



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1997 Volume III: American Maid: Growing Up Female in Life and Literature

All American Girl

Curriculum Unit 97.03.05
by Susan Norwood

In the history books that most of us read women have been excluded or only briefly mentioned. It became evident that for women to even consider any social or political changes, they would need to acquire a deeper understanding of their past. It was not until the last two decades that any substantial writings have been available on the study of women in our history. Fortunately, there has been an increased curiosity on the part of historians to research the role of women through history. Most of the evidence of women and their roles is documented in their diaries and letter writing. As it turns out the role that women have played in the development of our nation had a greater impact than previously recognized.

There are currently found in many bookstores and libraries today three very popular historical fiction series about young girls growing up and living during the beginning of our country's history. These have just become popular in the past decade. Before that most historical fiction available dealt with the tales of brave and courageous young men and boys. Young girls today are proving that they are interested in the roles and feelings of young girls of the past as well as young boys, as evidenced by the popularity of these books.

In the curriculum unit *All American Girl* I would like to use these historical novels to enhance the Social Studies curriculum for fourth and fifth graders by providing information on the roles that women had during three areas in history. The areas in history that the unit will be focusing on will be the colonial, revolutionary, and Civil War times. The unit will provide students with a history of women through literature. The three that I have chosen are *The American Girls Collection* published by Pleasant Company, *Dear America* published by Scholastic Inc., and, lastly, *American Diaries* published by Simon and Schuster Children's Division. Each content area will give a brief history of that time period and the roles that women played. At the end of each unit there will be two books to read from the corresponding historical series. They will be compared, contrasted, and critiqued. The books will be evaluated for accuracy, authenticity and interest to the reader. Each content area will also include a suggested reading list, women of interest for further research, and lessons that will enhance the curriculum. An emphasis will also be placed on what we can learn from these women, and what challenges girls are faced with in today's society.

Colonial American Women 1607-1770

In the early 1600's men, women, and children began to migrate from Europe to North America. Women as well as men came to seek religious freedom and for economic reasons.

In 1620 the Mayflower embarked on a voyage to start a new colony in Northern Virginia. The Mayflower landed in New England and anchored off the coast of Cape Cod on November 11, 1620. Rather than continue on to Virginia the colonists decided to stay and settle near Plymouth harbor. The Pilgrims (homeless travelers), as they were known, suffered greatly that winter with almost half of them dying. There were a hundred people on board the Mayflower and eleven of them were girls. Their ages ranged from one year to about sixteen. The Pilgrims' concern was that women and girls would not survive the long sea voyage. As it turns out none of the girls died, while two others, a man and a boy, did.

Most of the girls on the Mayflower came with their families, and others were sent because their families could no longer care for them. The first women to come on shore were sent because laundry needed to be done. When the colonists arrived they were faced with many hardships and challenges. They had to quickly accustom themselves to a new and different way of life. Most survived only with the aid of Native Americans, who taught the colonists how to cope in their new environment.

Most women continued to come to America because they wanted the opportunity for a better life. In the Virginia colonies women arrived in 1619 , after the threat of Indian attack and starvation was over. They came to marry the male settlers who had arrived some years earlier. Some were indentured servants and many of these were children.

Most of the colonial women received very little education . The colonial girls who were servants in other families were given the opportunity to learn how to read in exchange for their work. The majority of girls were taught by their mothers while they learned household skills. In the later colonial period, girls who were from an upper class or if they happened to lived near an "adventure school," did get some schooling. At these schools girls would take lessons in needle work, music ,dancing , drawing and painting. The better the penmanship the more accomplished the girl was thought to be. Social skills were taught by attending teas, country dances, and music lessons. Although literacy increased with some girls, it was still far behind literacy among boys.

The father in colonial families represented them outside the home. The father filled the family's obligation to the community and cast their vote in elections. Men controlled the finances and supervised all household affairs. The male would refer to other family members as "my family", and the woman of the household whose place was not equal to her spouse's in family affairs would refer to the family as "our family". The woman's role with her family was a private one compared to her spouse's public role. Women were expected to attend the hearth and find happiness there.

At home women were responsible for the preparation and processing of food. Women also took care of the dairying, feeding of animals, gardening ,brewing of cider and beer, slaughtering of animals and the smoking the meat. They were also the candle makers and soap makers. The women sewed their own clothes and quilted blankets. Quilt blocks were given specific names that dealt with the aspects of everyday life. Some influences in the naming of these blocks were trades, nature, religion, and dance, hence the names Anvil, Ocean Wave, Jacob's Ladder and Eight Hand Round. Women in the urban areas did more spinning of yarn than those in the rural areas who had more responsibility. The men's work cycle was considered a yearly one while

the women's was daily.

The women of colonial times were usually pregnant and caring for their young children. The second generation of colonial women had an average of about eight children. Childbirth was a fearful time for them. Death was an issue not to be dismissed with each birth. Childbirth was a communal affair attended by midwives and neighboring women.

Religion played an important role in the lives of women during the colonial period. Reading the bible was a daily practice and most colonial communities were religiously based. Although by the end of the colonial period girls were able to choose their husbands rather than have prearranged marriages, getting married was a major concern of colonial young women. Marriageable age was between seventeen and twenty-five years. If a young girl did not marry, it was probably because she was needed at home to care for a sick family member, but most women did eventually marry as was expected by society.

