

How Dare She? *Women Reformers* 8

Main Goals

Students can analyze historical situations in which dramatically nonconforming thought meets up with strongly held societal norms.

They understand the importance of our country’s constitutional protections for religious liberty to its free and independent thinkers.

Affective: Cultivate in students a sense that those who think “too differently” may be vulnerable and in need of legal protection.

Subgoal

To have students ponder how society could respond when members violate its rules or step out of the roles it defines for them.

Lesson Context

Knowledge and Cultural Understanding		Skills Attainment and Social Participation	
X	<i>Historical Literacy</i>		<i>Basic Study Skills</i>
X	<i>Ethical Literacy</i>		<i>Critical Thinking Skills</i>
X	<i>Cultural Literacy</i>	X	<i>Participation Skills</i>
	<i>Geographic Literacy</i>	Democratic Understanding and Civic Values	
	<i>Economic Literacy</i>	X	<i>National Identity</i>
X	<i>Sociopolitical Literacy</i>		<i>Constitutional Heritage</i>
Check the Table on page 4. Make sure your students have the concepts in Rows 1 and 2.		X	<i>Civic Values, Rights, and Responsibilities</i>

Lesson 8

How Dare She?

Concept Building Objective

Given examples of a few decisively nonconforming women, the student will comprehend how thinking that goes against social expectations entails *risks and benefits* with respect to *both* the individual *and* the society.



Contextual Introduction

For much of written history, women have been portrayed as subordinate beings. Of course, there always have been exceptions depicted, but these were the exceptions that proved the rule. In a society where all expectations are toward subservient women who have narrowly defined roles, any movement beyond those boundaries was doomed to immediate chastisement. Woe be it to the woman who did not conform to societal expectations.

Yet, throughout history there have been women who rejected their predefined roles. This lesson introduces three dramatic examples. The three women not only independently transgressed from acting as women were supposed to act in their day, but they also called for change in the conditions of *all* women. Although not the very first women to do so, from an American perspective each was a trailblazer and inspiration for other women seeking change in their fettered circumstances.

Susan B. Anthony's "Honor Roll"

Miss Anthony, would you tell us, please: "Who are the *earliest champions* of women's rights?" Susan B. offers a clear answer to the question.

On December 30, 1899 she prepared a "Roll of Honor" of nineteenth-century suffrage workers. Looking back, she named Mary Wollstonecraft (actually, late 18th century), Frances Wright, and Ernestine L. Rose as the three earliest women champions. Each had refused to conform to the societal expectations for women in her time. All three were reformers, working personally to upgrade the conditions of women.

Susan B. Anthony, Writing on Reformers

Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing, never can bring about a reform. Those who are really in earnest must be willing to be anything or nothing in the world's estimation, and publicly and privately, in season and out, avow their sympathy with despised and persecuted ideas and their advocates, and bear the consequences.

Harper, Ida Husted, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony, Volume I*, Hollenbeck Press, 1898, page 197

Materials

1. *Per student (or grouping)*: Duplication Sheets 1-3 — "**Ladies' First**" sketches to read (students will need to read *at least two* sketches if you are to follow the strategies below).

You may wish to prepare additional sketches featuring women other than the three, using the same pattern (WHO? WHAT? WHERE? etc.). For any added example to be comparable, you would need to have material to emphasize both the *scorn of her contemporaries* and a *more positive retrospective (or perhaps contemporaneous) view*.

2. (Optional; to be supplied by teacher) Reference material, such as encyclopedia entries, on the lives of the reforming women featured, and any additional information deemed useful to enhance the goals and specific instructional objective.

Strategies

Preparation: Beforehand, review the Teacher Background Information and also the “Contextual Introduction” above. Plan for step 1 and round up any additional ideas or resources you will want to use.

1. Present to the whole class an oral or pictorial example of someone “being the first” at some challenge (e.g., first to cross the Atlantic in a balloon), and then elicit further examples of “firsts” from their knowledge. Switching to challenges in their own lives, inquire into their feelings about how hard is it to “go first” or “be the first” in some endeavor (notions of accomplishment/failure). Tell them you will be introducing them to some women who “went first” for women everywhere, and learning about what happened to them. Then share the Susan Anthony portions of the contextual introduction with the class to motivate them to want to learn about these women.
2. Depending on whether you wish whole class study of each woman in sequence, or all three simultaneously, provide groups of students with the set of material they are to read, along with directions about what to do.

