

7 IDEAS FOR TEACHING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	Varies for each idea	Reading: R1, R2, R4, R6, R7, R9 Writing: W1, W2, W4, W6, W7, W8 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5 Language: L3, L4, L5
MS	HS		

Overview

In commemoration of Women's History Month, we present this resource to help educators engage students in thinking broadly and critically about the experience of women and gender in all of its complexity. In highlighting the significant events as well as people that have made a substantial contribution to women's experience, instruction should incorporate various elements of the curriculum including history, literature, politics, first-person experiences, the arts, and the struggle for equity. As you plan, keep in mind the following points:

- The history and accomplishments of women should be integrated throughout the school year.** Although Women's History Month takes place during the month of March, it is important to keep in mind and acknowledge that, like other groups that comprise U.S. society, the history of women in the United States is integral to American history. Therefore, it should be incorporated into multiple aspects of the curriculum throughout the school year to provide a multitude of cultures, knowledge, and information to students.
- Build empathy with students.** Use Women's History Month as an opportunity to build empathy in your classroom for the celebrations and struggles of all people. Make connections to other members of minority groups, people of color and oppressed people and find ways to incorporate their history, culture and struggle with the history and culture of women's experience.
- Provide a balanced perspective.** In teaching Women's History Month, a balance of the positive contributions of women along with the injustices faced by women should be emphasized. This means exposing students to the exploration of culture, art, history and accomplishments related to women's history and at the same time, explore the important but sometimes difficult learning about the struggles of women throughout history. It is important not to send the message that women's history is not only about sexism and the fight for equity, which can feel like a "deficit-centered" approach. On the other hand, women's battles for rights and opportunities are important aspects of the history. Thus, it is important to have an equal balance of both the trials and triumphs that many have faced throughout women's history.
- Be cognizant of intersectionality.** While you undertake the study of women and women's history, it is important to be aware of issues of intersectionality. Intersectionality is a way of looking at the overlap and intersections of people's social group identities (e.g., race, gender, class, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) and addresses the related and intersecting systems of bias, discrimination and oppression. An example is the gender wage gap; if you examine the wage gap generally, the statistics are very different than if you look at the [gender wage gap](#) in a disaggregated way, across racial groups. As you study women, ask questions that get students to think critically about who is being included and excluded, and push them to consider how different groups of women are impacted by the topics outlined below. This is a critical lens with which to learn about women's history and women's issues.

1 READ AND DISCUSS LITERATURE BY AND ABOUT WOMEN

- Have students read and discuss literature by and about women that addresses general topics as well as women's struggles, feminism and sexism. Include short stories, fiction, non-fiction, plays, poems, graphic novels and speeches as well as spoken word, blogs, online pieces, etc. Be sure to include voices of all kinds

of women: young, middle-aged and older, women of different races, lesbian and bi women, transgender and gender non-conforming women, women of different faiths, women who are immigrants and refugees, contemporary literature as well as literature written in past decades.

2. Read and discuss the literature as a whole class or create small group book clubs where each club reads a different book or collection together. Some general questions to guide literature discussions include:
 - What is the book/poem/story about?
 - What is the overall theme or message of the book/poem/story?
 - How are the characters developed?
 - What is the main conflict and how is it resolved?
 - What did you most like about the book? What did you like least about it?
 - What does the book/poem/story reflect about the experience of women?
 - How would the book/poem/story be different if it wasn't written by or wasn't about a woman?
3. Have small group book clubs discuss what they read and undertake a group project such as:
 - Write book reviews and/or create a class blog that includes all the book reviews.
 - Act out a scene from a play they read.
 - Write their own poems, short stories, plays or beginnings of a novel based on the particular genre that they read.
 - Learn more about the author and compile and summarize book reviews.
 - Create a drawing or collage that illustrates their favorite or most important part or scene.
 - Conduct a mock "book talk" with the author and create a video of it.
4. Comparing and contrasting different pieces of literature, discuss some of the common themes in women's literature, including these themes: everyday life, family and friends, tragedies both large and small, search for happiness and fulfillment, strong women who overcome obstacles, extraordinary events that showcase women's ability to tackle them, injustice, sexism and misogyny, vulnerability, gender roles, love and loss, relationships including dysfunctional families and relationships, family secrets, motherhood. Engage students in thinking critically about the extent to which these themes exist because the literature is focused on women or because the theme is universal.
5. Have students learn more about the extent to which books (children's, young adult and adult) have main characters who are women, are written by women, and contain strong women as characters and do an analysis with the data.

