

Women in Colonial & Revolutionary Era Society Lesson Plan Lesson #1 of the Women & The American Revolution Module

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What was life like for women during the Colonial and Revolutionary War Era? What were some of the restrictions and some of the benefits women experienced in the society and laws of these eras?

OVERVIEW

In Colonial and Revolutionary War eras, women had specific roles — primarily maintaining the household and child-rearing. Society's structures were based on class and gender roles which were largely supported by the concept of family. A family's name and success secured a social place, and families were usually large for a greater chance of carrying on the male lineage and expanding their influence or wealth in the local communities.

Though most women did not take a prominent role in public affairs or public settings, women were seen as the confidants and benefactors of male success in politics and business. Women could not participate in politics by holding office or voting, but many were self-informed about the political issues of the era and had strong opinions which sometimes influenced the men in their lives or social circles.

Some of the most influential women in mid-late 18th Century America were the wives or widows of influential men in politics and power. Widows, usually through their inheritance of their deceased husband's property and possessions, held sway within social circles as well as the daughters of powerful leaders. It was rare for a woman of lower-class status to be published in a newspaper, give a speech before a gathered group of the elite, or produce an opinion that influenced how the broader, secular colonial society thought.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Knowledge
 - Discuss the role of women in 1700's Colonial America society and culture and how those norms contributed to women's roles during the American Revolution.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
 - Read through primary source documents, create a list of observations about 18th Century social and legal norms for women, and consider what changes might have been useful.
3. Evaluation
 - Evaluate how women's roles and the social norms influenced their opinions and actions during the Revolutionary War.

ACTIVITIES

1. Use the [Lesson's PowerPoint](#) to explore the context and history; the PowerPoint introduces Essential Questions and lays foundational knowledge about Colonial society.
2. Distribute the [primary source worksheet](#) and have the students select 2 of the provided primary sources for this lesson. Students may work on their own or as a group.
 - a. The following primary sources will be most useful and best suited for this worksheet activity; they are available in the ["Primary Source" section of the lesson plan website page](#).
 - i. 1783: "I Have My Handsful"
 - ii. 1740: "Prudent as Well as Agreeable"
 - iii. Washington: "As by Marriage I am entitled to a Third Part of that Estate"
 - iv. Addressed to a Lady: "The Admirable Virtues of Generosity and Economy"
3. Students will read the primary sources and answer the questions on the worksheet to take notes.
4. Encourage and guide a classroom discussion, using the following questions:
 - a. What was the expected role for women?
 - b. Did women have protection under the laws for their own safety or to manage their own business/finances?
 - c. In what ways could living in a new nation benefit women? Would this be reason enough to support the Revolution and independence from Britain?
 - d. In what ways did the nation's independence not immediately affect the lives and legal rights of women?
 - e. How could women's traditional roles influence how they supported or opposed the protests and eventual war?

STANDARDS

Please visit the [Lesson Plan Page](#) and select the "Common Core and NCSS Standards for Social Studies" to view the details.

RESOURCES

[Visit the Lesson Plan Page](#) to find all resources in one convenient place. You'll find everything mentioned or linked in this Lesson Plan along with additional videos, articles, primary sources, and biographies.

Quick Links

- [PowerPoint](#)
- [Primary Source Summary Worksheet](#)

OPTIONAL HOMEWORK/ASSESSMENT/ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Option 1: Education Norms and Opportunities for Girls in the 1700s

Public schooling as we know it in the modern era did not exist in the 18th Century. Schools were either religious-based or mainly instructing law. Girls who received an education studied with private instruction or tutors. As more women became literate, advocacy arose among some wealthy social circles to push for more women's rights. In addition, as education improved for women, the belief that their main role lay within the household began to be challenged.

Use these primary and secondary sources and explore what girls were encouraged to learn, making a list of the subjects and comparing to modern learning.

- [Women and the Enlightenment](#)
- [1740: "Prudent as Well as Agreeable"](#)
- [1783: "Your Education and Your Welfare...Are Very Near My Heart"](#)
- [1787: "Thoughts upon Female Education"](#)

Option 2: Charleston Virtual Field Trip

Boone Hall Plantation near Charleston, South Carolina, traces its history back to 1681. Starting at the 22-minute mark and continuing to approximately 35-minute mark, see parts of the historic plantation and learn about the Gullah-Geechee culture and how enslaved women helped create a culture that remembered their original homes and ancestors and continued even after the end of slavery.

Invite students to reflect on the ways that women have shaped culture and preserved a society's values; how did this happen during the colonial era and in the ways the Revolutionary War is remembered?

- [Charleston Virtual Field Trip](#)