

# Inspiring Change: Women's Education in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America

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DAR Museum  
Teacher Resource



Grades 8-12

## Contents

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How to Use This Guide .....	3
Teaching Using Objects and Images .....	4
Guide for Careful Looking .....	5
Learning Objective and Common Core Standards .....	6
Background Information .....	8
References and Additional Sources .....	10

## How to Use This Guide

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This teaching resource aims to explore female education and its improvements which lead to the Women's Rights Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This guide for educators uses an object-based exploration strategy to facilitate conversation. In addition to the lessons, resources for further exploration of the topic are also cited and provided online.

### Objectives:

- Assist educators in teaching and facilitating meaningful dialogue on the topic of female education in 19<sup>th</sup> century America
- Provide thought-provoking activities that allow students to draw personal connections to Women's Rights topics
- Demonstrate how objects may be used as primary sources for understanding history
- Foster curiosity, understanding, empathy and a spirit of self-advocacy

### Grades: 8-12

**Lessons** are made to be flexible and adaptive based on the needs of any classroom. Each includes:

- Guide for Careful Looking
- Downloadable Object Images and Information
- Questions for Discussion
- Questions for Context
- Suggested Activities

Object images are accompanied by some basic information, which educators may or may not choose to share with the students prior to the lesson. Should a lesson need to be shortened, educators could choose to ask only one Question for Discussion and one Question for Context. For a more comprehensive lesson, teachers may choose to use one of the additional Suggested Activities.

**Guide for Careful Looking (5 minutes/object)** can be used at the beginning of every lesson for each object. This tool will help students carefully consider the basic features of the object and what it is communicating. After students fill out the guide on their own, educators may want to share the provided object information so that students can then fill in factual information on their Analysis chart.

**Questions for Discussion (15 minutes)** can be introduced after the Careful Looking Guide has been completed. They tie in background information on the objects to further the discovery process and make sense of the object's function. These questions focus on what we can know about the objects by looking at or reading about them.

**Questions for Context (15 minutes)** can be introduced after the Questions for Discussion to help students identify, understand, and make connections to the current or past conditions or state of the object, and how it may relate to their personal experiences. These questions encourage students to consider the broader implications of the object and its spheres.

**Suggested Activities (30 minutes+)** can be used as additional classroom exercises or multi-day projects to enhance student understanding of the subject matter covered in the lesson. It is intended for only one activity to be chosen per lesson; however, these are only suggestions and may not be necessary for every classroom.

## Teaching Using Objects and Images

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At the DAR Museum, we believe in the power of object-based learning as a helpful tool for audiences of all ages. The art of visual literacy, or “reading” images or objects, enhances our observation, interpretation, and analysis skills. Here are some suggestions for how to achieve this:

**Ask open-ended questions.** These types of questions help students develop answers in their own words and in their own frame of mind. It encourages independent thought, and more importantly, engagement! You cannot answer these questions with a nod of the head. Some examples of these might be:

“What do you see?”

“What are the important details?”

“What makes you think that?”

“How might this connect to what we have already talked about?”

**Ask why.** Follow-up questions are so important for keeping the conversation going. They provide opportunities for students to further their thinking and sometimes even challenge their own responses. “Why” is a particularly strong question, because it is never fully satisfied. You can keep asking this question over and over again and get deeper answers every time.

**Allow wait time.** Studies have proven that waiting for an answer before asking an additional or clarifying question improves both the quality of the answers, as well as the likelihood of engagement. When people are confronted with new information, it takes time to formulate a response. Giving them space to arrive at an answer on their own demonstrates your genuine interest in their answer and encourages further exploration.

**Refrain from lecturing.** We learn best when we can equate experiences back to ourselves or find a personal connection. Lectures that are full of facts often dispel the opportunity for students to make those personal ties and converse together. Find creative ways to weave the information you’d like to share into the discussion in appropriate and authentic ways.

**Paraphrase.** This basic listening tool is applicable to almost every kind of dialogue. It is important to acknowledge your students’ thoughts and ensure that the rest of the class hears them as well. This also helps the students feel that their opinions and thoughts are valid and valued.

**Point.** When a particular element or characteristic of the object is being referenced in a question or response, it is extremely helpful to physically point it out. This way, everyone is clear on what is being discussed and it brings the conversation back to the object as the central and primary source of information.

