

1 Discourse on Women (excerpted)

2 Lucretia Mott

3 1849

4
5 The question is often asked, “What does woman want, more than she enjoys? What
6 is she seeking to **obtain**? Of what rights is she **deprived**? What **privileges** are
7 withheld from her?” I answer, she asks nothing as favor, but as right, she wants to
8 be acknowledged a **moral**, responsible being. She is seeking not to be governed by
9 laws, in the making of which she has no voice. She is deprived of almost every right
10 in **civil society**, and is a **cypher** in the nation, except in the right of presenting a
11 **petition**. In religious society her disabilities, as already pointed out, have greatly
12 **retarded** her progress. Her **exclusion** from the **pulpit** or ministry—her duties
13 marked out for her by her equal brother man, subject to **creeds**, rules, and
14 **disciplines** made for her by him – this is unworthy her true **dignity**. In marriage,
15 there is assumed **superiority**, on the part of the husband, and admitted **inferiority**,
16 with a promise of **obedience**, on the part of the wife. This subject calls loudly for
17 examination, in order that the wrong may be **redressed**. **Customs** suited to darker
18 ages in Eastern countries, are not **binding** upon **enlightened** society. The **solemn**
19 **covenant** of marriage may be entered into without these lordly assumptions, and
20 humiliating **concessions** and promises....

21
22 Walker, of Cincinnati, in his *Introduction to American Law*, says:.... “the law of
23 husband and wife, as you gather it from the books, is a **disgrace** to any civilized
24 nation. The theory of the law **degrades** the wife almost to the level of slaves. When
25 a woman marries, we call her condition **coverture**, and speak of her as a femme
26 covert. The old writers call the husband baron, and sometimes, in plain English,
27 lord. The merging of her name in that of her husband is **emblematic** of the fate of
28 all her legal rights.... The legal theory is, that marriage makes the husband and wife
29 one person, and that person is the *husband*. On this subject, reform is loudly called
30 for. There is no foundation in reason or **expediency**, for the absolute and **slavish**
31 **subjection** of the wife to the husband, which forms the foundation of the present
32 legal relations. Were woman, in point of fact, the **abject** thing which the law, in
33 theory, considers her to be when married, she would not be worthy the
34 companionship of man.”

35
36 There are many instances now in our city, where the wife suffers much from the
37 power of the husband to claim all that she can earn with her own hands. In my
38 **intercourse** with the poorer class of people, I have known extreme cruelty, from
39 the hard earnings of the wife being thus robbed by the husband, and no redress at
40 law....

41
42 Let woman then go on—not asking as favor, but claiming as right, the removal of
43 all the **hindrances** to her elevation in the scale of being --- let her receive
44 encouragement for the proper **cultivation** of all her powers, so that she may enter
45 profitably into the active business of life;...

cypher: an unimportant person

petition: a legal or political request of those in government

creeds and disciplines: principles and ways of behaving

redressed: corrected

covenant: contract

concessions: something yielded or conceded

coverture: women protected and controlled by their husbands

emblematic: symbolic

expediency: practicality

abject: worthless/servile

intercourse: dealings

cultivation: development

Text-Dependent Question Creation Worksheet

Name of Text: Discourse on Women by Lucretia Mott, 1849

Question Composers: Temoca Dixon and Marcia Motter

Nevada State Standards: H3.[6-8].5

CCSS: RHST.6-8.1, RHST.6-8.2, RHST.6-8.4, RHST.6-8.6, RHST.6-8.10; WHST.6-8.2 WHST.6-8.4, WHST.6-8.9; SL.7.1; L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.4

Questions in Finalized Order

What is the point of this question? Why did you write it? Is there an overarching understanding you are trying to reach with students?

Include all answers (words, phrases, sentences with line numbers)

According to Lucretia Mott, what questions are being raised about women's status in 1849?

Line 5: What does woman want more than she enjoys?
Lines 5-7: What is she seeking to obtain? Of what rights is she deprived? What privileges are withheld from her?

What privileges are being withheld from women?

To be acknowledged as a moral and responsible being.: Lines 8-9
What's to have a voice in the making of laws: Lines 8-9
She is deprived of almost every right in civil society: Lines 8-10
To be a religious leader: Lines 11-14
To have more equality in marriage: Lines 14-16
To remain her own person: Lines 28-29 ("...marriage makes the husband and wife one person, and that person is the *husband*")
To be able to keep money they have earned from working: Lines 36-37

Reasoning (R): This is a reflection of the inequalities from women during this time period. Women have very few rights, if any, especially in a marriage.

Questions in Finalized Order

What is the point of this question? Why did you write it? Is there an overarching understanding you are trying to reach with students?

