



# Middle Level Learning™



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# Team Egypt!

## Integrating the Disciplines

Amanda Welsh Greenwald

**Sarah** walks into her sixth-grade social studies class and, for the next forty minutes, learns about the causes of the American Revolution. She then walks to her language arts class where she writes an essay about coming of age in Pakistan. In the next class, art, she models clay in the pattern of a Mayan design. Her day continues in much the same manner, as she moves from class to class, shutting off her mind to each class in turn when the concluding bell rings.

Emanuel, a sixth-grade student at a school across town, walks into his social studies class and draws a diagram about the causes of the American Revolution. He then walks to language arts class and writes an essay about *My Brother Sam is Dead*, a novel about an American family torn apart by the American Revolution.<sup>1</sup> In art class, he contrasts paintings by American colonists in the 1700s with portraits of European royalty of the same period, and he paints a self-portrait in American Primitive style. As his day continues, Emanuel begins to make connections between what he learned about the attitude of the colonists towards England and what he reads in the novel and sees in paintings.

As a sixth-grade teacher at Winchester

Thurston School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,<sup>2</sup> I yearned for a curriculum like Emanuel's—one that would encourage students to see knowledge integrated between the disciplines. Harvey Daniels and Marilyn Bizar, authors of *Methods that Matter*, state that an integrated curriculum results from "teachers translating models from one field into another, importing promising ideas from other subjects, designing cross-curricular investigations, and developing rich thematic units that involve students in long-term sophisticated inquiry."<sup>3</sup> When teachers get together to create a curriculum in which one class complements the other, students' ability to learn—and to demonstrate that learning—is enhanced.<sup>4</sup>

During the summer of 1997, Cheryl Capezzuti, an art teacher, and I noticed that we both teach lessons on ancient Egypt in our separate classes. We decided to work on an integrated unit of study in which students would research aspects of ancient Egypt in their social studies class and then apply this knowledge in their art class. As we put our ideas into practice with the students, the project inspired other teachers to integrate their classes into the curriculum.

Right from the start, we got interest and support from administrators. Now there are interdisciplinary coordinators for grades six through twelve, faculty members who meet once a week with all of the teachers in a particular grade. We use our meeting time to discuss curricula, projects, trips, and the progress of individual students. I enjoyed working on these projects so much that I applied for, and was awarded, the interdisci-

plinary coordinator position for the seventh grade for the current school year.

### A Unit on Ancient Egypt

In social studies class, students choose a topic in the daily life of Ancient Egypt (commerce, agriculture, worship, transportation, or the social hierarchy) that interests them. They acquire information from books and the web and write a rough draft of a paper on their topic.<sup>5</sup> They then exchange drafts with a peer, and each "formally critiques" the others' work by writing criticisms and suggestions in the margin. Then each student produces a short, polished paper.

In their language (Latin) class, students learn about hieroglyphics and choose an appropriate phrase or name to write in hieroglyphics on the sarcophagus that they are making in art class.

Science class allows students to investigate the mummification process in order to give authenticity to the mummies they create in art class. They learn which Egyptians were chosen to be mummified and how the process occurred.

In art class, students look at examples of Egyptian art and study mummies and sarcophagi. They learn about the significance of wall paintings to early civilizations. Finally, they demonstrate their knowledge by creating a mummy, sarcophagus, and a small "wall painting" (that is, a mural).

And last year, in computer class, students built web pages using pictures of their art project (taken with a digital camera), written notes, and links to other interesting sites. As a culminating experience, the

### On the cover

Models of an Egyptian sarcophagus and mummy by Peter deMontmollin, a sixth-grade student at Winchester Thurston School, Pittsburgh, PA. The approximate height of the models is 20cm.



Model of an Egyptian sarcophagus by Michael Sablowsky, a sixth grade student at Winchester Thurston School, Pittsburgh. Approximate length, 20 cm.

strengths. For example, in social studies class, students were graded on their research effort, their participation in each part of the writing process, and on the quality of their final paper. In art, it was their careful use of the materials and incorporation of ancient images that counted.

### Interdisciplinary Curricula

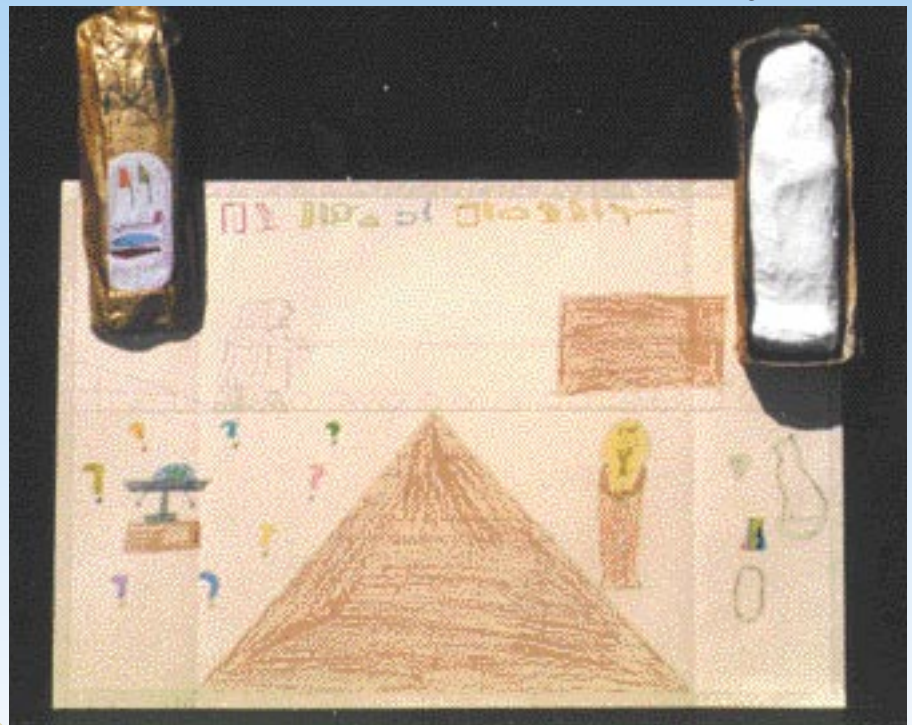
Each year, I rely on my team members for their expertise in the various subject areas. They add new dimensions to the unit of study that I would have been unable to offer. I can envision other disciplines being included in this curriculum. In math class, for example, students could study the geometry of the pyramid or attempt to draw one to scale. The collaboration by teachers on this unit has motivated students to become excited about learning and to take pride in their efforts. It also has built a support group of teachers that is invaluable in an academic environment. Daniels and Bizar state that teachers who work together to create integrated units “are showing kids how to think and are exemplifying the principles that learning never ends, that even teachers have room to grow, and that

school’s computer lab was turned into a multimedia art gallery for an evening. The research papers, art projects, and web pages were on display. Parents came for guided tours of the gallery, creating one of the most rewarding moments of the semester.

