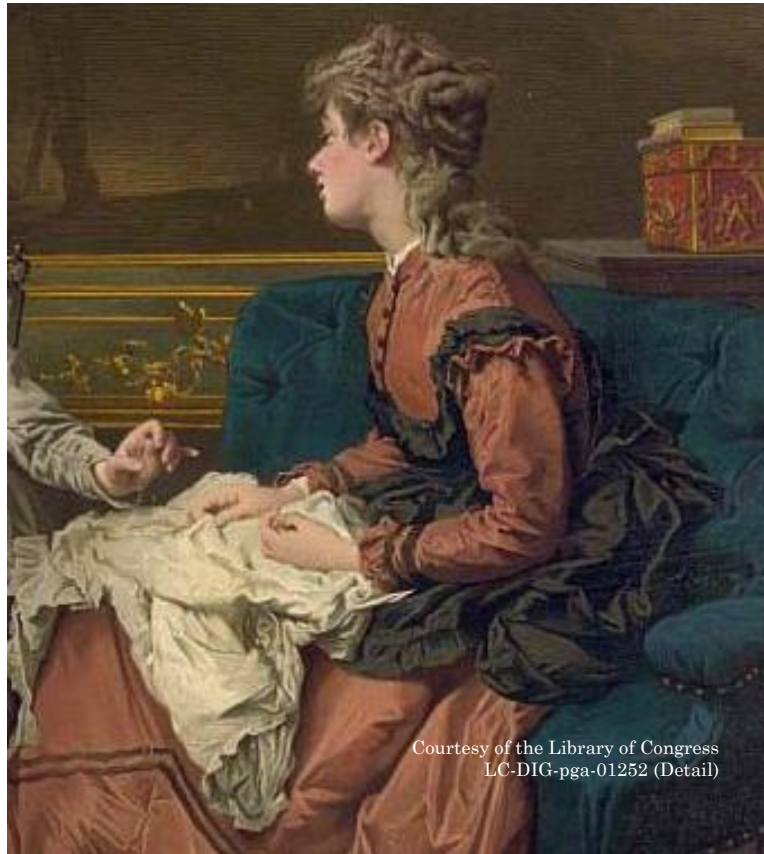


# Inspiring Change: Women's Education in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America

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## Lesson 2: How do we determine the value of education?



Courtesy of the Library of Congress  
LC-DIG-pga-01252 (Detail)

Grades 8-12

## 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 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.

# 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?

## Lesson 2: How do we determine the value of education?

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### Objects:

- “Certificate of Merit”
- “Improving Female Education” by Emma Willard

### Questions for Discussion:

- The certificate has words, symbols, and images on it. What do they mean or represent?
- Does this certificate resemble anything? How so?
- What does the certificate tell you about how society views education?
- Read Emma Willard’s petition for “Improving Female Education.” What argument is the writer making? What word choices assert her tone? What evidence supports her position?
- What connections can be made between the needlework samplers discussed in Lesson 1 and the certificate and petition in Lesson 2?
- How does education benefit society? What reasons or evidence can you draw on to support your point of view?

### Questions for Context:

- How are you rewarded or acknowledged for your educational accomplishments? Do you think it is beneficial to receive rewards? Why or why not?
- What kind of privileges did education give Cora Lovering? What privileges does it give you? How could the certificate and petition be related to or contribute to one another?
- Looking at the dates of the curriculum listed in Lincolnton Female Academy’s Newspaper Ad and Emma Willard’s petition, how do you think one could have influenced the other? What could have inspired Willard to make such a grandiose statement, and why did her ideas take root?
- Does everyone have access to education? Should everyone receive the same education? Why or why not?

### Suggested Activities:

- Ask students to create certificates of accomplishment or merit that they think are important and should be rewarded. Encourage students to get creative! Take the opportunity to address something that isn’t often acknowledged. What kinds of values do they want to promote in their school and community? Display certificates in a prominent location in the classroom or hall.
- Ask students to research educational policy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and compare it to today’s educational policies. Although many things have changed over time, where is there still room for improvement? Have students in groups compose their ideal educational policy. This should include specific instructions on how this plan should be carried out. Who will attend school, and where? Where should the money come from? Will federal, state, or local governments be involved? Will the long term benefits of the policy out-weigh the cost? If possible, have students share ideas with a local government official. Get feedback and hear an official’s perspective on education.

Some possible resources for this activity:

- <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>

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- <http://www.annenberghclassroom.org/files/documents/educationpolicy.pdf>
- <https://www.raceforward.org/research/reports/historical-timeline-public-education-us>
- <http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/uhic/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?zid=07fcfee3222a6a04958592dbd326b0d2&action=2&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CCX2536601606&userGroupName=oldt1017&jsid=8a59f6b1ee23ae61b1e4edeb810a8b8f>

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## A Certificate of Merit

United States

1872

Paper, printed red and blue ink

6.125 x 3.5"

DAR Museum, gift of Mrs. Ethel F. Murch; 3714.3



(Click on image to download.)