Suggested: Challenge students to: 1) *try to envision the event*, 2) *notice what happened afterward to the person*, and 3) *pay attention to what people thought of her*. Ask them to ponder the entire set of information and reflect on it in writing in the space indicated. (If using cooperative learning groups, have students chat among themselves first, and then prepare a joint written reflection.)

3. Lastly, conduct a class discussion to analyze what was common about the (three) women’s situations and what was different. Lead students to consider both the “name calling” and the praise. Ask how such *different* reactions could be, and whether it is possible to know which view better describes the *real* person.

Appraisal of Understanding

1. Evidence. Each student (or group) has produced a written reaction to the “Ladies’ First” sketch.
2. Assessment. Ask students to write an open response to the following:
What rules of society did (REFORMER’S NAME) seem to be breaking? Describe more than one if you can.
Was it good or bad that she did so? Explain.

Continuation Activities

1. Interested students might wish to study further the women featured in the lesson.
2. Students can examine the lives of additional American women reformers and abolitionists and the consequences of their actions, both to them, and to society.

Starter examples: Susan B. Anthony, Sarah Grimké, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Abby Kelley, Harriet Martineau, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Harriet Martineau, Lucy N. Colman, Josephine K. Henry, Lydia Maria Child, Margaret Fuller, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, illie Devereaux Blake

3. Identify other nonconforming or freethinking women from history that fit your interest and curriculum. There needs to be sufficiency of resources to permit your pursuing similar analyses if you wish to extend instances related to the same instructional objective.

Starter examples: Hypatia, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Anne Newport Royal, Voltairine de Cleyre, Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner, George Eliot, “Ouida,” Meridel Le Sueur, Zona Gale, Eleanor Roosevelt, Margaret Atwood, Ayn Rand, Annie Besant, Dora Russell, Etta Semple, Sonia Johnson

4. Ask students to generate present-day examples of women who have become known for stepping outside of some code(s) of acceptable behavior (e.g., Madonna, Hilary Rodham Clinton). Have students analyze whether the person had put forth any principle(s) of importance to them, whether society’s reaction is accurate or fair, and so on.
5. Students may use the “Celebrity Traits Analysis” activity with noted women from #4.

Background for Teachers

This following information on the three women reformers is taken from *Women Without Superstition: No Gods—No Masters*, edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor . (Read further about this reference work in Story Lesson 7’s “Background for Teachers.) In her volume, Ms. Gaylor wrote comparatively lengthy sketches to accompany the writings of each of the featured women, and the wording of the “mini-biographies” in *Different Drummers* borrows extensively from Ms. Gaylor’s narrative.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)

Please see “Background for Teachers” in Story Lesson 7 for a mini-biography of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Her Writings (abridged listing): *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1786), *Original Stories from Real Life* (a children’s book, 1788), *The Female Reader* (an anthology she had published under a male pseudonym, “Mr. Creswick, Teacher of Elocution, 179?”), *A Vindication of Man* (1790), and “Letters on the Management of Children” (published posthumously, 1798).

Further Resource Material

Flexner, Eleanor, *Mary Wollstonecraft, A Biography*, Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1972.

Solomon, Barbara H., and Berggren, Paula S., Eds., *A Mary Wollstonecraft Reader, Edited, with an Introduction and Notes*, New American Library, Times Mirror, 1983.

Sunsten, Emily W., *A Different Face: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Harper & Row, 1975.

From Mary Wollstonecraft, Reformer

Probably the prevailing opinion, that woman was created for man, may have taken its rise from Moses’s poetical story; yet, as very few, it is presumed, who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject, ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam’s ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground; or, only be so far admitted as it proves that man, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to shew that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creature was only created for his convenience or pleasure.