### Separate Assessments

The team of teachers who created this curriculum debated whether to give one cumulative grade for the entire project or to grade each discipline independently. We decided to grade each discipline independently in order to reward students’

Models of sarcophagus and mummy and diorama presenting—with hieroglyphs—different hypotheses about how the pyramids might have been constructed. Art by York Chen, a sixth grade student at Winchester Thurston School.



students have knowledge to be shared and valued" (3, p. 30). 📖

## Notes

1. James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier, *My Brother Sam Is Dead* (New York: Scholastic Paperbacks, 1989).
2. Winchester Thurston School is an independent, private school in Pittsburgh, Penn. It is co-ed and has about 600 students, pre-K-12.
3. Harvey Daniels and Marilyn Bizar, *Methods That Matter* (York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998), 20-21.
4. John H. Lounsbury (ed.), *Connecting the Curriculum Through Interdisciplinary*

*Instruction* (Columbus, Ohio: National Middle School Association, 1992); Thomas S. Dickinson and Thomas O. Erb, *We Gain More Than We Give: Teaming in Middle Schools* (Columbus, Ohio: NMSA, 1997).

5. "Egyptian Art: Working with Sculpture," *Art & Man* 20 (January 1990): 1-16; Mary Barnett, *Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Smithmar, 1996); H. W. Janson and Anthony F. Janson, *History of Art for Young People* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987); "Working with Stylized Images of Egyptian Art," *Scholastic Art* 29 (November 1998): 1-16; Maia Weinstock, "Mummies Unwrapped," *Science World* 56 (October 1999): 1-16; Carol Donoghue, *The Mystery of the Hieroglyphs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999);

"Children of Ancient Egypt," *Appleseeds* (February 1999): 1-34; "Mysteries of Egypt," *Archaeology's Dig* (August/September 1999): 1-40.

## About the Author

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## Answers to "Mysteries of Ancient Egypt" (on the back cover)

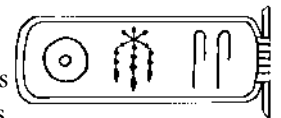
1. **The Curse.** In 1922, British archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the steps in the sand that led down to the tomb of King Tutankhamen (King Tut). The four underground rooms contained gold, jewels, and thousands of objects to be used by the fun-loving pharaoh in his afterlife (he died at the young age of 18, possibly by assassination). Carter lived a normal life span (to sixty-four), but his financial sponsor, Lord Carnarvon, died five months after walking into the tomb, possibly from a centuries-old germ that awaited in the dust. London tabloids noted that a warning had been found on King Tut's tomb not to disturb it, and they called it "the curse of the pharaoh." Several of Carter's associates subsequently died of various causes, but the tabloids linked them all to "the curse."

Today, archaeologists take precautions (like wearing gauze masks) when they open a tomb because dangerous germs may, in fact, be present in the dust around the corpse. Some bacteria or viruses might be able to exist in a dry, dormant state for centuries, only to awaken when breathed in by warm, moist, living, and unsuspecting lungs.

2. **The Riddle.** With the head of a pharaoh and the body of a lion, the Great Sphinx rests near the pyramids at Giza (near modern-day Cairo). Made of soft limestone, the Sphinx (carved around 2500 B.C.) has been eroded by weather and wars fought around it. The Greeks, who invaded Egypt in 332 B.C., had legends that told how, if a traveler came across a sphinx god, it would ask him a riddle. If the traveler did not know the correct answer, the sphinx would kill him.

3. **The Mountain.** The pyramids at Giza, which are over 4,000 years old, are arguably the most massive structures ever created by humans. Teams of men may have pulled the huge blocks of stone (each weighing more than two tons) over rolling logs (or on sleds), up a gently sloping ramp of rocks and sand, as the pyramid was constructed layer by layer. But archaeologists are still searching for any sort of working illustrations or "engineer's blueprints," maybe on papyrus, to confirm this theory.

4. **The Code.** One of the greatest mysteries of all time was the meaning of the hieroglyphs on tomb walls, sarcophagi, and pottery of ancient Egypt. In 1799, a French soldier found the Rosetta Stone, which had Greek and Egyptian writing carved on its face. People suspected right away that the mysterious hieroglyphs, which nobody could understand, told the same story as the Greek sentences carved below them, which scholars could understand. A race began to see who could break the code first, but the hieroglyphs were not fully deciphered until 1822. Why did it take so long? A big part of the confusion was that scholars had assumed that the hieroglyphs stood for concepts (a snake could mean devious). But most of the characters stand for sounds (a snake, in fact, indicates a "j" sound).



The first character in this set is the sound "ra" (Ra was also the sun god), the second is "m" (and it looks rather like an "m"), and the third character, which is repeated (and looks like a staff), is "s." The cartouche (the oval loop) indicates that these hieroglyphs spell the name of a royal person. RAMSES the Second was the pharaoh who built the great temple at Abu Simbel. 📖

## References

- Carol Donoghue, *The Mystery of the Hieroglyphs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)  
Stephen Hanks, "The Mysterious Sphinx," *Archaeology's Dig* 1, No. 3 (August/September 1999)

- James Putnam, *Pyramid* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994)  
Donovan Webster, "Valley of the Mummies," *National Geographic* 196, No. 4 (October 1999)

# Girls Can Be President

## Generating Interest in an Inclusive History

Melinda Kames

As a public school teacher for eight years, and now as an associate professor of education, I have always searched for ways to interest and engage young students in their history lessons. During the 1997-1998 school year, I asked a dedicated group of ten pre-service teachers and their mentors (“teachers” hereafter) to informally poll students about their attitudes toward social studies instruction. The students, in the third through eighth grades, were from rural and small town settings, a mix of poor and wealthy, male and female, white and minority. The districts were generally not able to afford much computer hardware, so although most of the teachers were savvy with regard to technology, they usually had to depend heavily on textbooks.

