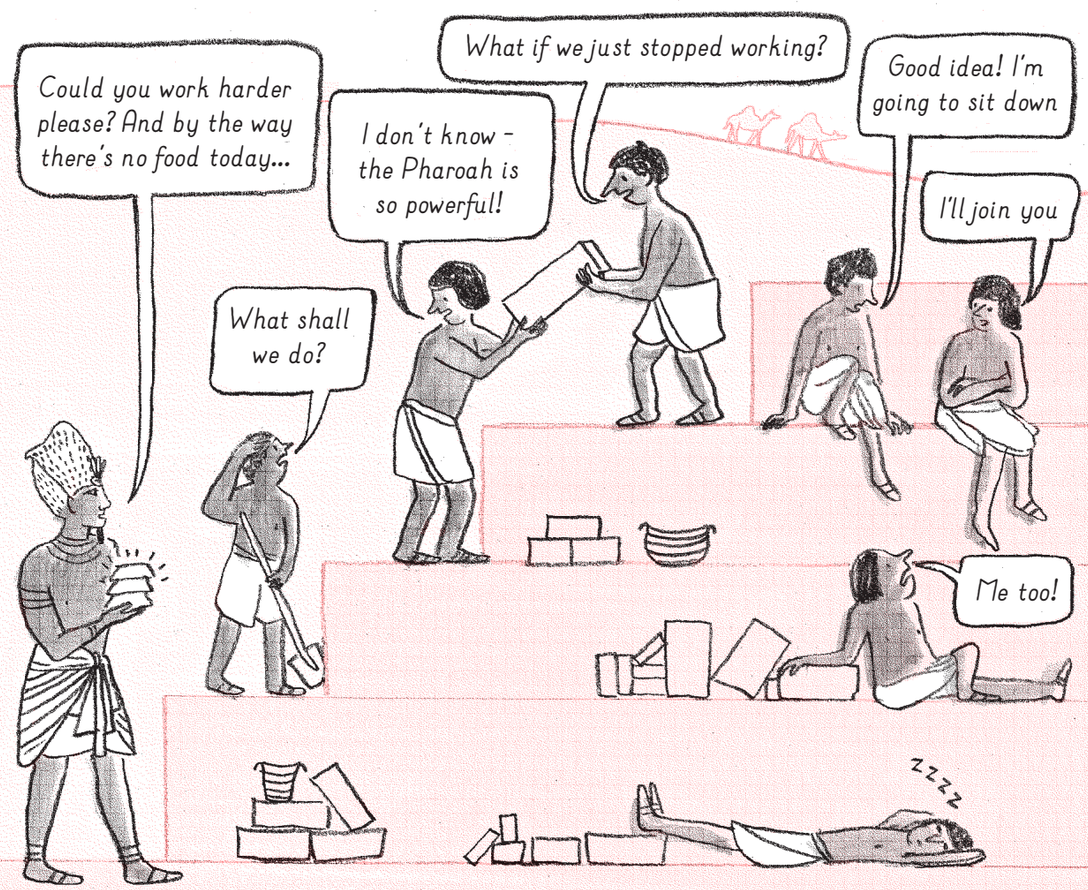
# Protest in the Ancient World

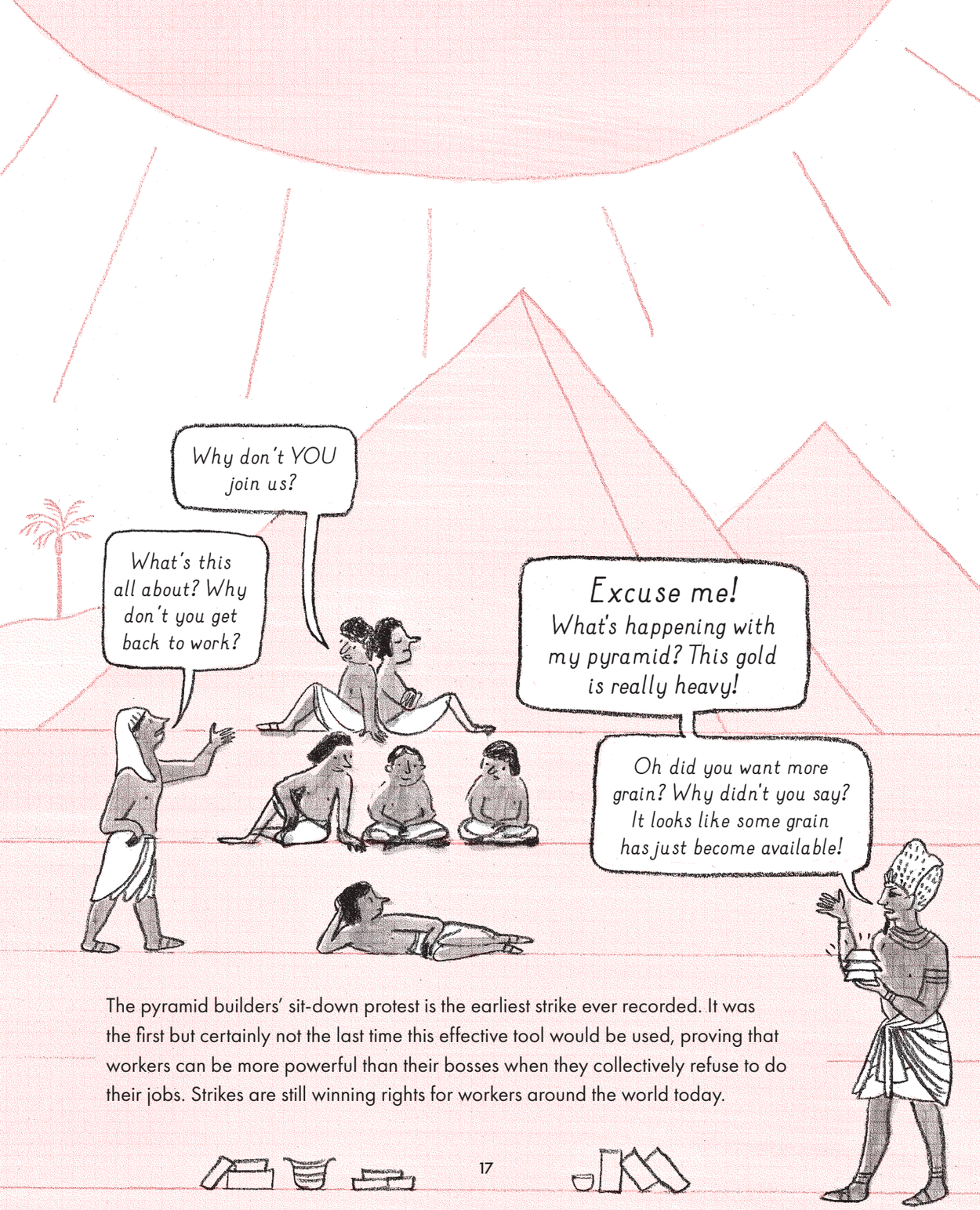
# THESE STONES ARE REALLY HEAVY

## The first workers' strike, Ancient Egypt, 1170 BCE

Pharaoh Rameses III, the ruler of Egypt, wanted lots of pyramids to store all his gold to take to the afterlife. Pyramids were built as tombs to protect Pharaohs' bodies and belongings after death. Rameses III had masses of jewellery and was terribly worried the pyramids wouldn't be finished before he died.

But the people building the pyramids had even bigger problems. The work was gruelling and they weren't getting enough food to eat. It was hot and dusty and the workers desperately needed things to change. They sat down and refused to work until they got their grain. It was a simple action that changed history.




The pyramid builders' sit-down protest is the earliest strike ever recorded. It was the first but certainly not the last time this effective tool would be used, proving that workers can be more powerful than their bosses when they collectively refuse to do their jobs. Strikes are still winning rights for workers around the world today.