Include all answers (words, phrases, sentences with line numbers)

<p>What other words or phrases from the text help you understand the meaning of deprived in Line 6?</p>	<p>Line 5-6: What is she seeking to obtain? Line 6-7: What privileges are withheld from her?</p> <p>R: If she is trying to “obtain” something and “privileges are withheld”, then students can infer that deprived means to be denied or not allowed something.</p> <p>Note to Teacher: This type of inference question should be used on many other vocabulary words at your discretion.</p>
<p>What other words or phrases from the text help understand the meaning of inferiority in Line 15?</p>	<p>Line 15: ...assumed superiority, on the part of the husband ... Line 16: ...a promise of obedience, on the part of the wife ...</p> <p>R: Superiority contains the prefix super which means above or beyond. The opposite of this would be below. To be obedient would place someone in a lesser status or below another as well.</p>
<p>What issue is Lucretia Mott concerned with when she states in Lines 27-28, “The merging of her name in that of her husband is emblematic of the fate of all her legal rights...”?</p>	<p>When women marry, they lose their legal rights. They lose their identity and become absorbed into their husbands legal persona. They are now known as one person, the husband: Lines: 27-32 It implies that women, in a marriage contract, are no better than slaves: Line 24</p> <p>R: Women didn’t have many more rights than slaves in a marriage. They lose their identity. Everything they own or have belongs to their husband. In effect, they were owned.</p>
<p>Lucretia Mott is making a persuasive argument. What words or phrases from the text demonstrate her attempt to persuade her audience?</p>	<p>Line 6: deprived Line 15: obedience Line 24: degrades Line 43: hindrances</p> <p>R: These are strong words that evoke negative feelings. Mott uses them to demonstrate how severe current circumstances are for women in the 19th century. These words help develop the tone of the text which is critical of women’s position in 19th century America. Social roles created a hierarchy where women were inferior to men. Lucretia Mott was a woman’s rights advocate and her writings were used to persuade progressive audiences. Line 9, 11-12, 14-16, 30-31, 38-40</p>

Questions in Finalized Order

What is the point of this question? Why did you write it? Is there an overarching understanding you are trying to reach with students?

Include all answers (words, phrases, sentences with line numbers)

The title of this piece is *Discourse on Women*. What does the word *discourse* mean in this context? How does the purpose and structure of the text give you clues to the meaning of the word?

Lines 5-6: What does the woman want, more than she enjoys? What is she seeking to obtain?
 Line 7: I answer ...
 Line 22: Walker of Cincinnati, in his *Introduction to American Law* ...
 Lines 23-34: the law of husband and wife is a disgrace...
 Lines 36-40: many instances now in our city ... no redress at law
 Lines 42-45 ... the removal of all hindrances...

R: Mott presents a question, proceeds to answer it herself, argues that current law (or counter arguments to hers) is in error, gives evidence to prove the current law is in error, and then provides a solution as she requests the “removal of all the hindrances.” She is contributing all of the parts of a conversation.

Note to Teacher: Discourse can mean a debate, an explanation of a position, a reasoned argument. Students should understand that discourse is a public conversation, debate, or explanation of a position. It was common in this time period to publish such issue pieces to add to the public discourse.

From Mott’s perspective, what are the qualities necessary for women to live an active life?

Lines 42-43: the removal of all the hindrances to her elevation in the scale of being.
 Lines 43-44: Let her receive encouragement for the proper cultivation of all her powers.
 Lines 36-37: Women to keep the money they earn from their own work.
 Lines 14-20: That women should be more of an equal in a marriage vs. being controlled and submissive to her husband.
 R: Women are being held back and oppressed. She would like for women to have new rights and opportunities in order to live a full and meaningful life.

According to Mott, why is it important for women to live an active life?

Line 7: She asks nothing as favor, but as right, she wants to be acknowledged a moral, responsible being.
 Line 42: ... claiming as right ...
 Line 45: profitability ... business

R: Women have been deprived of their rights, forced to be obedient and degraded. Without having their rights acknowledged it would be hard to live a meaningful, “active” life. These rights give her life meaning.

Writing Prompt

In a paragraph, describe what Lucretia Mott articulated the role of women in society during this time period should be.

Use two pieces of evidence and reasoning from the text to support your answer. Cite the evidence correctly by using line numbers (Lines 24-25) at the end of the sentence. Connect the evidence to the claim with reasoning that explains the evidence.

In their writing students should:

- Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories
- Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, and quotations
- Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone
- Provide a concluding statement that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented
- Quotations are cited correctly using line numbers from the text (Lines 8-9) at the end of the quote.

Sample answer:

In *Discourse on Women*, Lucretia Mott argues that women should be able to lead an active and meaningful life (Line 45). Mott claims that women have been deprived of their rights and privileges and forced to be obedient to men (Lines 9-10, 15-16). Mott even compares the status of a married woman to that of a slave (Line 24). If a woman is treated as inferior and forced to be obedient then she would not be able to live a meaningful life. Mott argues that women should be able to pursue her interests and as a result lead a more profitable and prosperous life (Lines 44-45).