(Ch. II: 95, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*)

Ernestine Rose (1810-1892)

The first lobbyist for woman’s rights in the United States was Ernestine Rose, a Polish immigrant. She was the affectionate only child of an orthodox rabbi, but she rebelled against the constrictions of Judaism at an early age. Said she later in life, “*I was a rebel at the age of five.*”

By age fourteen she had rejected Judaism, becoming a life-long atheist. She went on to many further insurrections. Her mother died when Ernestine was only sixteen, leaving her an inheritance, but her father offered it as a dowry, engaging her without her permission to an older man. When she tried to break off the engagement, the man told her she would then lose her money. Ernestine took the unprecedented step of arguing her case before the Polish high court and won a legal document entitling her to her property.

That fight was not to be Ernestine’s last. Far from it. She moved to England, supporting herself by tutoring. There she married William Rose, a jeweler, and the two moved to New York City in 1836 to establish a silversmith shop there. Right away Ernestine engaged in an action that made her America’s first woman’s rights activist.

Ever conscious of property rights because of her own experience, Ernestine drew up a petition in 1836 in support of a Married Woman’s Property Act. A member of the New York legislature had proposed this bill, and she took it up, going from door to door for signatures. She was met by wife after wife echoing the same refrain: “We don’t want any more rights—we have rights enough.” But, twelve years later, the MWPA of New York was passed. It was a landmark for American women who could, for the first time, control their own property. It was a landmark for women.

Ernestine became the second foreign woman to lecture publicly, promoting woman’s rights, abolition, and freethought. For a number of years she traveled around lecturing. She traveled in at least twenty-three states, often making return visits and addressing legislative bodies. She attended many women’s rights conventions and engaged in numerous petition campaigns for suffrage and against slavery.

Press criticism in the *Albany Register*, March 7, 1854, is representative of the invective she stirred; “People are beginning to inquire how far public sentiment should sanction or tolerate these unsexed women, who make a scoff of religion, who repudiate the Bible and blaspheme God;

who would step out from the true sphere of the mother, the wife, and the daughter, and taking upon themselves the duties and the business of men, stalk into the public gaze, and by engaging in the politics, the rough controversies, and the trafficking of the world, upheave existing institutions, and overturn all the social relations of life. It is a melancholy reflection, that among our American women who have been educated to better things, there should be found any who are willing to follow the lead of such foreign propagandists as the ringleted, glove-handed exotic, Ernestine Rose. ... In no country in the world, save possibly one, would her infidel propagandism and preachings in regard to the social relations of life be tolerated!

Responded Rose in a letter, *“Every one who has ever advanced a new idea, no matter how great and noble, has been subjected to criticism, and therefore we too must expect it ... I chose to make this country my home in preference to any other, because if you carried out the theories you profess, it would indeed be the noblest country on earth.”* Due to illness, however, only one month after receiving her U. S. citizenship, Rose and her husband returned to England. She maintained close ties to the States through correspondence to friends and writing letters to *The Boston Investigator*.

Wrote Susan B. Anthony in her diary, “Mrs. Rose is not appreciated, nor cannot be by this age,” analyzing that almost every other reformer “shrinks from being identified with one in whose view their ultraism is sheer conservatism.”

From Ernestine Rose, Reformer

(A later commentary, as described in *History of Woman Suffrage I: 95-98*):
Sisters, . . . I entreat you, if you have an hour to spare, a dollar to give, or a word to utter—spare it, give it, and utter it, for the elevation of woman!

Describing her lecture tours to Susan B. Anthony in 1877, Ernestine wrote: *“All that I can tell you is, that I used my humble powers to the uttermost, and raised my voice in behalf of Human Rights in general, and the elevation and Rights of Woman in particularly, nearly all my life.”*

Further Resource Material:

Barnard, L. E., “Ernestine L. Rose,” a sketch, *History of Woman Suffrage I* (Elizabeth Cady

Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Eds.; Susan B. Anthony, Publisher), reprint, Source Book Press, 1971.

DuBois, Ellen Carol, Ed., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, Speeches*, Schocken Books, 1981.

Piercy, Blodwen, “Ernestine Rose,” *Humanist in Canada*, Winter, 1995/96.]