This certificate is printed in blue and red to represent money. On the left, there is a grouping consisting of an oil lamp (the lamp of learning), books, and a quill. On the right is a small boy and girl reading a book together. This certificate was presented to Cora Lovering by her teacher, Ella Worth, in 1872. "The 'Reward of Merit' was passed out by the school teacher to deserving pupils for excellence in various subjects and also for good behavior... The reward of merit gradually became larger [over time], and in addition to the narrow border there were pictorial designs. The pictures were taken from cuts of newspapers and from the illustration in contemporary children's books... The reward of merit in the form and size of a bank note certificate with values marked on the end panels was thought to have been invented by John Barber, who was a pioneer bank-note engraver... Most rewards were printed eight or more to a sheet and were sold to the school master who cut them as needed for distribution."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McClinton, K. M. (1970). *Antiques of American Childhood*, (98-99). New York: Bramhall House.

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## Improving Female Education by Emma Willard, 1819

From Emma Willard. *An Address to the Public Particularly to the Members of the Legislature of New York Proposing a Plan for Improving Female Education*. Middlebury: J.W. Copeland, 1819.

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If the improvement of the American female character, and that alone, could be effected by public liberality, employed in giving better means of instruction, such improvement of one half of society, and that half, which barbarous and despotic nations have ever degraded, would of itself be an object, worthy of the most liberal government on earth; but if the female character be raised, it must inevitably raise that of the other sex: and thus does the plan proposed, offer, as the object of legislative bounty, to elevate the whole character of the community.

As evidence that this statement does not exaggerate the female influence in society, our sex need not be considered in the single relation of mothers. In this character, we have the charge of the whole mass of individuals, who are to compose the succeeding generation; during that period of youth, when the pliant mind takes any direction, to which it is steadily guided by a forming hand. How important a power is given by this charge! Yet, little do too many of my sex know how, either to appreciate it or improve it. Unprovided with the means of acquiring that knowledge, which flows liberally to the other sex--having our times of education devoted to frivolous acquirements, how should we understand the nature of the mind so as to be aware of the importance of those early impressions, which we make upon the minds of our children? --or how should we be able to form enlarged and correct views, either of the character, to which we ought to mold them, or of the means most proper to form them aright?

Considered in this point of view, were the interests of male education alone to be consulted, that of females becomes of sufficient importance to engage the public attention. Would we rear the human plant to its perfection, we must fertilize the soil which produces it. If it acquire its first bent and texture upon a barren plain, it will avail comparatively little, should it be afterwards transplanted to a garden. . . .

Not only has there been a want of system concerning female education, but much of what has been done, has proceeded upon mistaken principles.

One of these is, that, without regard to the difference periods of life, proportionate to their importance, the education of females has been too exclusively directed, to fit them for displaying to advantage the charms of youth and beauty. Though it may be proper to adorn this period of life, yet, it is incomparably more important to prepare for the serious duties of maturer years. Though well to decorate the blossom, it is far better to prepare for the harvest. In the vegetable creation, nature seems but to sport, when she embellishes the flower; while all her serious cares are directed to perfect the fruit.

Another error is that it has been made the first object in educating our sex, to prepare then to please the other. But reason and religion teach, that we too are primary existences; that it is for us to move, in the orbit of our duty, around the Holy Center of perfection, the companions, not the satellites of men; else, instead of shedding around us in their proper course, we must accompany them in their wildest deviations.

I would not be understood to insinuate that we are not, in particular situations, to yield obedience to the other sex. Submission and obedience belong to every being in the universe, except the great Master of the whole. Nor is it a degrading peculiarity to our sex, to be under human authority. Whenever one class of human beings, derive from another the benefits of supports, protection, they must pay its equivalent, obedience. Thus, while we receive these benefits from our parents, we are all, without distinction of sex, under their authority; when we receive them from the government of our country, we must obey our rulers; and when our sex take the obligations of marriage, and receive protection and support from the other, it is reasonable, that we too should yield obedience. Yet is neither the child, not the subject nor the wife, under human authority, but in subservience to the divine. Our highest responsibility is to God, and our highest interest is to please him; therefore, to secure this interest, should our education be directed. . . .It is the duty of a government, to do all in its power to promote the present and future prosperity of the nation, over which it is placed. This prosperity will depend on the character of its citizens. The characters of these will be formed by their mothers; and it is through the mothers, that the government can control the characters of its future citizens to form them such as will ensure their country's prosperity. If this is the case, then it is the duty of our present legislators to begin now, to form the characters of the next generation, by controlling that of the females, who are to be their mothers, while it is yet with them a season of improvement.

But should the conclusion be almost admitted that our sex too are the legitimate children of the legislature; and that, it is their duty to afford us a share of their paternal bounty; the phantom of a college-learned lady, would be ready to rise up, and destroy every good resolution, which the admission of this truth would naturally produce in its favor. . . .

