

Activities for the English classroom

Topic: women

Comenius Project 2007-08

"The evolution of European women through the centuries"

IES Ría del Carmen
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Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft, the famous feminist, writer and intellectual, was born in London, the second of six children. Her dad was a poor father because he mistreated his wife and wasted his money. From an early age, Mary was responsible for her brothers and sisters and learnt to be independent of men.

Mary believed that improving the condition of women was through education, and so in 1784 she opened a school with her sister. In 1788 she became translator and writer for a radical literature company. Mary wrote many articles, primarily about the French revolution, which were published in the press and earned her a strong reputation.

In 1792, she published her most important work, the [Vindication on the Rights of Woman](#), which argued for the equality of the sexes, and refuted the perception of women as helpless, sentimental, domestic creatures. Her writing was very controversial at the time, and when she later argued that women had sexual desires as well as men, she was heavily criticised.

Mary Wollstonecraft had two great loves each of whom she bore a daughter. The first was American, Gilbert Imlay, but when he left her she tried to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge and drowning. The second was with the political theorist William Godwin which lasted until she died on September 10th 1797, ten days after giving birth to their child, also called Mary who later wrote *Frankenstein*.

Mary Wollstonecraft was a radical thinker because she wanted to demonstrate how society could change to make a better future. Mary tried to help women achieve equality and a better life, not only for themselves and for their children, but also for their husbands.

Comprehension Questions

- 1) How many brothers and sister did Mary have?
- 2) What were the main problems with her father?
- 3) How did Mary believe that women could improve their condition?
- 4) What did Mary argue **for and against** in the *Vindication on the Rights of Woman*?
- 5) How many children did Mary have?

6) What will Mary Wollstonecraft be most remembered for?



Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Read the following summary of the main arguments in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and answer the questions below:

I believe that women are made to be weak by a false system of education, due to books written by men. The divine right of husbands, like the divine right of kings should be contested without danger. Men, in their youth, are prepared for professions, but women can only look to marriage. I do not wish women to have power over men; but over themselves. Though I accept that many women are called to be wives and mothers, I lament that intellectual women have no way to be useful and independent. I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of having no political voice. Women could study medicine, politics and business so they would not then marry for support.

I think that schools are now full of vice and stupidity and boys and girls should be educated together. The worst things for women to do are to read stupid novels, think about clothes all the time and to be superstitious. Parents and particularly mothers do not care for their children but just want to command them, which is bad for their minds. Give women more rights and then they will be as great as men.

1) What rights for women can you obtain from this paragraph? Can you think of any more that are not mentioned in the above paragraph? Try and use the phrase "Women have the right to..."

2) Which rights are the most important for you? Make a list in numerical order:

3) Do you think that women have all these rights today?

4) How did women achieved these rights in the past?

5) Are there any rights which are yet to be achieved? What would you do to achieve them?

The Suffragettes and Suffragists

In 1897, the **National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies** was formed under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett. The NUWSS wanted the vote for middle class women and would only use peaceful means of protest such as demonstrations or petitions. They were known as the **Suffragists**.

For many women the Suffragists were too slow and not active enough, so in 1903 the Women's Social and Political Union was founded by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters. They wanted all women to have the right to vote and they were not prepared to wait. The Union became better known as the **Suffragettes**. Members of the Suffragettes were prepared to use violence to get what they wanted.

The Suffragettes were very militant and committed numerous acts of vandalism, arson and refused to pay their taxes. The Suffragettes were quite happy to go to prison where they refused to eat and were force fed to prevent them from dying. The most famous act of the Suffragettes was the suicide of Emily Davison who threw herself under the King's horse at the Grand National to highlight their cause.

The actions of the Suffragettes ceased during the First World War because there was a necessity for national unity. During the war, women proved they could work as efficiently as men in traditionally male jobs, and they were essential to the war effort.

In 1918, the Representation of the People Act was passed by Parliament which enabled women over 30 years old to vote. It took a further ten years before women and men had the same full democratic rights.

Comprehension Questions

- 1) What were the objectives of the Suffragists? How did they want to achieve them?

