

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

---

## Lesson 3:

What makes attitudes towards education change over time?



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

Grades 8-12

## How to Use This Guide

---

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 3:

### What makes attitudes towards education change over time?

---

#### Objects:

- Terrestrial and Celestial Globes by Edith B. Stockton
- “Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary” lithograph by Nathaniel Currier
- Bell Letters, Fall 1875

#### Questions for Discussion:

- These needlework globes were made at a female academy by young girls. What differences can be found between the globes and the samplers from Lesson 1? What is being taught in the curriculum at Westtown School that is displayed in these globes?
- Mary Lyon, the administrator of Mt. Holyoke, was one of many strong advocates for female education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Why do you think Mary Lyon and her peers were so passionate about providing a better education to young women? What does education do for us?
- What connections can be made between the globes and the lithograph? What do they symbolize?
- Read Alexander Graham Bell’s letter exchange with Mabel G. Hubbard. What are the two positions represented in these texts? What evidence or reasons do they have to support their arguments? Why were some parts of society opposed to women receiving an equal education to men?
- How would an administrator of Westtown School or Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary have responded to Bell’s letters?

#### Questions for Context:

- What can we observe about the shifting of opinions based on the date of Emma Willard’s petition from Lesson 2 and Bell’s Letters in Lesson 3? How do you think Emma Willard’s contemporaries felt about her ideas? How do you think Bell’s contemporaries felt about his? What do you think of their opinions?
- Who do you think was limited from these higher education institutions, besides just women? Are there any other demographics or groups that you can think of? How has this had a lingering effect on our society?
- How do the dates of these objects fall in line with other historical events in our nation? What do the globes, lithograph, and letters tell us about the progress taking place in female education at the time? What else was happening around this time? What was going to happen in the future?
- What criteria do we use to divide student groups today? Is it helpful or effective?
- What rights were the most important to the women who have been discussed? How could this have fueled the emerging Women’s Rights Movement?
- What rights are most important to you? Why?

#### Suggested Activities:

- Split the class up into groups of two. One person in each pair should read the letters written by either Alexander Graham Bell or Mabel Bell Hubbard. If needed, the teacher can

pull out excerpts to shorten the activity. Ask students to act out the sentiments of the letters to their partner, as if it is a face to face conversation. Have students discuss how they would respond if someone said these things to them today. Volunteers may share with the class.

- Ask students to conduct further research on the women discussed in this resource and look for connections to the early Women’s Rights Movement. Students should discover other influential figures to this movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and their involvement in political activism. This research could be translated into a paper or class presentation.
- Host a class debate where half of the class must argue for women’s higher education/rights and the other half against it. Ask students to present arguments in a logical format, using supporting evidence that is based on real, relevant research from the historical arguments of both sides. Federal cases, laws, and documents may be helpful tools, in addition to other sources.

Some possible resources for this activity:

- <https://archive.org/stream/sexineducationor00clar>
- <https://sfpl.org/pdf/libraries/main/sfhistory/suffrageagainst.pdf>
- <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/why-women-led-antisuffrage-campaigns-against-themselves>
- <https://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2012/11/vote-no-on-womens-suffrage-bizarre-reasons-for-not-letting-women-vote/264639/>
- <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/first-age-reform/essays/education-reform-antebellum-america>
- <http://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/education-reform-movement>
- <http://www.connerprairie.org/education-research/indiana-history-1860-1900/lives-of-women>
- Catherine J. Lavender, “Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood,” Prepared for Students in HST 386: Women in the City, Department of History, The College of Staten Island/CUNY (1998), <https://csivc.csi.cuny.edu/history/files/lavender/386/truewoman.pdf>
- Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860.” American Quarterly, Volume 18, Issue 2, Part 1. Summer 1966. 151-174. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR2/welter.pdf>
- “The Nonsense of It.” A Printed Pamphlet Arguing for Women’s Suffrage. [https://catalog.archives.gov/id/306685#.Wi\\_guCqg36U.link](https://catalog.archives.gov/id/306685#.Wi_guCqg36U.link)