RESOURCES

Websites

[11 Essential Reads for Women's History Month](#) (Off the Shelf)

["10 Must-Read Books to Honor Women's History Month"](#) (*The Huffington Post*, April 18, 2019)

["60 must-read books by women, as chosen by our readers"](#) (Penguin Books)

[29 Awesome Books With Strong Female Protagonists](#) (Buzzfeed)

[Books about Feminism](#) (Good Reads)

[Celebrating Women's History Month](#) (Poetry Foundation)

ADL Booklists

[11 Picture Books to Read for Women's History Month](#)

2 IDENTIFY AND READ ABOUT IMPORTANT WOMEN IN U.S. HISTORY

1. Have students identify and study important women in U.S. history. The process of identifying people will be a learning experience as will the actual research. Begin with categories such as:
 - academics
 - business people
 - musicians
 - scientists
 - actors
 - celebrities/entertainers
 - performing arts
 - spiritual leaders
 - artists
 - elected officials
 - political activists
 - technology professionals
 - athletes
 - inventors
 - public service workers
 - writers
2. Using these categories, have students brainstorm the names of women with whom they are familiar; these can include women in history and modern times. You can use some of the resources below to begin identifying people to include on the list. After brainstorming, have students go home and interview their parents, family members and friends, asking them for additional names. They can also do some searching online for names and think about films and books about prominent women throughout history to include on the list. Instruct students to bring those names to school to add to the list. Remember to factor in the many different kinds of women (race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.) and if only certain kinds of women are being named as suggestions, ask critical questions to get students to broaden their perspective and approach.
3. After compiling a long and comprehensive list of names within each category, have students pick one of the women they want to learn more about. Try to discourage the majority of your students from choosing people in the entertainment industry, which young people are sometimes overly drawn to. Encourage students to choose women from history as well as contemporary women. Give students various options for presenting what they learned about the person they studied. Their learning should culminate in a project about the person such as:
 - Write and perform a short skit about the woman.
 - Write diary entries from their person's point of view.
 - Create a portrait of the woman.
 - Write a short biography.
 - Create a sculpture of the person, using clay, plaster of Paris or found objects.
 - Write an original speech that the woman might give.
 - Create a timeline of her life.
 - Make a webpage about her, using photos and original written material.
 - Create a postage stamp with the featured woman.
 - Create an imaginary Facebook or Instagram page of what she might post, including pictures and narrative.

RESOURCES

Websites

- Smithsonian's National Postal Museum: Women on Stamps [Part 1](#), [2](#) and [3](#)
[A List of Women Achievers](#) (Scholastic)
[Women's History](#) (History)
[Women Who Changed the World](#) (Biography Online)
[The 75 Greatest Women of All Time](#) (Esquire)
[National Women's History Museum](#)
[Women's History Milestones: A Timeline](#)
[Decade by Decade: Major Events in Women's History](#) (Smithsonian.com)

ADL Curriculum Resources

- [Mo'Ne Davis and Gender Stereotypes](#) (elementary school)
[Role Models and Stereotypes: Misty Copeland's Story](#) (elementary school)

[Who is Malala Yousafzai?](#) (middle school)

[Harriet Tubman of the \\$20 Bill: The Power of Symbols](#) (middle school)

[Shirley Chisholm: Unbought, Unbossed and Unforgotten](#) (high school)

ADL Booklists

[Children's and Young Adult Books on Gender and Sexism: Biography and History](#)