The teachers and I constructed a short, basic questionnaire (see box) that students completed anonymously. We found that the 274 students (in the third through the eighth grades) perceived the relation between their lives and history to be weak. On a scale of 1 to 5 (the score of 5 indicating the highest degree of interest and relevance), 92 percent of the respondents ranked their classes low, with a score of only 1 or 2.

These results supported teachers’

general observation that students were having trouble relating to social studies instruction. It was no surprise that they had heard comments such as “Why do we have to study these old white guys?” “I don’t remember anything from that class.” “Why aren’t there more stories for me?”

### A Call to Action

The service teachers, concerned about these results and determined to make their own teaching relevant to young students, wanted to develop a more inclusive “action philosophy.” They decided to focus on women’s issues as a beginning, but admitting that their own knowledge in this area was not strong, they began researching and reading about that topic—and also examined the classroom textbooks.

In a 1987 issue of *Social Education*, Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault analyzed the ways in which women and gender were portrayed in social studies texts and curricula.<sup>1</sup> The service teachers summarized the five “phases of thinking about women in history” described by Tetreault in this way:

**1. Male-defined history** — The

absence of women in the historical record is not noticed, and male experience is considered the only knowledge worth having;

- 2. Contribution history** — The absence of women on the “main stage” is noted, but only in the male-defined context of what determines greatness;
- 3. Bifocal history** — This dualistic approach to history describes the contributions of males and females, leading to the understanding that the male experience has been dominant;
- 4. Histories of women** — This multi-



Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the second and first presidents (respectively) of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association. (1890)

Library of Congress

### Students Rank Interest and Relevance

1. I was not interested in the study.
2. I was somewhat interested in the study.
3. I can see the reasons for such a study and can identify with the content.
4. The study is relevant to my life, and I found the unit interesting.
5. The study is extremely relevant and very interesting.



Ruth Muskrat, a Cherokee Indian, presents President Calvin Coolidge with a copy of *The Red Man in the United States*, a survey of American Indian life. (1923)

faceted concept of women recognizes that there are other factors (besides sex) that shape lives, such as socio-economic phase, class, and personal characteristics;

5. **Histories of gender** — This perspective weaves male and female contributions together based on common denominators of experience, citing the particulars of motivation and accomplishment.

### Content Analysis

With the use of Tetreault's scale, the teachers first examined the content of our primary sources for teaching, the textbooks. They found that these texts (primarily published in the late 1980s) generally omitted pertinent information on women's accomplishments. They found that most of the information about female contributions appeared to be "added on" to content that the students perceived as "the really important stuff." Historical pictures of females were included with little explanation of their significance. Written information on the daily lives of people of the past, and the interaction between men and women to improve society, was scant at best. The teachers concluded that much of the text describing

female contributions was trivialized, and, in their opinion, barely reached phase 2 on Tetreault's scale.

We ordered samples of new texts, and found that to add the "cultural and gender element," authors briefly mentioned one or two women in a chapter. The teachers thought that this was still not enough information to reach the level of understanding that they hoped to achieve. New social

studies texts were not a purchasing priority for the districts. Updating course material seemed a monumental task at this point in the careers of these teachers, but they decided to try, beginning with the units they were teaching.

### Planning and Preparation

The teachers set as a goal creating units of study that would include particular accomplishments by men and women, as well as a description of everyday life during the era of study.<sup>2</sup> For example, a unit on inventions included innovations created and used by men and women of different ethnicity and social class. Political leaders were studied, inclusive of physical disabilities, gender, social class, and religion. The concept of "nations" was presented from the indigenous point of view, as well as the conqueror's point of view. The everyday lives of people were examined as well as those of the great and mighty. Some unsuccessful attempts at leadership and reform were included as well as successes.

### Teaching Methods

Early in the year, the teachers taught what they considered to be Phase 5 (on Tetreault's scale) units of study in ten classes in the third through eighth grades. Half way through the year, however, students in seven of these classes evaluated the lessons

as not interesting or relevant. The teachers decided not to disregard their work so far on improving the content of the lessons, but to turn to the pedagogy and environmental concerns in an attempt to increase student interest.

In teaching a unit about national documents of the United States, one teacher had prepared an additional lesson about the 1848 "Declaration of Sentiments" of the Women's Rights Movement.<sup>3</sup> It was a wonderful lesson filled with active learning exercises, but it was perceived as a "tag-on" to the lessons about the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and the U.S. Constitution. Students remarked, "Another one? [sigh]" and "What does this have to do with what we studied?" The teacher was dismayed.

It's not just what we say, but how we say it. By stating, "Now we are going to study another document, the Declaration of Sentiments," the teacher had made clear to the students that they had "wandered away" from the traditional curriculum. The perception was that this new information was not going to prove to be important. We concluded that the lesson had fallen to Phase 2 (Contribution History)—the Women's Rights document was viewed as an appendage, not as a central part of the body of history. That example prompted a discussion of similar disappointments, leading the group



Programmer Grace Hopper is responsible for the computer term "bug." The original bug was a moth that caused a hardware fault in the Mark I computer. (1945)

to conclude that its teaching methodology must be changed.

Through a series of trial and error situations, the teachers found that no matter what the topic of the social studies unit, they achieved the most success when the information was presented in something close to chronological order, thus avoiding the appearance of assigning some sort of priority to any one example, event, or person. Timelines, developed by the students, became more important, and the teachers began to use thematic eras as the basis for units. Students could then compare everyday life with major accomplishments, coordinating the time chronology in their minds, thus creating an understandable setting to which they could relate. For example, if national documents were the topic of a unit, the teachers presented all of the documents in chronological order, and students discussed each document's particular contribution to society.

The teachers also used Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligence* as one basis for their instruction.<sup>4</sup> When their pedagogy was varied (that is, not always a lecture or discussion), the students were more engaged. There appeared to be a "natural" connection between the infused inclusive content the teachers were presenting and a more inclusive holistic pedagogy, appealing to various styles of learning. The numerous teacher workshop materials based on Gardner's theory presented a wealth of ideas that provided avenues for connecting teaching techniques with the historical information to be learned.