Stein, Gordon, “Ernestine L. Rose,” *The American Rationalist*, Nov.-Dec., 1993.

Frances Wright (1795-1852)

Frances was orphaned as a baby and reared by wealthy relatives. As a young heiress, she influenced fashion with the way she wore her hair (in ringlets) and her simplicity in dress. (In later travels in the U.S., she became one of the first women to adopt the notorious “turkish pants.”)

As a teen she wrote two plays which were later published to acclaim. (One was staged successfully in New York [1819], and after that, she shocked society with her audacity by adding her byline to the published play!)

She traveled to America with her younger sister for two years, returned to England and upset people by praising the U.S. and attacking Tories in a book that impressed Lafayette, with whom she began an amorous acquaintance (she frequently visited with his family in France.). At 29, she returned to the U.S., traveling separately but following in his track. She was at Monticello the two weeks Jefferson hosted Lafayette.

She traveled far on horseback on the frontier, visiting Robert Owen’s commune in New Harmony, Indiana, which spurred her interest in starting a plantation to educate slaves for freedom. She helped start it (joining in manual labor; getting malaria), but she traveled again to Europe and the experiment unraveled. The press vilified it as “Fanny Wright’s Free Love Colony.”

After seeing a revival in Cincinnati, she set out on a quest to disabuse women of their credulity, which she blamed on religious fantasy. Mrs. Trollope witnessed her debut lecture in Cincinnati, and wrote in her book about America of Frances’s “extraordinary gift of eloquence, her almost unequalled command of words, and the wonderful power of her rich and thrilling voice.” Her themes followed a feminist theme, arguing

against preistcraft that alarms and overwhelms reason, encouraging free inquiry, and proposing overthrow of superstition by science. In New York, she purchased an old church and reopened it as the world's first "Hall of Science" (health clinic, storefront bookstore). She launched the *Free Enquirer*, with its motto "to promote the cause of human improvement."

Further adventures led her to Boston, Haiti, and Europe, and again to the U.S. She later settled in Cincinnati, but a relationship with Phikepal D'Arusmont (by whom she had a daughter) initiated a downhill path with her marrying and divorcing him, and then losing custody of her daughter. A fall on ice led to an untimely death. There is today a monument to her in Cincinnati, put there by her daughter, who very firmly rejected her mother's "infidel" views.

Her Related Works: "Divisions of Knowledge" and "Religion" (topical lectures from 1828-1829, compiled in *Life, Letters and Lectures*, 1972 reprint).

From Frances Wright, Reformer

(From "Divisions of Knowledge) *I am not going to question your opinions. I am not going to meddle with your belief. I am not going to dictate to you mine. All that I say is, examine, inquire. Look into the nature of things. Search out the grounds of your opinions, the for and the against. Know why you believe, understand what you believe, and possess a reason for the faith that is in you. But your spiritual teachers caution you against inquiry—tell you not to read certain books; not to listen to certain people; to beware of profane learning; to submit your reason, and to receive their doctrines for truths. Such advice renders them suspicious counsellors.*

Related Resource Material

Eckhardt, Celia Morris, *Fanny Wright: Rebel in America*, Harvard University Press, 1984.

Lane, Margaret, *Frances Wright and the 'Great Experiment,'* Manchester University Press, 1972.

Rossi, Alice S., *The Feminist Papers*,

Northeastern University Press, 1988.

Wright (D'Arusmont), Frances, *Life, Letters and Lectures*, Arno Press, 1972 Reprint

WOMAN WORDS

The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of women's emancipation.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Free Thought Magazine (Sept. 1896).

We found nothing grand in the history of the Jews nor in the morals inculcated in the Pentateuch. . . . I know of no other books that so fully teach the subjection and degradation of woman.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eighty Years and More, ch. 24 (1898).

I know not what you believe of God, but I believe He gave yearnings and longings to be filled, and that He did not mean all our time should be devoted to feeding and clothing the body.

Lucy Stone, "Disappointment Is the Lot of Women," speech, 17–18 Oct. 1855. Quoted in: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1 (1881).