3 EXPLORE ART BY AND ABOUT WOMEN

1. Have students explore female visual artists by visiting online galleries as well as museums in your local area that focus on or contain a collection of art by and about women. Have students think broadly about different types of visual art including photography, painting, sculpture, architecture, drawing, craft/folk art as well as “street art” including graffiti and murals. Some suggested activities are:
 - As a class, visit an art museum or exhibit within a larger museum with a permanent collection or one that may be featuring women’s art during Women’s History Month. Give students some background information prior to the museum trip and provide activities and items to look for as they are walking around the museum.
 - Have students go to the museum on their own or with their family and discuss what they saw as a class after everyone has visited the museum or exhibit.
 - Have students select a time period and look at women’s art over that time period, writing a critical analysis of the art and also creating some of their own art that reflects that time period.
2. Have students delve deeper into one specific artist. Some women artists include: Frida Kahlo, Georgia O’Keeffe, Yayoi Kusama, Mary Cassatt, Faith Ringgold, Edmonia Lewis, Annie Liebovitz. Students can also conduct research to discover other artists. Have the students learn about the artists’ life, their motivation, style, message and the time period in which they were artists, and then have students create some of their own art in the same style as their selected female artist.
3. Have students explore performing art (music, dance, theater, spoken word, etc.) that has been written and performed by women over the years and in modern times. As a class, watch videos of women performing art and engage students in discussions by asking:
 - How did it make you feel while listening and/or watching?
 - What instruments did you hear?
 - What dance moves did you notice?
 - What is the meaning of the lyrics?
 - Is the performance conveying anything significant about women?
4. Have students work individually or in small groups to learn more about one genre of women’s performance art throughout history, how it was developed and famous artists in that genre. Students can select a decade in history and, in addition to the performance art of that time period, research its significance to politics and culture, the social justice context of the art form and the genre’s influence on clothing styles and other aspects of popular culture. They can also create a short documentary about one of the genres.

WEBSITES ABOUT ART, ARTISTS AND MUSEUMS

[National Museum of Women in the Arts](#)

[American Women Artists](#)

[Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985](#) (Hammer Museum)

[Modern Women](#) (Museum of Modern Art)

[African American Women Artists: A Selected Annotated Bibliography](#) (Smithsonian)

[National Association of Women Artists, Inc.](#)

[“10 Influential Women of Art Throughout History”](#) (Envato, March 8, 2016)

4 WATCH AND DISCUSS FILMS ABOUT WOMEN

1. Throughout the years, there have been a variety of films made for, by and about women-- some directed by female directors and some not. Below are resources that list specific recommendations for such films. You may consider showing some of these films in class or assigning students to watch them on their own. You can also engage students in a discussion about what films are missing, the extent to which the films as a whole portray women's experience in its complexity, what bias or stereotypes exist in the film(s) and what additional films haven't yet been made but should be. These include films about women's history, biographical depictions, strong women, women's friendships and women's struggles.
2. You can also engage students in a discussion about the [Bechdel Test](#). The Bechdel Test was popularized by a comic strip by Alison Bechdel. The Bechdel Test for examining a film has the following three criteria: (1) it has to have two or more women in it who have names, (2) the two women have to talk to each other and (3) the women have to talk with each other about something besides a man. Many movies don't pass this test. You can show your students the short video, [The Bechdel Test for Women in Movies](#) by Feminist Frequency. Ask students to reflect on films they know that pass the Bechdel Test and those that don't.
3. Students can explore, watch and learn about women's films in the following ways (film recommendations below):
 - Organize a Women's Film Festival for the school. Create a program and a schedule and show films throughout Women's History Month and beyond.
 - For each week in March, choose a different film for all the students to watch (either in class or independently) and discuss. In addition to discussion questions particular to each film, here are some general questions you can ask about any of the films:
 - What is the point of view of the film?
 - How did the director portray women's experience?
 - Are the characters complex, stereotyped or a combination?
 - What did you learn about women's experience from the film?
 - For its time period when the film was made, was it ahead (or behind) of its time in terms of its portrayal of women?
 - How did the screenwriter develop the characters?
 - What is the director trying to show about time and place?
 - Did you like the film? Why or why not?

Because there are so many films by, about and featuring women, below is a list of links that provide their own listings of films by and about women. For reviews and information about age level appropriateness, check [Common Sense Media](#).