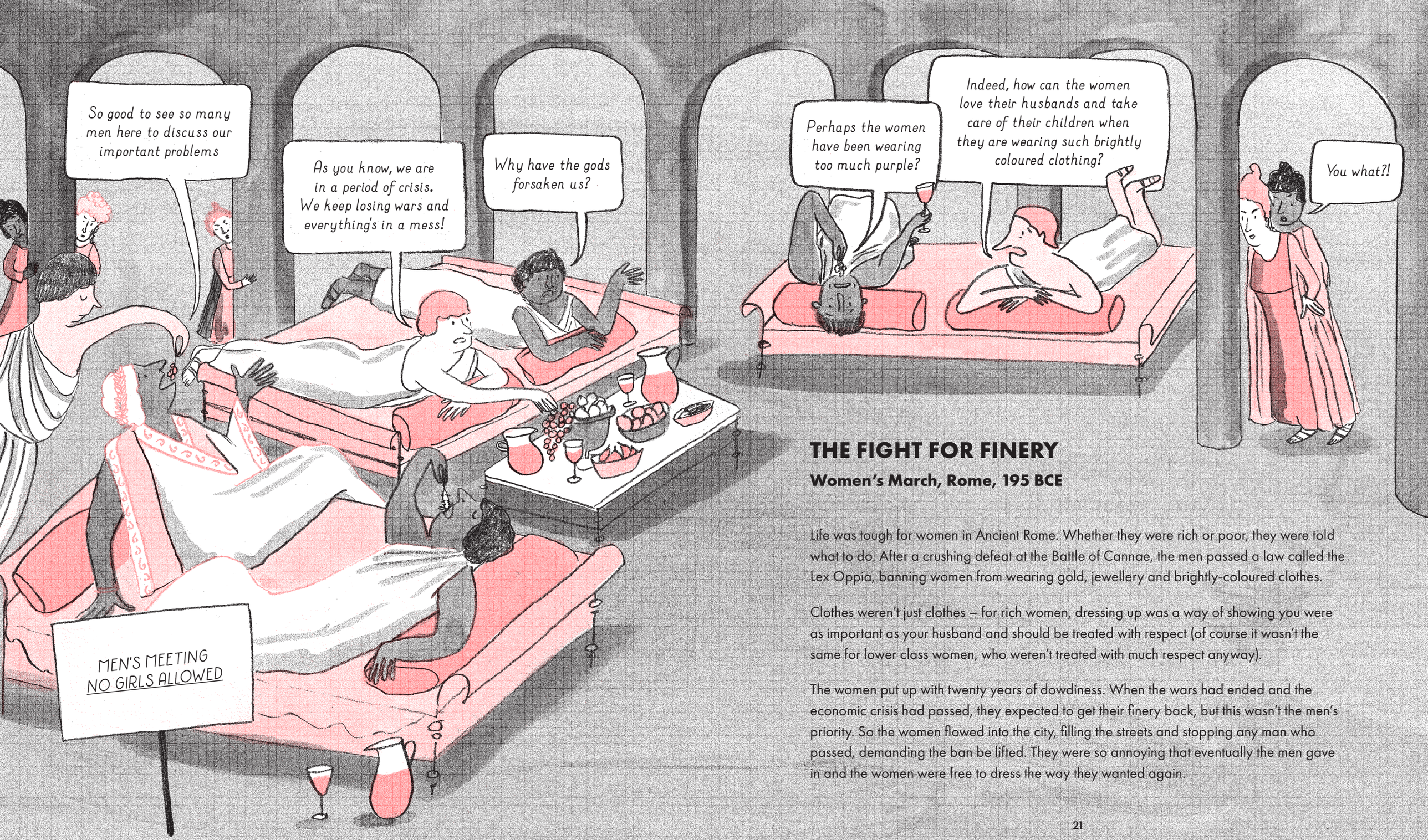
# WHERE IS EVERYBODY?