### Classroom Environment

A poster of the U.S. presidents, displayed in a third grade classroom, had an empty frame in one corner with a question underneath, "Could this be you?" A girl looked it over and said, "I'd like to be President some day," to which a boy responded, "You



The first female U.S. astronaut Sally Ride answers questions for ABC TV's "Nightline" in a NASA laboratory. (1983)

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

can't. You're a girl." The teacher interjected, explaining that a person does not have to be male to be president, it just happens that all of the presidents so far have been male. The boy scoffed, "Look at the pictures," and walked off.

Later, we discussed this event, concluding that the classroom environment was important, maybe no less than the content of the lessons or the teaching methods. The event also inspired the teacher—not to lecture on the requirements of being president, but to teach a unit on job qualifications, presenting careers spanning all walks of life, infusing materials throughout the unit that were cross-cultural and gender inclusive. Of course, she was also inspired to redesign the classroom environment appropriately for the unit, including posters, books, articles, and teacher materials that portrayed a cross-section of citizens working at various jobs (including the presidency). By the end of the unit, the classroom was full of visuals, videos, slides, music, student-created newspapers, and other projects portraying

the idea that the career market is, or at least can be, gender-inclusive.

### Results of Interest

At the end of 1998, the same questionnaire was administered to the same groups of students in the third through the eighth grades. The results were gratifying: No student ranked any class in the lowest two points of the five-point scale of interest and relevance; 34 percent of the students gave their classes a score of three, 53 percent gave a four, and 13 percent awarded a five, "The study was extremely relevant and very interesting."

The teachers summarized their efforts by stating the three components of teaching that seemed to be correlated with student interest.

1. Improve the content of the lessons so as to include not only the successes of white males, but also the achievements of, and challenges faced by, men and women at all levels of society in a given age. Present information chronologically, not ranked by "importance." Aim for Phase 5 of Tetreault's scale, to "define what binds together and what separates the various segments of society."
2. Strive to use various materials and sources (for example, videos, historical fiction for young people, online resources, the library, and the local historical society) and different methods of teaching and assessing (as described by Gardner and others).
3. Create a classroom environment that reflects the content of the unit of study and presents a welcoming face to every child in the class.

Earlier in the year, these teachers tried to change all of their units to be in accordance with a new organizing principle or teaching technique. They got frustrated because they were trying to do too much and were not seeing results. They found



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The caption to this photo of abolitionist Sojourner Truth reads, "I sell the shadow to support the substance." (1883)

that, by using this three-component strategy to revise one unit at a time, the work load was not overbearing and the results were rewarding for the teacher and student.

These three components are goals, not requirements. Not every lesson can be a blockbuster, and there is not always time to enrich the course material. But by taking a

more active role themselves, these teachers appeared to have raised the interest—and maybe even the expectations—of their students in the field of social studies. 🌐

#### Notes

1. Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, "Rethinking Women, Gender and the Social Studies," *Social Education* 51, No. 3 (March 1987): pp. 170-

178. Useful tables, with "questions commonly asked in each phase," are on pp. 172 and 173.
2. Books that provided a rich, inclusive history include Joy Hakim, *A History of US* (New York: Oxford University Press Children's Books, ten volumes, 1999); Christine Lunardini, *What Every American Should Know About Women's History* (Holbrook, MA: Bob Adams, Inc., 1994); Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, Barbara Smith, Gloria Steinem (eds.), *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492 to the Present* (New York: Harper Perennial Library, 1995); *The Twentieth Century: A People's History* (New York: Harper Perennial Library, 1998). There is a comprehensive list of resources in *Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice*, Linda Christensen, Stan Karp, Bill Bigelow, Barbara Miner (eds.), (Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 1994). See also the sidebar of websites in this article.
3. "Declaration of Sentiments," in *Report of the Woman's Rights Convention, 1848* (Seneca Falls, New York). [www.closeup.org/sentimnt.htm](http://www.closeup.org/sentimnt.htm)
4. There are many interpretations of Howard Gardner's original work, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). Gardner himself has expanded his offerings with two key titles, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); and *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). There are also numerous workshops based on Gardner's theory. Perhaps the most prolific series comes from Sunlight Publishers, including David Lazear's works such as *The Eight Ways of Knowing* (Palatine, IL: Skylight Publishing, 1999).

#### About the Author

Melinda Karnes is an associate professor at the School of Education at the State University of New York at Fredonia.

Useful websites include the National Women's Hall of Fame at [www.greatwomen.org](http://www.greatwomen.org),



which has a great list of resources; the National Women's History Project at [www.nwhp.org](http://www.nwhp.org), which promotes inclusive history through newsletters and teaching projects; and the search directory of Women Online at [www.women.com](http://www.women.com), which is useful for research on specific topics.



# Besting Testing Hysteria

## Reasonable Preparation for Standardized Tests

Sherry L. Field

STANDARDIZED TESTS, born in the early 1900s, have taken firm root in the American educational system. During the testing movement of the 1920s, specific-response (or “objective”) tests were developed, while essay examinations were criticized as being unreliable and inaccurate. Today, short-answer, standardized tests remain a grim reality. According to a recent survey by *Newsweek*, forty-nine states have implemented tests for measuring student achievement.<sup>1</sup> In many instances, these are “high-stakes” tests: if a student does not perform well, he or she may not be allowed to progress to the next grade or to graduate (as is now the case in twenty-six states). On the basis of poor test scores, college admission might be denied to a student, despite other achievements. *Newsweek* states that there is a growing “anxiety among parents, teachers, and kids over the proliferation of standardized tests” and that “reformers try to improve school quality by holding educators accountable” for test results.

A school’s academic reputation is largely based on achievement test scores. For example, student performance in the largest school district in Georgia was recently touted by this newspaper headline: “County Tops National, State SAT Averages.” State superintendent of schools Linda Schrenko attributed Georgia’s gains in SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) scores to a rigorous core curriculum, increased math requirements for graduation, the use of funds for all sophomore students to take the Pre-SAT test, and “hard work by administrators to improve student achievement.”<sup>2</sup>

What will the future bring in the way of testing policies and legislated mandates? According to Judy Mathers, a policy analyst at the Education Commission of the States, “We’re in the middle of the maelstrom. It’s very difficult to see which way it’s going to go.”<sup>3</sup> Many teachers are concerned that what they teach and how they teach may be increasingly determined by the dictates of the standardized test “empire.”