Suffrage is the pivotal right.

Susan B. Anthony, "The Status of Women, Past, Present and Future," in *Arena* (May 1897).

The true Republic: men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less.

Susan B. Anthony, Motto printed on the front of her newspaper, *Revolution*.

The delicate and infirm go for sympathy, not to the well and buoyant, but to those who have suffered like themselves.

Catharine Esther Beecher, *Woman Suffrage and Women's Professions*, "Statistics of Female Health" (1871).

How many young hearts have revealed the fact that what they had been trained to imagine the highest earthly felicity was but the beginning of care, disappointment, and sorrow, and often led to the extremity of mental and physical suffering.

Catharine Esther Beecher. *Woman Suffrage and Women's Professions*, "Statistics of Female Health" (1871).

The prohibition law, written for weaklings and derelicts, has divided the nation, like Gaul, into three parts—wets, dries, and hypocrites.

Florence Sabin. Speech, 9 Feb. 1931.

American "energy." . . . is the energy of violence, of free-floating resentment and anxiety unleashed by chronic cultural dislocations which must be, for the most part, ferociously sublimated. This energy has mainly been sublimated into crude materialism and acquisitiveness. Into hectic philanthropy. Into benighted moral crusades, the most spectacular of which was Prohibition. Into an awesome talent for uglifying countryside and cities. Into the loquacity and torment of a minority of gadflies: artists, prophets, muckrakers, cranks, and nuts. And into self-punishing neuroses. But the naked violence keeps breaking through, throwing everything into question.

Susan Sontag. "What's Happening in America (1966)," in *Partisan Review* (New Brunswick, N.J., Winter 1967; repr. in *Styles of Radical Will*, 1969).

Perhaps nature is our best assurance of immortality.

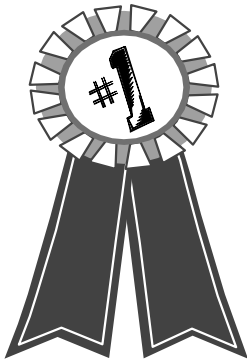
Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," syndicated newspaper column (24 April 1945).

You always admire what you really don't understand.

Eleanor Roosevelt, "Meet the Press," 16 Sept. 1956, NBC TV.

I think, at a child's birth, if a mother could ask a fairy godmother to endow it with the most useful gift, that gift would be curiosity.

Eleanor Roosevelt, *Today's Health* (Chicago, 2 Oct. 1966).



A “Ladies’ First”

First Significant Voice for Women’s Rights

Who? MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (an Englishwoman)

What? She authored an influential book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

When? The volume was published in 1792, when she was 33 years old

Where? London, England

What Happened? Mary’s book disputed accepted views about women. In it, she encouraged women to “reason” and not to be slaves of opinion. She protested how society viewed women (as having feelings as opposed to than ability to think). The book was a sensation in its day. It was not republished for a century, but nineteenth century women’s rights advocates acquired, read, and treasured it.

What about Her? From what we know of Mary, it appears she lived a thoroughly nonconformist life. She had “modern” notions. She wrote several books and published pieces. She exhibited unconventional behavior. She became a symbol of disgrace to conservatives and proper society. She was lambasted as “a hyena in petticoats.”

And? Margaret Fuller, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), wrote of Mary as “...a woman whose existence better proved the need of some new interpretation of Woman’s Rights than anything she wrote. Such beings as these, rich in genius, of most tender sympathies, capable of high virtue and a chastened harmony, ought not to find themselves, by birth, in a place so narrow, that, in breaking bonds, they become outlaws.”

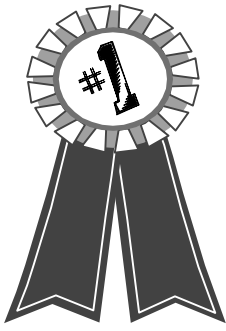


Try to picture the event

Notice what happened

Notice what people thought about her

Write your reaction



A “Ladies’ First”

First Woman to Speak Publicly in the United States

Who? FRANCES WRIGHT (born in Scotland and reared in London, England, she became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1825)

What? She addressed a combined audience of women *and men* as the main speaker at a public occasion

When? July 4, 1828, when she was 33

Where? A podium in New Harmony, Indiana

What Happened? Soon after the New Harmony talk, she began a lecture tour calling for the education of women and the rejecting of religion. She started her lecture tour with three consecutive Sunday lectures at the Cincinnati, Ohio courthouse. She traveled to places as widespread as St. Louis, Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York.