[Great Movies by Female Directors](#) (*The New York Times*)

[14 Inspiring Films to Celebrate Women's History Month](#) (Reader's Digest)

["40 Essential Feminist Movies You Need to See"](#) (Harper's BAZAAR, February 28, 2020)

[85 Films By and About Women of Color, Courtesy of Ava DuVernay and the Good People of Twitter](#) (List Challenges)

[Films with Strong Female Leads](#) (Imdb)

["20 Inspiring Films that Feature a Strong Female Lead"](#) (Her Campus, July 26, 2015)

[20 movies that every woman should watch](#) (Bright Side)

[Movies with Strong Female Characters](#) (Common Sense Media)

["15 Best Trans Woman Movies According to Trans Women"](#) (Autostraddle, November 18, 2015)

[Latina Directed Feature Films Breaking Out in 2015](#)

["The 13 Best Biopics About Women"](#) (MadameNoire, March 10, 2014)

[Celebrate Women's History Month with these Docs](#) (Independent Lens)

5 IDENTIFY AND INVESTIGATE IMPORTANT PERIODS IN WOMEN'S HISTORY

1. Have students identify the significant periods and events in women's history—which can include accomplishments, milestones, legislation, and women's struggles for equity. You can start by brainstorming what students may already know and then have them go home and conduct some preliminary research for homework by interviewing their parents/family members and doing internet research. Remember to ask questions to get them to consider different kinds of women through an intersectionality lens. The list may include:
 - Nineteenth Amendment: Women's suffrage
 - Seneca Falls Convention
 - Margaret Sanger and the American Birth Control League (later evolves into Planned Parenthood)
 - Margaret McLeod Bethune and the National Council of Negro Women
 - Sojourner Truth: abolitionist
 - Victoria Woodhull: Presidential candidate on her own ticket
 - Betty Friedan publishes *The Feminist Mystique*
 - Equal Pay Act
 - Women of the Civil Rights Movement
 - Gloria Steinem and *Ms. Magazine*
 - ERA (Equal Rights Amendment)
 - Women's Professional Sports Teams: All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, Professional Basketball League, American Basketball League (ABL) and Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA)
 - *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court ruling
 - Sandra Day O'Connor: first woman on U.S. Supreme Court
 - Sally Ride: first American woman to ride into space
 - Title IX
 - Shirley Chisholm: first African-American candidate for a major party's nomination for President
 - Geraldine Ferraro: first woman Vice Presidential candidate on major party ticket
 - Condoleezza Rice: first female African American Secretary of State
 - Violence Against Women Act
 - Lily Ledbetter: Fair Pay Restoration Act
 - Sonia Sotomayor: third female and first Latina Supreme Court Justice
 - Hillary Clinton runs for President
 - Women's March of 2017
 - Kamala Harris becomes first women, first Black woman and first South Asian woman as Vice President of the U.S.
2. Working alone or in small groups, have students study one of the time periods, milestones or events and engage in a project to express and share what they learned. After conducting research, students can undertake one or more of the following projects to demonstrate what they learned:
 - Create mini-timelines for the event.
 - Provide biographical information about important people who participated in that event.
 - Draw or paint pictures of the events and write placards that go along with the pictures.
 - Create a mini-documentary about the event.

- Write and perform a skit demonstrating something about the time period or event.
- As a class, create a complete Women’s History timeline, using all of the mini-timelines from each group.

WEBSITES

[Women’s History: The Struggle for Equality](#) (Scholastic)

[Women’s History Milestones: A Timeline](#) (History)

[Women’s History](#) (Biography)

[Timeline of Legal History of Women in the United States](#) (National Women’s History Alliance)