How should middle school teachers respond to this sort of pressure? Ignoring the storm of standardized tests would not help students or schools. On the other hand, “teaching to the test” exclusively (with constant memory drills and practice of test-taking skills) can backfire as students, and teachers, succumb to boredom. A more rational approach might be for teachers to compare the form and content of standardized tests with their own standards for learning and assessment. If teachers, throughout the year, would refer to their own chosen standards (as they plan lessons and design their own assessments of student learning), they could probably enhance students’ performance in standardized test situations—without having to make this result the “holy grail” of their professional life.<sup>4</sup>

### Content of Standardized Tests

Let’s take a closer look at the actual social studies content in a widely used current standardized test, the ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills). A recent survey<sup>5</sup> of the content of the social studies portions of this test revealed six general categories of knowledge being assessed (Table 1). These categories were present in recent tests for third, fifth, and eighth grade students in roughly similar proportions, except for that of his-



**Table 1. The Social Studies Content of the ITBS**

Category	Sub-topic	Proportion*
<b>History</b>		<b>10%</b>
	Traditions and heritage of the people of Earth People who have shaped history Examples in history of conflict or cooperation Situations in history involving change or adaptation	
<b>Geography</b>		<b>27%</b>
	Physical features of Earth Interactions of people with the environment	
<b>Economics</b>		<b>23%</b>
	Work and workers Economic principle of supply and demand Material needs and wants of people Economic impact of technology Economic interdependence of people and nations	
<b>Political Science</b>		<b>23%</b>
	Rights and responsibilities of citizens Rules and laws Structures and services of government	
<b>Sociology/Anthropology</b>		<b>13%</b>
	Human culture Social interactions of people Human needs and wants Psychological principles of human behavior	
<b>Related Social Sciences</b>		<b>4%</b>
	Human culture as seen through fine and applied arts Systems of ethics and human values	

\* Proportion equals the number of questions on a sub-topic divided by the total social studies questions (n = 30) in the test for third graders.

tory, which increased. (In the third grade test, 30 questions make up the social studies portion, including three questions (10 %) from history (Table 1, line 1). At the fifth grade, this proportion rose to 20%; at the eighth grade, it was 28%.)

Of course, the difficulty of the questions increases with grade level. For example, in the third grade, students may be asked to (1) identify an original American cultural group, (2) identify an animal that was historically important to American travel and settlement, and (3) choose an appropriate form of transportation for a specific purpose. Fifth grade students may be asked to (1) recognize a historical term or concept, (2) state one reason for coloni-

zation, and (3) identify the historical settlement pattern of the United States.

### NCSS Standards for Assessment

A comparison of the ITBS categories (Table 1) and questions with some of the National Council for the Social Studies Curriculum Standards<sup>6</sup> shows many similarities. The ten NCSS standards were written by teachers and other social studies professionals for use by schools, departments, and individual teachers when they design curricula and assessments. Each standard has “performance expectations” that can serve as the basis for assessing student knowledge at different ages.

### II Time, Continuity, & Change

“Demonstrate an ability to use correctly vocabulary associated with time such as past, present, future, and long ago; read and construct simple timelines; identify examples of change; and recognize examples of cause and effect relationships.”

This performance expectation might be represented on standardized tests by having children read a short paragraph and then place an event appropriately on a timeline. Young students might sequence pictures of many different activities or events. Older students might sequence phrases or sentences. On many state and “gatekeeper” tests, middle school students will be asked to write a brief, reasoned essay on the basis of historical information provided in a test question.

### III People, Places, & Environments

“Use appropriate resources, data sources, and geographic tools such as atlases, data bases, grid systems, charts, graphs, and maps to generate, manipulate, and interpret information.”

A surety on standardized tests is that students will have many opportunities to interpret various representations of data. (Many tests rely heavily on these skills at the expense of other social studies knowledge and skills.) Younger students might read and interpret cardinal directions and trace a path. They may be asked to identify relative locations. Middle school students might read and interpret sophisticated maps and graphs and find information on them quickly. Often, this skill is assessed in conjunction with a related narrative in which students are given large chunks of information, which they then have to weed out. Geographic land forms and related vocabulary (terms about natural resources and cultural traits) are often featured.

## ● Production, Distribution, & Consumption

“Give examples that show how scarcity and choice govern our economic decisions.”

Students should show an understanding of basic economics concepts and be able to interpret various types of economics situations and data, such as charts and graphs. A typical question for younger children might ask them to distinguish between needs and wants. Middle school children might be asked to describe the role that supply, demand, and price play in determining what is on the market. Specialized economics vocabulary is prevalent, as are questions about economic problems and relationships between production, distribution, and consumption.

Thus, content of standardized tests in elementary and middle grade social studies does not have to be at odds with school districts and states that aim to use various types of assessment tools and to meet benchmarks set by local, state, and national standards. Nor do the tests have to be at odds with our day-to-day work as social studies teachers if our goals include teaching specific skills and content, and then measuring student learning in several different ways.

## Principles for Improving Performance

I would like to offer the following few principles to help with systematic thinking, discussion, and practice.

1. Standards for social studies education (as stated by individuals, schools, governments, professional organizations, and testing institutions) often overlap.
2. Classroom assessments can be based

on a teacher's own standards for content knowledge and skill acquisition.

3. Ongoing classroom assessment can help students prepare for the end-of-the-year (or the occasional) standardized test.
4. Reasonable efforts can be made to prepare students for the emotional and “mechanical” aspects of test-taking (for example, by reviewing techniques of time management, learning how to eliminate multiple choices, practicing methods of at-the-desk relaxation, writing an essay under a deadline, etc.).
5. Student performance and knowledge can be assessed in many different ways, some of which can be similar to standardized tests (for example, multiple choice, fill in the blank, short essay, creation of a chart or graph given data, etc.) and some not (creating a dramatic performance, holding a debate, drawing a picture, or composing a website).
6. Students can be tested on different types of problem solving, literacy, and reasoning, as well as specific knowledge of various topics. (For example, analytical questions can assess a student's ability to understand and use maps, charts, graphs, and other forms of data representation. Vocabulary questions assess one's ability to remember the meaning of terms. Simple historical questions test one's knowledge of major events, people, and dates.)
7. Beyond formally administering a particular standardized test, teachers can learn about the methods of assessment used in a particular test instrument, the skills that students are expected to have, and the content that students are

expected to know.