What About Her?

In the U.S. for a woman, she was also:

- ◆ first to advocate for women’s equality
- ◆ first to question the utility of religion
- ◆ first to denounce the power of the clergy

Reactions to Frances’s speeches ranged from rave reviews for her eloquence to physical attacks for her opinions. Walt Whitman reckoned her to be one of the most maligned and least understood characters in history. She was called awful names (“The Red Harlot of Infidelity,” “Priestess of Beelzebub,” and “a female monster”). Clergy disparaged her as a “bold blasphemer,” a “voluptuous preacher of licentiousness. . . impervious to the voice of virtue, and case-hardened

And?... Only later did Frances Wright become acknowledged for her pioneering activism. A later tribute (1870) noted that “she bore the calumny, reproach and persecution to which she was subjected for the truth, as calmly as Socrates. . . endured the scoffs and jeers of the multitude, and fearlessly continued to utter her rebukes against oppression, ignorance and bigotry.”

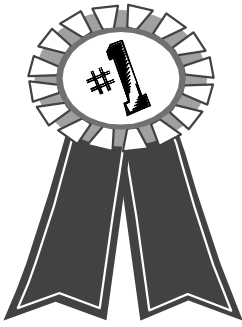
Try to picture the event

Notice what happened

Notice what people thought about her

Write your reaction





A “Ladies’ First”

First Woman to Canvass for Woman’s Rights in the United States

Who? ERNESTINE L. ROSE (born in Poland, she became a naturalized citizen of the U.S. in 1869)

What? She drew up a petition in support of a Married Woman’s Property Act

When? 1836, when she was 26

Where? New York, where the bill had been introduced into the state legislature

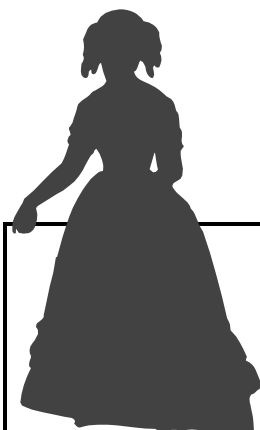
What Happened? It became a suffrage legend that Ernestine garnered only five signatures in five months. But twelve years later (1848), the Married Women’s Property Act of New York was law, a landmark for American women.

What About Her? Like Wright before her, Ernestine promoted woman’s rights, freethought, and abolition of slavery. She plunged into activism almost immediately after her arrival in the U.S. She lectured in at least twenty-three states, often making return visits and addressing legislative bodies. Her freethought positions earned her much condemnation from the clergy. They either warned parishioners not to attend her talks or invited hecklers to show up at them. In Charleston, they called her “the female devil, so bold as to contest the right of the South to hold their own slaves.” She was occasionally heckled so mercilessly that she could not continue speaking. Press responses varied widely. She was severely criticized for her “infidel views.” Some journalists mocked her Polish accent. Others acknowledged and praised her oratorical powers and her audience’s response.

Dubbed the “Frances Wright of the Fifties” and “Queen of the Platform” for her speeches, Ernestine L. Rose became the *second* foreign woman to lecture publicly in the U.S.

She attended the first national Woman’s Rights convention in 1850 and nearly all national and state conventions thereafter before returning to England in June 1869, less than *one month* after gaining U.S. citizenship

And?... While Ernestine was still alive, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage wrote a joint tribute, stating, in part: “All through these eventful years Mrs. Rose has fought a double battle; not only for the political rights of her sex as a woman, but for their religious rights as individual souls; to do their own thinking and believing. How much of the freedom they now enjoy, the women of America owe to this noble Polish woman, can not be estimated, for moral influences are too subtle for measurement.”



- Try to picture the event
- Notice what happened
- Notice what people thought about her

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