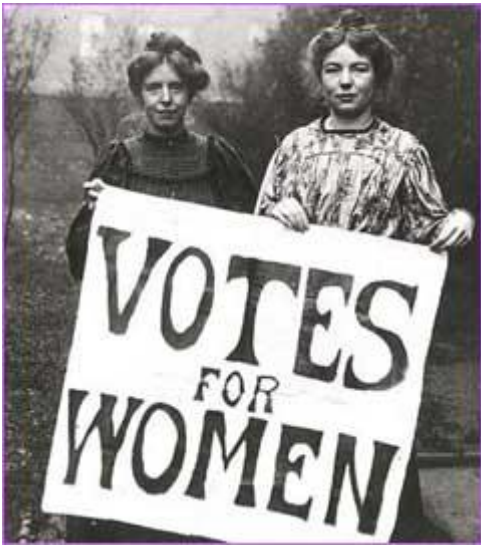
- 2) What were the objectives of the Suffragettes? How did they want to achieve them?

- 3) Explain in English the meaning of the following words: vandalism, arson and taxes.

4) What happened to the Suffragettes during the First World War?

5) In what year was the vote given to all adult women in Britain?





MARY SHELLEY

Mary Shelley was born August 30th 1797, in London, England. Mary Shelley came from a very literary and intellectual family because she was the daughter of William Godwin, a famous political thinker and writer, and Mary Wollstonecraft, a writer and early feminist who died ten days after her daughter's birth.

In her childhood, Mary Shelley's education was aided by the constant presence of poets, intellectuals and writers in her house who were friends of her parents. One poet who came to her house was called Percy Shelly, and although he was married and she was only 15 years old, they ran away and travelled together.

Two years later, Mary and Percy visited the poet Lord Byron, at his villa beside Lake Geneva in Switzerland. Stormy weather forced them to stay indoors, where they sometimes read from a book of ghost stories. One evening, Byron challenged his guests to write one themselves and Mary's story became Frankenstein. Frankenstein was published two years later and became a huge success. Many people could not believe that a 19-year-old woman could have written such a horror story, and so they thought that it was written by Percy.

Unfortunately, Mary Shelley's life was full of suffering because all but one of her four children died during childhood and her husband Percy drowned in an accident when she was only 25. Mary devoted the rest of her life to her surviving son's education and the continuation of her career as a professional writer.

Mary Shelley lived in England until her death from a brain tumour in Bournemouth, England, on February 1, 1851.

Basic Questions

- 1) Where was Mary Shelley from and what was her profession?
- 2) What was the name and occupation of her husband? In total, how many children did they have?
- 3) Whose villa did they stay in when Mary wrote Frankenstein?
- 4) When did Mary die and how?

Comprehension Questions

- 1) What were Mary Shelley's parents known for?
- 2) Who or what contributed to Mary Shelley's education?
- 3) Why did Mary Shelley begin to write Frankenstein?
- 4) What was the reaction of the public when Frankenstein was published?
- 5) What were the main reasons for Mary Shelley's suffering?

Frankenstein Extract

"One of the phenomena which has peculiarly attracted my attention was the structure of the human frame, and, indeed, any animal with life. I often asked myself, from where did the principle of life proceed? It was a bold question, and one, which has always been considered as a mystery; yet with how many things are we on the brink of knowing, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our inquiries.

Unless I had been animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm, my application to the study of dead bodies would have been difficult, and almost intolerable. **To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death.** I became acquainted with the science of anatomy: but this was not sufficient; I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body. I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights with did bodies. My attention was fixed upon every object that disgusts human beings. I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted and I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. I paused, examining and analyzing the change from life to death and death to life until **from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me**—a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect it illustrated, I was surprised that among so many men of genius, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret.

"Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter."

Frankenstein, pp. 48-49

Comprehension

What is Frankenstein's peculiar interest?

What does he think stops people from making discoveries?

What did he spend days and nights doing?

What discovery does he make?

Discussion

What do you think about Frankenstein's experiments? Is Frankenstein unethical in his scientific pursuits or is he justified?

Can you think of any modern day equivalents to Frankenstein's efforts to challenge the boundaries of knowledge? Should we always push the boundaries of knowledge?

Themes

Link between life and death

The Enlightenment - Pursuit of knowledge at almost all costs and the specific value placed on scientific values (objectivity)

Subtitle - The Modern Prometheus

Light - Prometheus (Fire) - Overreaching

Prometheus tricked the gods into eating bare bones instead of good meat. He stole the sacred fire from Zeus and the gods and gave it to human beings. In punishment, Zeus commanded that Prometheus be chained for eternity in the Caucasus. There, an eagle would eat his liver, and each day the liver would be renewed. So the punishment was endless, until Heracles finally killed the bird.