8. Standardized tests are one form of assessment among many. Social studies teachers could provide an important voice in local, state, and national debates over the meaning and use of test results.

By systematically integrating these principles into a year-long school curriculum, teachers (and their students) might experience increased confidence when the season of standardized testing arrives.<sup>7</sup> After all, assessment of some sort is a useful part of any learning situation. Maybe we can take reasonable steps to improve students' performance on these tests without getting caught up in “testing hysteria.” 📖

## Notes

1. D. McGinn, “The Big Score,” *Newsweek* (September 6, 1999): 46-51.
2. D. Zillich, “County Tops National, State SAT Averages,” *Gwinnett Daily Post* (Wednesday, September 1, 1999): 1A, 9A.
3. McGinn, 51.
4. S. Walton and K. Taylor, “How Did You Know the Answer Was Boxcar?” *Educational Leadership* 54, No. 4 (December 1996/January 1997): 38-40.
5. Figures provided by the Georgia Council on Economic Education.
6. National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Washington, D.C.: NCSS, 1994).
7. G. Wiggins, “Practicing What We Preach in Designing Authentic Assessments,” *Educational Leadership* 54, No. 4 (December 1996/January 1997): 18-25.

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# Revolutionary Women

## *Portraits of Life in the Thirteen Colonies*

Mary E. Connor

A valuable skill for students of social studies is to be able to analyze and evaluate primary source material.<sup>1</sup> I have created a lesson plan that includes an overview of the social conditions of women who lived during the American Revolution, brief portraits of the lives of six women from that era, and primary source material drawn from their personal letters or publications.<sup>2</sup> Students are given the information below, and then asked to reflect on the commonality and diversity of life experience for women in that time and place.

### **Women's Lives, ca. 1776**

In the late eighteenth century, most white women were married by the age of sixteen, usually to a farmer, and bore from five to ten children. Life was rigidly determined by gender. Men completed one set of chores, women another. Many girls did not attend school, but did work (including caring for younger brothers and sisters) around the house and farm. Women spun, sewed, cooked, baked, tended gardens and orchards, milked cows, butchered farm animals, cured meat, churned butter, made cheese, and worked in the fields at harvest time. They made most of the clothing and household items such as candles, blankets, and curtains. Especially on frontier farms, most of the household items were created by a woman's hands.

Daughters were expected to grow up to be "modest, retiring, chaste, and sweet;"<sup>3</sup> women to obey their husbands; and men to

be tender and loving to their wives. There were exceptions, however, to this general picture. One Virginian made note of women who fought back if taunted, went to cockfights, and traveled around the countryside unchaperoned.

In the South, a wealthy young woman was considered a prize in marriage. Widows, especially wealthy ones, usually did not remain single very long. But even for the "aristocratic" white woman living a plantation, life was often physically demanding as she might oversee the preparation of meals and maintenance of the house, manage the activities of slaves, deliver babies, nurse the sick, and educate children, not to mention giving birth herself, often with little rest between pregnancies.

Conditions were the most difficult for slave women. Their marriages were not recognized as legal or important by their owners, and they could be sold away. Female slaves usually experienced harsh working conditions; pregnancies were frequent, maternity leaves unknown, and death during childbirth a common experience. Some exhausted mothers accidentally suffocated their babies because they fell asleep while nursing.<sup>4</sup> Although their masters and owners must have known that hard physical labor was not good for pregnant or nursing mothers, such risks were often ignored so that a cash crop could be rapidly harvested.

Many immigrants came to America as indentured servants and were often not much better off than slaves, as they were required to work for a master for a certain

period, often in return for travel expenses, shelter, and food (or sustenance).

A woman's property and wages belonged to her husband. Only widows and the very few women who never married could own property and run their own business; such women paid taxes, but could not vote. Once married, a woman could not sue or be sued, make contracts, buy or sell property, or write a will. Her husband had all legal rights to the children. Divorces were difficult to obtain; a common reaction to an unbearable husband was to run away to another man or back to Mother. Despite some difficulties, it seems that a fair share of marriages were happy ones. Letters between husbands and wives reveal much warmth and tenderness.<sup>5</sup> Widows without property who did not remarry often faced poverty. They congregated in cities to support themselves as midwives, teachers, laundresses, seamstresses, or servants. A woman with property might open a shop, inn, or boardinghouse.

During the American Revolution, women of every rank boycotted British-made cloth and tea. During the war, women did men's jobs and provided support in varied capacities. When the War of Independence was won, slaves were gradually freed in the North and education became more available to girls, but major changes in the rights of women followed only after suffrage was achieved in 1920.

## Jane Franklin Mecom (1712-1794)

The daughter of a chandler (maker and seller of tallow, wax candles, and soap) and favorite sister of Benjamin Franklin, Jane was the youngest of seventeen children. Married at fifteen to the local saddler, Jane had twelve children, eleven of whom died while she was still alive.

Jane became her brother's favorite correspondent. For a quarter of a century, she gave birth to a new baby every other year. At age thirty, Jane took in lodgers, helped in her husband's shop, and cared for children and aging parents. Her husband died in 1765, but none of Jane's surviving children was able to support their aging mother. Her brother Benjamin tried to help by sending trading goods from England, where he was a representative of the thirteen colonies. The boxes arrived just as Bostonians decided to boycott British goods, so Jane was not able to sell them.<sup>6</sup>

When Jane was seventy, her granddaughter died in childbirth, and she was again the head of a household and the caretaker of four small children. By 1784, however, she was living comfortably in Ben's home in Boston, where she had the leisure to read and write until her death in 1794.

## Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784)

A thin, sickly eight-year-old Phillis was brought to Boston on a slave ship from Africa. A white woman, Susanna Wheatley, took pity and bought the girl. Mary, the Wheatley's daughter, taught Phillis to read and write. Within sixteen months, Phillis spoke English and read the Bible. At the age of twelve, she knew Latin and Greek, was translating works of the Roman poet Ovid, and was writing her own poetry. She also studied geography, astronomy, and ancient history. Susanna took pride in Phillis' intelligence and protected her delicate health, but did not grant her freedom.