## Untitled, Terrestrial and Celestial Globes

Edith B. Stockton

West Town, PA

1822

Silk and ink on canvas ground

C. 18"; D. 6"

DAR Museum, gift of Mrs. A. A. Birney, (Helen T. Conway); 2267.1 & .2



*Click here to download images of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.*

*Click [here](#) to download 360° video.*



*Click here to download images of the Top of Globe, Scorpio, Gemini, and Aries.*

*Click [here](#) to download 360° video.*

Both of these globes were made by Edith B. Stockton in her time as a pupil at Westtown School, just outside of Philadelphia. The school, which was opened in 1796 and administered by the Society of Friends (Quakers), was one of the many dame schools in existence at the time, whose purpose was to teach young ladies of affluent families the “general arts” that all women of their class had to know. These globes reflect the increasing emphasis of the period on academic subject matter, particularly among the female population. At Westtown, girls were required to master plain sewing, including a darning sampler, and finally she might attempt to work a pair of globes. Both are made from eight wedge-shaped silk sections sewn to a canvas covered sphere. Couching stitches outlined continents while ink inscriptions identified continents, countries, and bodies of water. Several notations on the terrestrial globe, such as the identity of Chatham Island as the place where “Cap Cook was killed 14 Feb 1775,” indicate that the globe was useful in teaching history, geography, sewing, and Latin. The celestial globe displays constellations, astrological signs, and characters from the myth “The Quest of the Golden Fleece.”<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Judith Tyner, *The World in Silk: Embroidered Globes of Westtown School*, presented at the Annual Meeting of The Association of American Geographers, 1993

<sup>2</sup> Tyner, J. A. (2004, Sept. & Oct.). *Stitching the World: Westtown School's Embroidered Globes. PieceWork.*

## Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary

Nathaniel Currier

New York, NY

1845-1850

Lithograph

12.75 x 9.25"

DAR Museum, gift of Mr. & Mrs. William Sen & Friends of the Museum purchase; 96.33



*(Click on image to download.)*

This lithograph shows the original building of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary a few years after its founding in 1837 by Mary Lyon, a well-known advocate of higher education for women. As a student, Mary Lyon became very interested in the subject of chemistry. She attended lectures at male academies to further her knowledge and exposure to the topic. When she opened Mt. Holyoke, science became a hallmark of the studies offered at the school. Mary herself taught chemistry courses, and required her female students to complete seven science and mathematics courses to be eligible for graduation. In addition, her students participated in lab experiments, fieldwork, and lectures from distinguished scientists of the time.<sup>3</sup> Today, Mary is memorialized at the college at Mary Lyon Hall.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Lyon's Influence on Science Education for Women. (2013, January 10.) <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/maryl原因/science>

## Bell Letters, Fall 1875

---

Letter 1: Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell

October 5, 1875

292 Essex Street

Salem, MA

Dear Miss Mabel,

I have just finished a long letter to Hon. George Brown concerning my telegraphic schemes — and now I feel like writing a few lines to you to thank you for so promptly letting me know of your safe arrival home. I felt indeed more anxious than I care to tell you when I saw you drive off from the Station alone. The horse looked so spirited and you drove off so fast — that I felt I better lose my train — than let you run any danger. However when you stopped at the corner I knew you had control over the horse — and so stepped on board the cars with a lighter heart.

I found Dr. and Mrs. Marsh on board on their way to New York. Baby was there too looking well and comfortable. And an elderly lady whose name I forget. I hope you have obtained your drawing-book — and that you are making numerous sketches of Bethel and the neighborhood. Please remember me kindly to Miss True, and tell her how sorry I was not to see more of her. I hope she will come to Boston soon. Remember me also to my little friend — Helen I think her name is — but impress upon her memory the fact that I am not “Miss Bell”.

I was at Cambridge yesterday and your mother told me of a letter she had received from you on the subject of “Woman's Rights”. I never suspected that you were one of these people who think women have rights. Do you actually suppose their wishes are to be considered with the same respect as those of men? That their opinions are entitled to the same weight? That — when forced by circumstances to gain their livelihood — they are to be permitted to choose their occupations as men are?