Beauty

What is beauty?

Write down three of the most beautiful or most positive things about yourself and three of the best qualities that you can/would like to see in an ideal partner or best friend. Don't put your name on the paper, and make sure it's legible!

Textual Analysis

How Not to Look Old

"Between you and me, girlfriend, aging sucks. But don't worry; we can do something about it. There are smart, fast and easy ways that will make you look ten years younger, ten pounds lighter, ten times better! Here are all your To-Do's, complete with a shopping list of all the products that really deliver results—and all the places to go to get gorgeous in a city near you. Let's get started."

In the 99 books I read, there were tons of tons that tried to make me feel better by telling me to celebrate my wrinkles, to light a candle, run a bath, say a mantra and grow old gracefully. I'm here to tell you that that doesn't work. Not for a boomer woman who is trying to stay vibrant and visible in order to keep her job until she says it's time to go. The truth is, looking younger isn't just about vanity anymore...it's become a necessary strategy for survival in our youth-obsessed culture where women—unfortunately—cannot afford to look their age. So I wrote the boomer woman's survival guide. Because there isn't a woman I know who doesn't need it (including me!). I hope you love it.

Charla Krupp xxx

Comprehension Questions

- 1) How would you describe the language and tone of this article: formal, colloquial or a mixture of both? Try to justify your answer with quotations:
- 2) What does Charla suggest will help against the aging progress in the first paragraph?
- 3) What is a "boomer woman"?
- 4) Why does Charla think that looking good is not just about vanity?

Beauty

What is beauty?

Write down three of the most beautiful or most positive things about yourself and three of the best qualities that you can/would like to see in an ideal partner or best friend. Don't put your name on the paper, and make sure it's legible!

Textual Analysis

How Not To Evolve - *From www.beautycounterculture.com*

Yesterday's New York Times included a [feature](#) about the new book "*How Not To Look Old*" by Charla Krupp. Without going into the painful particulars, "*How Not To Look Old*" scares me a little, okay it scares me a lot. The premise of the book, is neither particularly new nor groundbreaking—society doesn't particularly revere aging women, so try not to look like you're actually aging.

The most terrifying part though is the fact that we live in a society that encourages plastic surgery as a smart way of dealing with aging. Aging is a natural part of life. We live, we (hopefully) learn, we become more interesting or at the very least somewhat evolved people and it shows on our faces and bodies and in our senses of humor.

What troubles me is the notion that women, or men for that matter have to change themselves to conform to a dangerous ideal of not only beauty but relevance. Ms. Krupp is quoted as having previously stated that her book "is hitting a nerve because I am giving not looking old a spin as if your life depended on it."

The idea that youth is the only commodity of value left to working women and that protecting and enhancing their faces and figures is the only recourse left for modern women is ridiculous.

Warts and all,
Rachel x

Comprehension Questions

1) How would you describe the language and tone of this article: formal, colloquial or a mixture of both? Try to justify your answer with quotations:

- 2) What does Rachel say is society's main way of combating aging?
- 3) What is the main problem that Rachel has against the "dangerous ideal" of beauty?
- 4) What does Rachel believe to be a ridiculous idea?
- 5) What do you think "Warts and all" means? Do you know where this saying comes from?

John Keats and Beauty

Below is a poem written in 1819 by the English poet John Keats (1795-1821) describing characters engraved on a beautiful Grecian Urn, a type of vase. It seems that the poem is describing a number of different people who are on a type of procession. Don't worry at all if you don't understand everything! Try to listen and feel the music of the poetry first and foremost...

Ode on a Grecian Urn

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thou express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunt about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal - yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,

And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know

- 1) Can you identify any of the characters in the poem?
- 2) What objects are they using?
- 3) Do you agree with the closing lines of the poem? What do you think they mean?

Draw your own Grecian Urn

Try and use your imagination to draw something beautiful. When you have finished, describe to the class what you have drawn and, if possible, how you felt whilst drawing it. What was your source of inspiration?

International Women's Day

International Women's Day has been observed since in the early 1900's, a time of great expansion and turbulence in the industrialized world that saw booming population growth and the rise of radical ideologies.