At seventeen, Phillis published a poem about George Whitefield, the leader of the "Great Awakening," a religious revival that was sweeping through the colonies. Only a week before he died, Whitefield had preached in Boston, where Phillis must have heard him. Wheatley's beautiful eulogy—printed in newspapers in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and London—led to publication of a book of poetry and finally to her emancipation in 1773. With the deaths of Susanna, John, and Mary Wheatley, however, Phillis was on her own. She continued to write poetry

and supported American independence. One of her most famous poems was "To His Excellency George Washington."

Since Phillis could not support herself, she married a free black, but he deserted her and their young child. To survive, Phillis took a job as a domestic servant. She was still able to publish several poems; one of them ("Liberty and Peace") is considered by many to be her best. Before it was printed, Phillis, who had been sickly all of her life, became seriously ill from an infection following childbirth and died at the young age of thirty-one.

## Deborah Sampson (1760-1827)

Deborah Sampson was born to poor farmers. With the death or possible desertion of her father, she became an indentured servant. At twenty-two, finished with her servitude and inspired by the Revolution, she dressed



in men's clothing and enlisted in the militia, but was soon discovered.

Not one to quit, she again enlisted under the assumed name of Robert Shurtleff and marched toward West Point, New York, with the Continental Army. She wrote to her mother that she had found agreeable employment in a "large but well-regulated family."<sup>7</sup>

Deborah was wounded at Tarrytown, New York. Determined to remain undetected, she extracted a musket ball from her thigh. She continued to serve, but contracted a fever and was taken to a hospital. The examining doctor was amazed to discover the soldier's gender, but told no one. Upon recovery, Deborah again served, became ill again, and was discharged.

Why did Deborah do such a risky thing? She might have viewed military service as a patriotic duty and an economic opportunity. She could receive a bonus and free land after the war. Also, she may have been drawn to the challenge and excitement of the war. She could not achieve any of these things, however, without pretending to be a man.

In 1784 Deborah married Benjamin Gannett. They bought a farm and had children, but her health was poor. After petitioning the General Court in Massachusetts, she eventually received back pay for her service as a soldier. In 1802, she donned a blue and white uniform, carried a musket, and went on a

speaking tour of New York and New England, telling about her adventures.

## Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814)

Mercy Warren has been aptly described as "the foremost female intellectual in eighteenth century America."<sup>8</sup> At her birth she entered a world of wealth, social status, and political power. Bright, highly energetic, charming, and ambitious, Mercy made the most of all of her gifts. Her youth was spent pursuing the established routines of domesticity. Although she had no formal education, her brother took note of his sister's brilliance and contributed significantly to her education.

In 1754 she married James Warren, merchant and politician, and moved to Plymouth, Massachusetts. They had five children. James was an intelligent partner who supported her intellectual interests. Yet she also had the energy to raise children and attend to household duties.

Throughout the 1770s, Mercy followed closely the political events in Boston. Her correspondents included John Adams, Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Elbridge Gerry, and Henry Knox. These men asked "her opinion in political matters, and acknowledge[d] the excellence of her judgment."<sup>9</sup> Her letters reveal a remarkable clarity, perceptivity, and boldness.

For years Mercy wrote poetry, but not until 1772 did she publish. Her first work was a dramatic piece intended as propaganda against Governor Thomas Hutchinson, whom she depicted as willing to destroy the colony. In other plays, she attacked British officials and Loyalists.

In her seventies, she published her finest work, a three-volume set, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*, which is considered by modern historians to be "the most complete account we have of the Revolution." Mercy remained strong and alert until her death at 87.



## Eliza Lucas Pinckney (1722-1793)

The daughter of a career officer in the British army, Eliza was educated in England. When her father was ordered to the West Indies, Eliza managed his three plantations in South Carolina. She was just sixteen years old.

Eliza began a journal (which she called a “letterbook”) in which she recorded details of all aspects of daily life. For historians today, it represents “one of the most impressive documents of personal writings of an eighteenth century woman.”<sup>10</sup> Eliza also sent informative letters to her father, brothers, and friends in England.

Commercial indigo (a blue dye made from the indigo plant) was in great demand, and in 1744, Eliza grew the first successful crop in the colonies and gave seeds to other planters. Within three years, South Carolina was exporting 100,000 pounds of indigo dye a year.

Eliza was a gifted musician, spoke several languages, taught her sister and slave children how to read, experimented with new plants, dealt with overseers, taught herself the law, and read so much of the classic works by Locke, Plutarch, and Virgil that an elderly lady in the neighborhood “prophesied that she would damage her brain.” She found most of her male contemporaries to be dull.

In 1744, Eliza married Charles Pinckney, a forty-five-year-old widower. She asked for God’s

help to be a good wife, mother, and mistress of servants. Eliza and Charles had three children: Charles Cotesworth, Harriot, and Thomas. When Eliza was thirty-five, her husband contracted malaria and died. This loss might have undone her, but she continued to manage the plantation and raise her children. During the Revolutionary War, one of their plantations burned to the ground, yet the family recovered and prospered.

Two of Eliza’s sons became leaders: Charles (junior) was a member of the Constitutional Convention and Thomas became governor of South Carolina. Because their work took them away from their homes, Eliza helped to manage their plantations as well as her own and looked after their wives and children. When Eliza died of cancer, George Washington served as one of her pallbearers.

## Hannah Lee Corbin (1728-1782)

Constructed in 1738, Stratford Hall was the home of the prominent Lee family. It was the boyhood home of Declaration of Independence signers Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee, and it was the birthplace of Robert E. Lee, who—in the next century—would be the commander in chief of the (Rebel) Confederate Army in the Civil War.

Hannah Lee was the daughter of the founder of Stratford Hall and sister to Richard and Francis. Her father was determined to give an excellent educa-

tion to all of his children, so Hannah, along with her brothers, studied history, law, literature, religion, and politics.

At twenty, she married her cousin, Gawin Corbin, and had one child. But Gawin died, and his will stated that if Hannah remarried or moved, she would forfeit the estate. Failing to appear in court for the settlement, she was fined, but refused to pay. Hannah continued to reveal her independent spirit. When the Great Awakening swept Virginia, she heard sermons of Baptist preachers and became a convert to a church that was illegal in that colony.