The wisdom of the world has decided that they are inferior beings doomed to exist within the narrow space called “Woman's Sphere”. Why then should they seek to rebel against the decrees of fate?

Mrs. Mary Somerville was guilty of the most unladylike conduct in daring to write works on the Connection of the Physical Sciences. If Miss Herschel had only been banished to a Seminary for young ladies — she would have been taught very different things from photographing sun-spots! Nor would she have had the audacity to rob scientific men of the discovery of the connection between sun-spots and the Aurora Borealis! Why should



any ambitious woman be allowed to invade man's sacred domains? And there is that Miss Susan Dimmock too — intended by nature to be a lady. Words are too weak to portray the enormity of her offences against society. Who would ever have thought of that pure womanly spirit willingly rebelling against the restraints that society had placed upon her sex — offending the feelings of her own kind — running the gauntlet of the world's criticism — and all for what? To do what men are paid to do. It is true it was to benefit the sick and dying — But are there not men enough in the world to do the work? Men paid, and paid well too — for performing those very duties. If she was obliged to earn her own living why did she not go to dressmaking or to teaching. These subjects are included in “Woman's Sphere”! Medicine and Surgery belong to man. Astronomy and the Physical Sciences are ours. All the professions and businesses that are most lucrative and honorable belong to us.

Why cannot women be contented with the condition in which nature has placed them? Why should they seek to make themselves the equals of men? Must they be allowed to take the law into their own hands and think and act for themselves? Why can't they let us think and act for them? Would they not be happier so? Were not the negroes happier as slaves than they are now as freemen? Then they had no cares — They were not then called upon to battle with the world alone. Not that women are considered as slaves!

Woman is free and we men guard her and protect her. We do everything for her. We attend her in sickness — we look after her law-affairs — we preach to her — we legislate for her — we do all her thinking for her - in fact we leave her nothing to do but to dress — make fancy-work — and read novels! And yet women are discontented! What ingratitude!

They must have higher education! — they must be able to choose their own occupations! — they must vote! — in a word they must be free to do whatever they like! Do they not forget that they are different beings from ourselves?

If slaveholders could look upon “Liberty” as the motto of their flag without a blush — because their negroes had not white skins — why should not we adopt our motto “No taxation without Representation” — with free consciences knowing that women are not men.

Slaveholders asserted that the negroes ought to be slaves because they were unfitted for liberty.

Abolitionists said they were unfitted for liberty because they were slaves.

We say that women cannot acquire a higher education because their mental attainments are inferior to ours.

Women say their mental attainments are inferior to ours because they cannot acquire a higher education.

If we wont admit them to Harvard or Yale — they straightway obtain endowments for the Boston University — or have a College built for themselves — the selfish creatures — at Northampton.

Where is all this to end? Not content with serving on our School Committees — they are agitating for political rights.

They are refusing to pay their taxes unless they are represented.

I suppose it will not be long before we have a woman wanting to be President of the United States! Well it is not for me to say her “Nay” — seeing that I am a subject of Queen Victoria — a woman-sovereign — and one of the best the world has seen — so my best wishes go with her. If women want anything they are sure to get it in the long run — so we better give in gracefully at once.

I trust you will return to Cambridge soon. I have just five minutes to catch my train to Boston.

Please excuse haste.

Yours sincerely,

A. Graham Bell

Letter 2: Letter from Miss Mabel G. Hubbard to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell  
October 13th, 1875  
Cambridge, MA

Dear Mr. Bell:

I cannot help writing to apologize for my rudeness last night in not thanking you for your trouble in bringing me Dr. Carpenter's pamphlets and for the pleasure its perusal gave me. I do not know why I did not speak of it, it did not occur to me to say anything at that time. The pamphlet interested me much, and gave me some new ideas. Yet I do not think it explains Spiritualism at all. Very likely much that people see is only their imagination, and it seems to have satisfactorily disposed of table-turning, etc., as if such things needed refutation, but it makes no mention of the more complicated phenomena witnessed by Mr. Crookes, and Dr. Carpenter's theories do not apply to them. I think you will see it yourself if you look at Mr. Crookes' pamphlets.