## The people desert Rome, 494-287 BCE

Much like Egypt, Rome was a very unequal society. A tiny group of rich and powerful men called the patricians made all the decisions and made sure that life was comfortable for themselves. Everybody else grew the vegetables, tended the animals, built the buildings, ran the shops and fought in the armies. These Romans, known as the plebeians, kept society going, but they had no say in how it was run. What they did have were their friendships, and the feeling that they should stand up for each other. The plebeians decided that they needed to join together to fight for their rights.

The plebeians realised that if all of them left the city at once, the patricians would notice how essential they were. So all the plebeians went to a nearby mountain until the patricians came to listen to what they had to say, and agreed to change things. It was decided that, for the first time, the plebeians would be represented by their own people in government.

They repeated their disappearing act – known as a secession – several more times, each time winning more rights, including a fairer legal system, the right to marry people from other classes, and the ability to be elected to the highest offices of government themselves.




## THE FIGHT FOR FINERY

### Women's March, Rome, 195 BCE

Life was tough for women in Ancient Rome. Whether they were rich or poor, they were told what to do. After a crushing defeat at the Battle of Cannae, the men passed a law called the Lex Oppia, banning women from wearing gold, jewellery and brightly-coloured clothes.

Clothes weren't just clothes – for rich women, dressing up was a way of showing you were as important as your husband and should be treated with respect (of course it wasn't the same for lower class women, who weren't treated with much respect anyway).

The women put up with twenty years of dowdiness. When the wars had ended and the economic crisis had passed, they expected to get their finery back, but this wasn't the men's priority. So the women flowed into the city, filling the streets and stopping any man who passed, demanding the ban be lifted. They were so annoying that eventually the men gave in and the women were free to dress the way they wanted again.

# Noise

From singing to drumming, silence to rowdiness, people have used noise to unify, bring hope and make their voices heard.

### MEDIEVAL BELLS, 1300s

In the English Peasants' Revolt, church bells were used for a new purpose. They could be heard far and wide, bringing the scheming revolters together on village greens.

### SINGING REVOLUTION, 1991

The Baltic states had wanted to be free from Soviet rule for years. When huge crowds started singing national songs together, their movements gathered irresistible momentum, and soonEstonia, Latvia and Lithuania won their independence.

### RUBBISH MUSIC, 2015

Going on a march in Syria can be dangerous, so instead protesters hid tiny speakers in rubbish bins and piles of manure all over Damascus. The police had to wade through the rubbish to turn off the illegal protest songs they were playing.

### NEDA, 2009

When a protester called Neda was killed in Iran, people wanted to share their feelings of sadness, but the government made it illegal to talk about her. Then the people remembered that Neda is a common name that appears in lots of Iranian pop songs. They started to use these as their ringtones, so whenever a phone rang, everyone would remember her.



### PUSSY RIOT, 2012

A band of young women in neon stormed into an Orthodox cathedral in Moscow and started playing raucous feminist punk music. Pussy Riot ended up in prison, but this just made the band more famous and their messages about feminism, LGBTQ+ rights and other issues even louder.

### FREEDOM SONGS, 1800s

On the plantations where they worked, enslaved Africans sang songs of resistance. Singing kept hope alive and spread secret messages about uprisings and routes of escape. The hymn Swing Low Sweet Chariot has a hidden meaning, the 'sweet chariot' referring to the Underground Railroad which rescued enslaved people: *a band of angels coming after me, coming for to carry me home.*

### JAZZ NOT HATE, 2020

When a far right politician started giving hate-filled speeches in Denmark, a group of jazz musicians decided to drown him out. Any time Rasmus Paludan was scheduled to speak, the musicians were there with their instruments, making more noise than him. They call themselves Denmark's "potentially biggest band" and specialise in bad music, so that anyone can join in whether or not they know how to play. Anyone, that is, except Paludan himself, who is the only person not invited to join the band.

### SILENT PARADE, 1917

One of the first civil rights protests was a silent march. There was no chanting or singing: only the sombre sound of muffled drums could be heard as 10,000 African American men, women and children walked through the streets of New York. It was the absence of noise that amplified their grief in the wake of racist killings.