**WOMEN WHO SPOKE UP activity**

by Andrew Matthews 2018

6th GradeLexile: 890

In this informational text, Andrew Matthews discusses women throughout American history who fought to be a part of change.

**As you read, take notes on the different women discussed in the text and the movements to which they contributed.**

["Women! Free our sisters"](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c01458/%20%20) by N.E. Women's Liberation and Black Panther Party of Connecticut is licensed under No known restrictions.

**READ AND ANNOTATE THE TEXT USING CODING SKILLS CHART.**

[1] Women have had to fight to be heard. For most of history, women were expected to keep silent. In their traditional roles as wives and mothers, their sphere of influence was home and family. That sphere kept them out of the public eye. Some determined women refused to be prevented from participating in public life. Even when they risked being accused of unacceptable female behavior, women began to speak up. In the 19th century, women were the moving force behind a number of reform issues. Many of those issues related to their sphere of influence: the home and what was in the best interest of families. Women worked to end slavery and child labor. They supported women’s rights and temperance.1 In the 20th century, women’s roles in society changed more dramatically. More women spoke up. They addressed larger and broader audiences. Here are a few women whose public words are remembered today as particularly inspiring and courageous.

**Sojourner Truth**— whose slave name was Isabella Baumfree — was born into slavery in 1797. She escaped to freedom in 1826. She lived at a time when neither African Americans nor women were viewed as full citizens. She was both. She was deeply religious, and her faith called her to travel across the free states preaching the gospel. Contemporaries2 noted that she had “a heart of love” and “a tongue of fire.” She used her voice to fight slavery and to support women’s rights and temperance. After several lectures in New York City, one abolitionist3 wrote that, she “poured forth a torrent of natural eloquence, which swept everything before it.” She gave her most famous — and unprepared — speech in Ohio in 1851. It is known today as her “Ain’t I a Woman” speech, but historians now question whether she ever used those exact words. She pointed out the inequality that existed between the races and the genders.

*“I am a woman’s rights. I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal; I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now. As for intellect, all I can say is, if woman have a pint and man a quart — why can’t she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much — for we can’t take more than our pint’ll hold.”*

As an African-American woman journalist living in the South, **Ida B. Wells-Barnett** had her life threatened for the work she did. She led a one-person campaign against lynching. She did that by gathering stories. She studied the information. She produced facts and statistics. And she spoke about it. In 1909, she gave a speech to the newly created National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). “This Awful Slaughter” presented hard facts about a subject that others refused to address publicly. Wells-Barnett forced people to face the reality of the horrors of lynching. She called on her listeners and the NAACP to do more to end it.

[5]*“[Lynching] is national — a blight4 upon our nation, mocking our laws and disgracing our Christianity. ‘With malice5 toward none but with charity for all’ let us undertake the work of making the ‘law of the land’ effective and supreme upon every foot of American soil — a shield to the innocent; and to the guilty, punishment swift and sure.”*

When **Clara Lemlich** was a teenager, her Jewish family fled from the Ukraine to escape religious persecution.6 The family settled in New York City. Lemlich found work in a textile factory.7 Factory employees worked long days — more than 10 hours — and six days a week. They earned only a few dollars. The terrible conditions motivated Lemlich to join the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union. She became a leader in the effort to fight for workers’ rights. She organized several strikes. On November 22, 1909, she was part of a crowd listening to male organizers offer advice to workers. She insisted on speaking to the crowd. Her words sparked a massive strike known as the Uprising of the 20,000.8 Striking factory workers refused to work and protested in the streets. After more than two months, owners agreed to better pay and shorter workdays.

*“I am a working girl, one of those who are on strike against intolerable conditions. I am tired of listening to speakers who talk in general terms. What we are here to decide is whether we shall or shall not strike. I offer a resolution that a general strike be declared — now.”*

**Mary Harris “Mother” Jones** was a labor activist at the turn of the 20th century. She traveled around the country and gave speeches that organized laborers. She spoke for children, mill workers, coal miners, steelworkers, and immigrants. Those workers were paid pennies to work long days under harmful conditions. Sometimes her speeches were rough and coarse — she referred to herself as a “hell-raiser.” One opponent called her “the most dangerous woman in America.” But her words energized workers to fight for better conditions and pay. In 1912, she gave a now-famous speech at a West Virginia coal mine. Workers had struck to fight for a better contract with the mine owners. She spoke without notes and directly to the crowd. Her speech survives today because the mine bosses hired a stenographer to take notes. They hoped to use Jones’ words against her for inciting9 violence.

*“This meeting tonight indicates a milestone of progress of the miners and workers of the State of West Virginia... You will not be serfs,10 you will march, march, march on from milestone to milestone of human freedom, you will rise like men in the new day and slavery will get its death blow. It has got to die. Goodnight.”*

[10]**Margaret Chase Smith** was the first woman to serve in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. She won election to the Senate in 1948. Two years later, she bravely spoke up when other public leaders remained silent. At that time, Americans feared the spread of communism11 and its ties to the Soviet Union. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy was heading a campaign to identify Communist activity in the United States. McCarthy’s hunt ruined the careers and lives of the people accused. Smith delivered her “Declaration of Conscience” on the Senate floor. She did not specifically name McCarthy. But she commented on the state of fear that had crept into U.S. politics. She warned against its dangerous anti-American tone.

*“I think that it is high time that we remembered that we have sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution. I think that it is high time that we remembered that the Constitution, as amended, speaks not only of the freedom of speech but also of trial by jury instead of trial by accusation.”*

African-American civil rights activist **Fannie Lou Hamer** gave an electrifying testimonial in 1964. Hamer was the vice chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The party wanted to challenge Mississippi’s all-white state delegation to the Democratic National Convention. Hamer addressed the convention credentials committee. She shared her personal experience of trying to register to vote in the South. She described how she had been jailed and beaten. She testified that she been shot at and verbally abused because she wanted to vote. President Lyndon B. Johnson tried to prevent her testimony from being aired by making a speech of his own at the same time. But Hamer’s televised appearance made the news, and it reached a large audience. Her hope to have some of the Mississippi Freedom Democrats seated at the national convention did not succeed. But four years later, she was a delegate at the Democratic National Convention. She was the first woman to represent Mississippi and the first African American to be seated at a national convention since the 1870s.

*“And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings in America?”*

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DIRECTIONS: Answer the Questions Below.

1. What main idea is the author trying to convince readers to agree with?
2. ​How does the author’s choice of words influence how readers think about the topic?
3. How does the author’s choice of facts or examples influence how readers think about the topic?
4. What does the author want to accomplish in this text?

Short Constructed Response:

1. What is the central idea of the text? Can you summarize the central idea using key supporting details? Cite a fact. Cite an opinion.