I have never spoken of the last letter I received from you in Bethel because there never has been opportunity, but I was pleased with it and thank you for it. However I am a little puzzled to know what your views on Woman's Rights really are.

Hoping to see you soon again,  
Sincerely yours,  
Mabel G. Hubbard

Letter 3: Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell

October 18, 1875  
Salem, MA

Dear Miss Mabel,

I wonder if you know what it is to have more correspondence upon your hands than you can possibly attend to.

It is with a despairing countenance that I sometimes open letters to find that I am expected to write volumes in reply.

I have been so busy lately writing upon the subjects of Telegraphym Visible Speech, and Orthöepy that I have allowed quite a number of letters to accumulate on my hands unanswered.

This evening feeling some premonitory twinges of conscience I sat down to write--and have just accomplished a feat of which I really feel quite proud. I have written nine letters at one sitting--most of them quite lengthy epistles too!!

And now--having eased my conscience in regard to these letters--I shall rest myself by writing a few lines to you in answer to your kind note. I fear I must have left you last night about as much puzzled as you were at first in regard to my real feelings on the subject of "Woman's Rights". To tell the truth I am somewhat puzzled in the matter myself!

I have a vague sort of feeling that there has been--and-is-injustice somewhere in the position that woman holds in the world--but where to locate that injustice--or how to define its boundaries--I know not.

The fact is that my mind has been so occupied with scientific matters that I have given very little attention to the question at all.

I am quite at sea in the matter--in a fog--and I do not even know the latitude and longitude of the port for which I am bound!

When I heard from Mrs. Hubbard that you were interested in the subject--I felt curious to ascertain what your ideas were. On the spur of the moment I strung a few disjointed thoughts together and forwarded them to you in Bethel hoping to rouse your indignation to a reply!

It was a dangerous experiment and I am glad I did not succeed. You were not angry with me. Indeed I do not know whether you are ever angry with anybody!

All is well that ends well and I am glad that I have escaped this time. One of my latest resolves has been to keep my letters for a day before posting them. Had I done so in that instance the letter would not have been posted at all. As I stated to you yesterday I am a passive advocate of Woman's Rights and not an active one--although you would scarcely believe it could you hear the debates that sometimes arise between Mr. Sanders and myself upon the subject. In Salem I come out strongly for the plaintiff in the action "Woman versus Man"--because Mr. Sanders will take the other side. In Cambridge however I suspect I shall have to plead for the defendant in the suit! If you are such a Woman's Rightist as I take you to be. The true way to look at a subject is to look at it from all sides--to view it in its totality with impartial eye. I confess that I am unable to as yet to do this with Woman's Rights as I have thought too little upon the subject.

I recognize that women have many just grounds of complaint against society--and yet I think that there is much to be thankful for in the position accorded to them in this nineteenth century. The evils of this life obtrude themselves upon our notice--the blessings have to be sought for to be appreciated. It is always much more easy to find fault with established usages than to propose remedies that will be above criticism. An illustration occurs to me at this moment.

I remember in England having my attention called to the case of a very good, honest worthy woman who had married unhappily. Her husband was a great drunkard and at last she was obliged to open a millinery store in order to support herself and her little child. The man left her but returned every now and then for the purpose of carrying off what money she had in the house!

The poor woman lived in continual dread of his visits--but, as she believed the marriage tie to be too sacred a one to be broken by human hands, she could obtain no redress.

It was not "robbery" for a husband to take from his wife--for what belonged to the one belonged to the other! Now here was a manifest injustice! And yet I would not hold that the law should be laid on one side because it may be unjust in certain cases. It is easy to find fault with it--but very difficult to frame a better one.

There is to me something extremely beautiful in the idea of marriage--as the union and complete identity of two beings--so perfect a union that what belongs to the one belongs to the other and that each becomes to the other a second self.