That nature designed for our sex the care of children, she has made manifest, by mental, as well as physical indications. She has given us, in a greater degree than men, the gentle arts of insinuation, to soften their minds, and fit them to receive impressions; a greater quickness of invention to vary modes of teaching to different dispositions; and more patience to make repeated efforts. There are many females of ability to whom the business of instructing children is highly acceptable, and who would devote all their faculties to their occupation. They would have no higher pecuniary object to engage their attention, and their reputation as instructors they would consider as important; whereas, whenever able and enterprising men, engage in this business, they considerate as merely temporary employment, to further some other object, to the attainment of which, their best thoughts and calculations are directed. If then women were properly fitted by instruction, they would be likely to teach children better than the other sex; they could afford to do it cheaper; and those men who would otherwise be engaged in this employment, might be at liberty to add to the wealth of the nation, by any of those thousand occupations, from which women are necessarily debarred.

But the females who taught children would have been themselves instructed either immediately or indirectly by the seminaries. Hence through these, the government might exercise an intimate, and most beneficial control over common schools. Any one, who has turned his attention to this subject, must be aware, that there is great room for improvement in these, both as to the modes of teaching and the things taught; and what method could be devised so likely to effect this improvement, as to prepare by instruction, a class of individuals, whose interest, leisure,

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and natural talents, would combine to make them pursue it with ardor. Such a class of individuals would be raised up, by female seminaries. And therefore they would be likely to have highly important and happy effects on common schools.

It is believed that such institutions would tend to prolong to perpetuate our excellent government.

An opinion too generally prevails, that our present form of government, though good, cannot be permanent. Other republics have failed, and the historian and philosopher have told us that nations are like individuals; that at their birth, they receive the seeds of their decline and dissolution. Here deceived by a false analog, we receive an apt illustration of particular facts, for a general truth. The existence of nations, cannot, in strictness, be compared with the duration of animate life; for by the operation of physical causes, this, after a certain length of time, must cease: but the existence of nations, is prolonged by the succession of one generation to another, and there is no physical cause, to prevent this succession's going on, in a peaceable manner under a good government, till the end of time. We must look to other causes and seasonably prevent their operation, then might our latest prosperity enjoy the same happy government, with which we are blessed; or of but in part, then might the triumphs of tyranny, be delayed, and a few more generations free.

Permits me then to ask the enlightened politician of my country whether amidst his researches for these causes he cannot discover one, in the neglect, which free governments, in common with others, have shown, to whatever regarded the formation of the female character. . . .

But while, with an anguished heart, I thus depict the crimes of my sex, let not the other stand by and smile. Reason declares, that you are guiltier than we. You are our natural guardians,--our brothers,--our fathers, and our rulers. You know that our ductile minds, readily take the impressions of education. Why then have you neglected our education? Why have you looked with lethargic indifference, on circumstances ruinous to the formation of our characters, which you might have controlled? . . .

1. Females, by having their understandings cultivated, their reasoning powers developed and strengthened, may be expected to act more from the dictates of reason and less from those of fashion and caprice.
2. With minds thus strengthened they would be taught systems of morality, enforced by sanctions of religion; and they might be expected to acquire juster and more enlarged views of their duty and stronger and higher motives to its performance.
3. This plan of education, offers all that can be done to preserve female youth from a contempt of useful labor. The pupils would become accustomed to it, in conjunction with the high objects of literature, and the elegant pursuits of the fine arts; and it is to be hoped that both from habit and association, they might in future life, regard it as respectable.

To this it may be added that if housewifery could be raised to a regular art, and taught upon philosophical principles, it would become a higher and more interesting occupation; and ladies of fortune, like wealthy agriculturists, might find that to regulate their business was an agreeable employment.

In calling on my patriotic countrymen to effect so noble an object, the consideration of national glory, should not be overlooked. Ages have rolled away;--barbarians have trodden the weaker sex

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beneath their feet;--tyrants have robbed us of the present light of heaven, and fain would take its future. Nations calling themselves polite have made us the fancied idols of a ridiculous worship, and we have repaid them with ruin for their folly. But where is that wise and heroic country, which has considered that our rights are sacred, though we cannot defend them? That tho' a weaker, we are an essential part of the body politic, whose corruption or improvement must affect the whole? And which, having thus considered, has sought to give us by education, that rank in the scale of being, to which our importance entitles us? History shows not that country. It shows many, whose legislatures have sought to improve their various vegetable productions, and their breeds of useful brutes; but none whose public councils have made it an object of their deliberations, to improve the character of their women. Yet, though history lifts not her finger to such an one, anticipation does. She points to a nation, which having thrown off the shackles of authority and precedent, shrinks not from schemes of improvement, because other nations have never attempted them; but which, in its pride of independence, would rather lead than follow in the march of human improvement; a nation wise and magnanimous to plan, enterprising to undertake, and rich in resources to execute. Does not every American exult that this country is his own? And who knows how great and good a race of men may yet arise from the forming hand of mothers, enlightened by the bounty of that beloved country,--to defend her liberties,--to plan her future improvement,--and to raise her unparalleled glory?

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