Shortly after Gawin’s death, she fell in love with Dr. Richard Hall. Since Gawin’s will prevented her from remarrying, she decided to live with Hall but remain unmarried. Hannah managed the plantation as a widow and had two children by Hall, which displeased some people. Baptists worshipped in their home, a practice that was dangerous at the time—Hannah could have been imprisoned or attacked by angry neighbors. When Richard died, Hannah continued to manage Gawin’s estate, but worried about paying off Hall’s heavy debts. She complained about the position of widows and single women and the fact that women were taxed, but could not vote. She was probably the first woman in Virginia to be vocal about women’s rights. In her final years, Hannah became obsessed with religion and feared for her soul in the afterlife.

### Three Questions for Discussion with Middle School Students


- ▶ Life was difficult or challenging for women at the time of the American Revolution. Describe two challenges that women faced.
- ▶ Chose one specific woman and tell about one of her achievements or why you find her life story to be interesting or remarkable.
- ▶ Below are primary source materials from the lives of these six women. Select one of these sources (A through F) and describe how it relates to the woman and to aspects of life during the late 1700s. If

the author of the source is not the woman herself, identify the person.

### A Challenge for High School Students

“The portraits of six colonial women chronicle the lives of exceptionally able and interesting women and reveal much about the female experience in the eighteenth century.”

- ▶ Assess the validity of this statement in a coherent essay of several paragraphs, integrating the background information, several of the portraits, and the primary sources which follow in this article. Avoid paraphrasing.

Identify any of the primary sources you mention at the end of a sentence (for example, “Doc. A.”).<sup>11</sup> 

### Notes

1. National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Washington, D.C.: NCSS, 1994): 51.
2. The lesson “Revolutionary Women” was developed through a fellowship at the Monticello-Stratford Hall Summer Seminar for Teachers in 1999. To obtain information about the fellowship, send a query to [shpedu@stratfordhall.org](mailto:shpedu@stratfordhall.org), visit [www.stratfordhall.org](http://www.stratfordhall.org), or call (804) 493-8572.
3. Jan Lewis, “Women and the American Revolution,” *OAH Magazine of History* (Summer 1994), 24.
4. Michael P. Johnson, “Smothered Slave Infants: Were Slave Mothers at Fault?” in Linda K. Kerber and Jane DeHart Mathews, eds., *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past* (New York:

## Document A

“Whereas it appears to this Court that the said Deborah Gannet enlisted, under the name of Robert Shirtliff . . . and did actually perform the duty of a soldier . . . for which she has received no compensation . . . it further appears that the said [soldier] exhibited an extraordinary instance of female heroism by discharging the duties of a faithful, gallant soldier, and at the same time preserving the virtue and chastity of her sex unsuspected and unblemished, and was discharged from the service with a fair and honorable character . . . The Treasurer (is) directed to issue his note to the said Deborah for the sum of thirty-four pounds. . . . Approved John Hancock” (1792)

## Document B

“The virtuous and noble resolution of America’s sons, in defiance of threatened desolation and misery from arbitrary despots, demands our highest regard. . . . And be it known unto Britain, even American daughters are politicians and patriots, and will aid the good work with their female efforts.” *Mercy Warren (1774)*

## Document C

“I think there was hardly Ever so unfortunate a Famely. I am not willing to think it is all owing to misconduct. I have had some children that seemed to be doing well till they were taken off by Death. . . .” *Jane Franklin Mecom (late 1770s)*

## Document D

“Your favor of the 26th of October did not reach my hands till the middle of December . . . I apologize for the delay. . . . I thank you most sincerely for your polite notice of me in the elegant lines you enclosed . . . If you should ever come to Cambridge, or near headquarters, I shall be happy to see a person so favored by the Muses, and to whom nature has been so liberal and beneficent in her dispensations.” *George Washington (1776)*

## Document E

“Item, I leave all my Estate both real and personal to my dear wife during her widowhood and continuance in this Country, allowing my daughter . . . out of my Estate a Genteel Education and maintenance at the discretion of my Executors hereafter mentioned; . . . if my wife marries again or leaves this County then and in that case, my will and desire is that my said wife shall be deprived of the bequest already made her. . . .” *From the will of Gawin Corbin (1750s)*

## Document F

“If you will not laugh too immoderately at mee I’ll Trust you with a Secrett. I have made two wills already! I know I have done no harm, for I con’d [learned] my lesson very perfectly, and know how to convey by will, Estates, Real and Personal . . . . But after all what can I do if a poor Creature lies a-dying, and their family takes it into their head that I can serve them.” *Eliza Pinckney (1740s)*

- Oxford University Press, 1982), 111.
- Edmund S. Morgan, “Colonial Women,” in John H. Cary and Julius Weinberg, eds., *The Social Fabric: American Life from 1607 to the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), 68.
- Ann Firor Scott, “Self Portraits,” in L. K. Kerber and J. DeH. Mathews, eds., *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 68.
- Edith Patterson Meyer, *Petticoat Patriots of the American Revolution* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1976), 158.
- Lester Cohen, “Forward,” in *Mercy Warren, History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, Vol. I (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988), xvi.
- Elizabeth F. Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution* (Williamstown, Mass.: Corner Publisher, 1980), 77.
- John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, eds., *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), s.v. “Elizabeth Lucas Pinckney,” by Elise Pinckney.
- This assignment is similar to the DBQ (Document-Based-Question) on the Advanced Placement U.S. History Exam. Another possible essay assignment could read, “There is not always a good historical record to show what life was like for a group of people in the past.

What, do you think, allowed historians to know about the women in this article? Using the information given in this assignment, explain what record or traces of a woman’s life might have survived over the years. Give some examples.

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## About the Author

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# MYSTERIES OF ANCIENT EGYPT



1. Curse of the Pharaoh  
Disturb the tomb and you'll die a painful death. Is the curse just hogwash?

2. Riddle of the Sphinx  
What was the Sphinx, and why might it be considered a harsh teacher?



3. Impossible Feat  
How could the Egyptians have built the huge pyramids without power equipment, pulleys, or even wheels?

4. Unreadable Text  
What does this script, found on a sarcophagus, mean?  
(Hints: It's a name, and one of the characters resembles a letter in our alphabet.)