And yet how hard does that law become which recognizes and compels a union that does not exist in heart.

My best wishes go with those who try to reform the world--and I should like to help them out--even though they are women!

When I look out upon the world of real life I see much to deplore--much that needs righting--but I think there is much also that is good. Indeed the good and evil are pretty evenly balanced. I do not think we should open our eyes to the one and close them to the other. In the rough contacts of life

the rocks seem very hard and angular--huge stones encumber the ground--Still--viewed from a lofty point--the details of the landscape melt into a harmonious whole. The blessing of this life stand out all the more brightly that they are contrasted with evils. The brightest picture--we know--would seem tame without its shadows. There are lights and shadows in our own lives. There is a bright and a dark side to the world itself. I do not approve of the plan of looking at one side and ignoring the other--but if I must look at one side more than the other--give me that which is brightest and best.

Were we to spend a winter in the Arctic Regions we might become skeptical of the existence of warmth and sunshine upon earth. Did we live in the Tropics ice and snow would be matters of faith. The African and the [Hindu] laugh at the Englishman who tells them that water becomes solid in his country--and that white rain falls from the sky!

Give me the temperate regions of the earth where Spring and Summer, Autumn and Winter succeed each other in every-pleasing variety.

We do not appreciate those blessings that we possess continually--half as much as those which we are still to come--or which we have lost.

I think that women have a brighter and freer future before them, but I must say that I cannot fully sympathize with or appreciate sudden revolutions. The mightiest physical changes upon the face of the earth have been accomplished by silent and gentle upheavals of the crust continued through long periods of time. Sudden movements are always destructive in their tendencies. I believe in Woman's Rights as a matter sure to be accomplished in the future.

For ages past there have been a steady and continuous improvement in the condition of the sex--but I cannot feel that extremists are right. Were everything granted at once there would be a sudden and disastrous change in the condition of society--and a catastrophe would ensue.

But I must bring this epistle to a close or I fear I should have Mr. Sanders upon me for breaking my promise about sitting up at night.

I hope that you are not going to New York on Friday but if you are--I trust you may have a pleasant visit.

With kindest regards

Believe me

Yours very sincerely

A. Graham Bell



Letter 4: Letter from Miss Mabel G. Hubbard to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell  
 October 23rd 1875  
 Cambridge, MA

Dear Mr. Bell:

I was much pleased with your letter received the other day and thank you for telling me all you think about Women's Rights. I am only afraid you give me credit for more earnestness in this subject than I feel. My interest is of very recent date, and all I know about it has been gathered from what Miss True's sister, and lately you have said about it.

So far as I am concerned the laws, both civil and of society may stay as they please. I am not at all envious of men. But I do not think it is just or right that women must depend as much as they do on men's sense of justice or love, which is all that restrains them from using the great power they possess. How may we be sure interest will not triumph over the one, or other feelings take the place of the latter. A man can put his wife in prison for keeping her own money from him and use that money in a lawsuit against her. Can a woman do so by her husband? "The idea of marriage as the union and complete identity of two beings, so perfect a union that what belongs to the one belongs to the other," is indeed beautiful but before the law does the man really do as he says in the episcopal marriage service, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow?" I only know the promise becomes null and void at his death when only one third of his property goes to his wife if she has no children. I do not sympathize with the "Extremity" any more than you do, and would not have the public sentiment that forbids a woman to appear in public life, or to assume duties hitherto belonging exclusively to men, outraged if it could be helped, but there are so many more women than men that few can have home duties to occupy them and they are obliged to seek other work or live in a useless life. Not all can be dressmakers or governesses, they must go forth and be doctors and artists, professors or preachers as their talent inclines them. They do not interfere with you men for you have more than enough work, and in some respects they may be better fitted for the work than you. They are more tender and delicate of touch, and have greater sensibility and keener perceptions than you, and so perhaps may make up for lack of strength.

I am afraid I have repeated a great deal that I told you yesterday, but you asked me to write so you have only yourself to blame if this is not very fresh.

I think it entirely too bad you should always ..... (rest of letter missing)