1908

Great unrest and critical debate was occurring amongst women. Women's oppression and inequality was spurring women to become more vocal and active in campaigning for change. Then in 1908, 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights.

1909

In accordance with a declaration by the Socialist Party of America, the first National Woman's Day (NWD) was observed across the United States on 28 February. Women continued to celebrate NWD on the last Sunday of February until 1913.

1910

At a Socialist International meeting in Copenhagen, an International Women's Day of no fixed date was proposed to honour the women's rights movement and to assist in achieving universal suffrage for women. Over 100 women from 17 countries unanimously agreed the proposal. 3 of these women were later elected the first women to the Finnish parliament.

1911

Following the decision agreed at Copenhagen in 1911, International Women's Day (IWD) was honoured the first time in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on 19 March. More than one million women and men attended IWD rallies campaigning for women's rights to work, vote, be trained, to hold public office and end discrimination. However less than a week later on 25 March, the tragic 'Triangle Fire' in New York City took the lives of more than 140 working women, most of them Italian and Jewish immigrants. This disastrous event drew significant attention to working conditions and labour legislation in the United States that became a focus of subsequent International Women's Day events.

1913-1914

On the eve of World War I campaigning for peace, Russian women observed their first International Women's Day on the last Sunday in February 1913. In 1914 further women across Europe held rallies to campaign against the war and to express women's solidarity.

1917

On the last Sunday of February, Russian women began a

strike for "bread and peace" in response to the death over 2 million Russian soldiers in war. Opposed by political leaders the women continued to strike until four days later the Czar was forced to abdicate and the provisional Government granted women the right to vote. The date the women's strike commenced was Sunday 23 February on the Julian calendar then in use in Russia. This day on the Gregorian calendar in use elsewhere was 8 March.

1918 - 1999

Since its birth in the socialist movement, International Women's Day has grown to become a global day of recognition and celebration across developed and developing countries alike. For decades, IWD has grown from strength to strength annually. For many years the United Nations has held an annual IWD conference to coordinate international efforts for women's rights and participation in social, political and economic processes. 1975 was designated as 'International Women's Year' by the United Nations. Women's organisations and governments around the world have also observed IWD annually on 8 March by holding large-scale events that honour women's advancement and while reminding of the continued vigilance and action required to ensure that women's equality is gained and maintained in all aspects of life.

2000

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2007

IWD is now an official holiday in many countries. The tradition sees men honouring their mothers, wives, girlfriends, colleagues, etc with flowers and small gifts. In some countries IWD has the equivalent status of Mother's Day where children give small presents to their mothers and grandmothers.

The new millennium has witnessed a significant change and attitudinal shift in both women's and society's thoughts about women's equality and emancipation. With more women in the boardroom, greater equality in legislative rights, and an increased critical mass of women's visibility as impressive role models in every aspect of life, one could think that women have gained true equality. The unfortunate fact is that women are still not paid equally to that of their male counterparts, women still are not present in equal numbers in business or politics, and globally women's education, health and the violence against them is worse than that of men.

However, great improvements have been made. We do have female astronauts and prime ministers, school girls are

welcomed into university, women can work and have a family, women have real choices. And so the tone and nature of IWD has, for the past few years, moved from being a reminder about the negatives to a celebration of the positives.

Annually on 8 March, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate their achievements. While there are many large-scale initiatives, a rich and diverse fabric of local activity connects women from all around the world ranging from political rallies, business conferences, government activities and networking events through to local women's craft markets, theatric performances, fashion parades and more.

Did you know it was international Women's Day on March 8th?

Think about...

Do you think this date is important?

Do you know any other international days?

Do you think that these days make a difference to the causes they support?

Comprehension Questions

What two critical factors inspired women to become more active in their protests?

What were women protesting for in the 1908 march to New York?

Who declared the first national women's day?

In 1910, what did the proposal for a women's rights day aim to support?

What was the 'Triangle Fire' and what causes did this tragic event highlight?

What did Russian women do in response to the 2 million dead Russian men as a result of World War One?

What does International Women's Day serve to remind people for?

What other famous day is IWS compared to in other countries? Why?

What does the word emancipation mean?

In what ways have women gained equality with men?

In what ways are women still treated unequally in comparison to men?

How and why has IWD changed in recent years?

What different types of activities are used to celebrate IWD?