6 DISCUSS SEXISM AND WOMEN’S STRUGGLE FOR EQUITY; TAKE ACTION

1. While it is important to not focus exclusively on women’s struggles and issues of discrimination and bias, it is worth exploring and addressing the historical and current day issues around sexism, misogyny and women’s struggle for equity. Talk with your students about the history of injustice towards women in the United States including [current events](#). Issues may include: the gender wage gap, portrayal and representation in media, sexual violence, sexual harassment, workplace discrimination, street harassment reproductive rights, “pink tax” (women’s products costing more than men’s), implicit bias, microaggressions, “slut shaming,” gender stereotyping in books, movies, etc. and other relevant issues.
2. Engage students in interactive exercises to help them learn about and distinguish between individual, institutional and internalized forms of sexism and oppression. Develop a common language and a [vocabulary](#) for talking with students about these issues.
3. Make the connection between sexism and other forms of bias and discrimination (i.e. intersectionality) such as racism, classism, religious discrimination, heterosexism/homophobia, transphobia, ableism, immigration discrimination and language discrimination, and provide the context of the [Pyramid of Hate](#).
4. Have students reflect on and share their own experiences with sexism and other forms of gender discrimination and be sure to help them understand the societal institutions and systems which support and reinforce discrimination. Use art, literature, film and history to explore these issues in a deeper way. Always provide information about how people worked together to fight injustice and make fundamental change. Brainstorm ways that people have engaged in [activism](#)—both past and present—to make a difference in their world.
5. After discussing the different ways that sexism manifests in society today, have students consider one of them to investigate further. In pairs or small groups, students can research their chosen topics and develop the following projects to demonstrate what they learned:
 - Develop a social media campaign to raise awareness.
 - Write and perform a skit.
 - Create an infographic on one of the issues in order to educate the public.
 - Engage in a service learning project that addresses the issue.
 - Write letters to the editors of local and national newspapers about the issue.
 - Get involved in local social action efforts.
 - Conduct a survey to find out what others think about it.
 - Create a PSA (public service announcement) and broadcast it on school or community access television.
6. Learn more about ADL’s educational programs on [Anti-Bias Education](#) and our [Curriculum Resources](#) that focus on gender, sexism and women’s struggle for equity.

RESOURCES

Websites

[Toward Communication Free of Gender Bias](#)

ADL Curriculum Resources

[Preschool Lessons on Gender and Sexism](#)

[Elementary Lessons on Gender and Sexism](#)

[Middle School Lessons on Gender and Sexism](#)

[High School Lessons on Gender and Sexism](#)

ADL Booklists

[Books about Gender and Sexism: Biography and History](#)

7 RESEARCH THE ORIGINS OF WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

1. Have students find out how and why Women's History Month was created, why it takes place in March and what this year's theme is as well as previous years' themes.
2. Have students find different ways to share this information with other students in the school and the community at large by writing articles, making posters, using social media or creating a website or Instagram page about it.
3. In pairs or small groups, have students do the following projects:
 - Research different points of view about the pros and cons of Women's History Month and similarly-themed months. Read essays with multiple perspectives and have students share their own viewpoints in writing, citing evidence and including quotes from the texts they read. Consider having a debate with different positions represented.
 - Design and conduct a survey with teachers in the school asking them if they intend to teach about Women's History Month and if so, what they plan to do.
 - Find out what events and activities in their town or neighborhood will be happening to commemorate Women's History Month. Share this information with the rest of the school community. Create a calendar to share.
 - Every year, March 8 is designated as [International Women's Day](#), which is an international celebration of respect, appreciation and love towards women for their economic, political and social achievements. Have students learn more about International Women's Day, how different countries celebrate and acknowledge it and what the plans are for the current year.
 - As a culminating project for the month of study, create a [word cloud](#) using the words and concepts from all the student projects. Publish this on the school's website.

RESOURCES

Websites

[ADL's Women's History Month Resources](#)

WomensHistoryMonth.gov

[International Women's Day](#) (United Nations)

[National Women's History Alliance](#)

["Why Women's History Month is in March"](#) (CNN, March 1, 2020)

["Why March is National Women's History Month"](#) (National Women's History Alliance)

["The End of Women's History Month"](#) (*The Atlantic*, March 1, 2013)

[Why March is National Women's History Month](#) (National Women's History Project)

[Women's History Month](#) (History)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
R4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
R6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
R7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
R9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
W6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
W8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
SL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
SL5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

Language

L3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.