



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2020 Volume I: The Place of Woman: Home, Economy, and Politics

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## **Women in Fiction / Women in Fact: Power and Worth Exposed by Pandemics**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 20.01.10  
by Barbara A. Sasso

Women have always had power and worth, even behind masks of weakness forced upon them by society. Indeed, in primitive hunter-gatherer societies, women and men had equal roles. Historically, war and pandemics have precipitated more power for women in societies where their rights were limited.

While women's voices may have been silenced in politics, in history, and as artists, their social, artistic, and economic power was always felt behind the scenes, and portrayed vividly, not in historical documents, but in fictional voices. Ultimately, women in fiction are based on women in life, in real stories, and in families. This unit will touch on plays from ancient Greece, and examine the power of women in medieval fiction, where their voices were amplified after plagues, and encourage students to reflect on the value and importance of "women's work" – and the essential work of all marginalized people – that was exposed by the COVID-19 quarantine, which started just as the seminar for this unit began.

(Developed for AP Literature and Composition, grade 12; recommended for AP Literature and Composition, Women's Literature, Literature Survey Course, and Medieval Literature and History, grades 11-12)

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