# GUIDE FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

**Title of Object:**

**What is this object made of?**

Paper

Wood

Silk

Cotton

Leather

Metal

Ink

Linen

**Describe what you see.**

**Analyze what you see.**

	Your Guess & Why	Factual Information
Where is it from?		
When is it from?		
Who used it? Why do you think so?		
What was its purpose/function?		
What symbols, words, imagery, or details are used?		

**Further your thinking.**

What other questions do you have about the object? What documents, artifacts, or historical evidence could help answer those questions?

## Common Core Standards

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### Grades: 8-12

#### Common Core Standards:

##### Standards for Reading:

###### Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

###### Craft and Structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

###### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

###### Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

##### Standards for Speaking and Listening:

###### Comprehension and Collaboration

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

###### Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

#### Standards for Literacy of History/Social Sciences, Science, and Technical Studies

- 8.2. Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; provide an accurate summary of the text distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- 8.6 Analyze the author's purpose in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment in a text.
- 8.8 Distinguish among facts, reasoned judgment based on research findings, and speculation in a text.
- 8.9 Compare and contrast the information gained from experiments, simulations, video, or multimedia sources with that gained from reading a text on the same topic.
- 9/10.2 Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; trace the text's explanation or depiction of a complex process, phenomenon, or concept; provide an accurate summary of the text.
- 9/10.6 Analyze the author's purpose in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment in a text, defining the question the author seeks to address.
- 11/12.2 Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; summarize complex concepts, processes, or information presented in a text by paraphrasing them in simpler but still accurate terms.
- 11/12.6 Analyze the author's purpose in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment in a text, identifying important issues that remain unresolved.

## Background Information

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In the 19th century, women's responsibilities were primarily focused on tending to their husbands, their children, and their homes. It was typical for boys to attend school, if their families had the means. Subjects included reading (usually of religious texts), writing, spelling, grammar, geography, and arithmetic. During the summer months while the boys worked the farms, girls were permitted to attend the schools. Eventually, they were allowed to attend during the winter months as well;<sup>1</sup> however, their curriculum was drastically different from boys. They often learned no more than basic reading and arithmetic skills,<sup>2</sup> and knitting and needlework during the summer months.<sup>1</sup>

Needlework remained a prominent aspect of female education until around 1840. Teachers usually dictated the design format of the samplers, which ended up producing distinctive regional styles over time.<sup>3</sup> Most girls completed two samplers during their schooling, the first being known as a "marking sampler" where they practiced making letters, spelling words, learning numerals, and memorizing poems promoting good virtue and morals. The second sampler was usually a finer piece of artwork in silk threading that was pictorial in nature.<sup>2</sup>

After the American Revolution, some states, including Connecticut and Massachusetts, began to establish public school systems for primary education, which received funding from the local government. At first, laws stated that these "district schools" were only for male children. The teaching at these district schools was often considered quite mundane and lacking in rigor. Eventually, private academies began to open offering a more challenging curriculum to older students from families of means.<sup>1</sup> Some of these academies allowed women to attend as well, and with time, prominent female figures began to emerge as advocates for equal education opportunities.

Some of the figures discussed in this resource are Mary Lyon and Emma Willard. Both of these women opened their own educational institutions solely for females and whose opportunities "offered so wide an intellectual reach to young women."<sup>4</sup> Their mission was to "rescue young women from 'empty gentility' and prepare them for enlarged social roles." With the availability of these forms of education as well as the rising popularity of women's publications, by 1850 at least half of the women in America could read and write.<sup>5</sup>

The objects in this resource will help paint the picture of the progression of the female experience during these changing times in American history, and the implications of receiving an improved education. The needlework examples included in the lessons are used to reference the kinds of celebrated "female accomplishments" of the 19th century and mark their changes over time. The samplers represent the early years of education for females, while the stitched globes demonstrate the shift in values over the course of the century. As the lessons show, the American education system evolved to include a growing interest in the accomplishments of females and broadened the scope of the contributions they make to society as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Lutz, A. (1976). *Emma Willard, Daughter of Democracy*. Washington, DC: Zenger

<sup>2</sup> Peck, A. A. (2003, October). American Needlework in the Eighteenth Century | Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/need/hd\\_need.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/need/hd_need.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Ring, B. (1993). *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers & Pictorial Needlework 1650 - 1850*. New York, NY: Knopf.

<sup>4</sup> *Emma Willard and Her Pupils or Fifty Years of Troy Female Seminary 1822-1872*. (1898). New York: Mrs. Russell Sage.

<sup>5</sup> Woloch, N. (1984). *Women and the American Experience*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf



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