Lessons on Colonial America

Objectives

- To have the students use the media center to research the following women of colonial times.
- To have the students use the Big 6 (a research strategy) to obtain information.
- To have the students learn about colonial times in American history through literature.

Colonial Women of Interest

Anne Dudley Bradstreet (1612-1672): A poet who portrayed a Puritan view of life.

Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643): American religious leader whose religious beliefs were not shared by the Puritans. She started weekly meetings for women to discuss sermons they heard.

Pocahontas (1596-1616): A legendary Indian heroine at the English colony on Jamestown, Virginia.

Have the students create a time line depicting when these women appeared in colonial times in relationship to each other.

Have the students write a brief biographical sketch on each of the women listed below.

Historical Novels on Colonial Times

Duey, Kathleen. *Sarah Anne Hartford- Massachusetts, 1651* . American Diaries. This is the story of a young girl who breaks the Sabbath in Puritan New England.

Tripp, Valerie. *Changes for Felicity* . American Girls Collection. As tensions increase between the Patriots and the loyalists, Felicity is faced with changes in her friendships and family.

Related Questions and Evaluation of Novels

How do the stories depict the time period of colonialism?

What kind of life did they have?

How does it compare to the life girls live today?

How would you compare the two characters?

State excerpts from the book to describe how they set the time period.

Where in America did the stories take place?

Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?

Have the students answer the above questions and discuss the novels.

Writing Prompt

Describe the differences and similarities that Felicity or Sarah would feel if they were living in America today. What do you think they would miss the most and what do you think they would enjoy the most living in America today?

Additional Suggested Reading

Fritz, Jean. *The Cabin Faced West* . The story of a young girl who is unhappy after her family moves to the western Pennsylvania territory, until General George Washington comes to visit.

Bulla, Clyde Robert. *A Lion to Guard Us* . The story of three children who sail to America from England, to be reunited with their father who is in Jamestown, Virginia.

Dalglish, Alice. *The Courage of Sarah Noble* . The story of a young girl and her father, together they explore the Connecticut wilderness in 1707.

Clapp, Patricia. *Constance: A Story of Early Plymouth* . The journal of a young girl who travels from London to colonial America. The story describes the hardships and pleasure found in colonial life.

Field Trip

New Haven Colony Historical Society

14 Whitney Avenue

New Haven, Connecticut 06510

(203) 562-4189

The New Haven Colony Historical Society offers an educational program to students. *Everyday Life in Early New England* (Grades K-4) is a hands-on program that uses reproductions of common household goods from the 17th and 18th century to provide students with a sense of what life was like in New Haven during colonial times.

The Home and Textile Industry (Grades 2-Adult) is a program that shows students how to clean, card and spin wool. *Women and the American Revolution*

By 1760 the letters and diaries that women kept showed what was the beginning of a deep interest in politics. Many women felt it difficult to keep their feelings about the revolution silent. As the conflict with Britain increased, all of the colonists—men, women, and children—became involved.

Women replaced British goods with those made in America. Boycotts of consumer goods were the political exercise of women. Men actually asked their wives for their assistance with boycotts. For the first time women were being included in some political activity, though still on the outside.

City women organized mass spinning bees. In 1769 the Boston Evening Post carried an account of these Spinning Bees on its front page, rather than on the usual back pages. The articles spoke in praise of the women's significant endeavors on behalf of the war effort. The spinning bees were attended by women and they often called themselves Daughters of Liberty. The bees would usually take place at the home of a local minister. They would begin early in the morning, often spending the entire day at their wheels. They were engaged in conversation and drank locally -made herb tea. At night they would give the minister all that they produced. Many times the entire community became involved as spectators who provided them with entertainment and American food. Some bees were even held as competitions for their quality and quantity. The spinning bees were intended to show that American women as well as men, could make a much needed contribution to the struggle against Britain.

By 1783 the war created a generation of women who called themselves "great politicians". Women now read about the progress of the war and wanted just as much as men to be informed of any developments both in America and in Britain.

The political allegiances taking place in the colonies caused many differences in peoples' political views. Friendships and even marriages felt the strain that political views placed on them. These conflicts caused women to take an even more active role in the revolution. Some female activists were known as camp followers as they followed their husbands to war. The work was extremely dangerous and these women became an essential auxiliary to the American army. General Washington's army lacked a support staff so the troops became dependent on the women. They worked as cooks and laundresses. They were a comfort for the men and improved their morale. The women also worked as nurses, (only men were surgeons) doing menial labor. Many women became camp followers because they were unable to support themselves while their

husbands were away. Nonetheless, they had a choice.

The Great Awakening, a religious revival movement that started in England and came to America in the 1730's, redefined women's roles and created the idea of republican motherhood. It would be the patriotic duty of women to raise their sons to be virtuous and law abiding citizens. This new responsibility gave women a civic purpose. The Revolution initiated many theories dealing with legitimate government, but women were still excluded from political participation in many of them.

Republican motherhood questioned the lack of women's education and stimulated the founding of the first academies for women. These schools which were usually run by women offered a curriculum equal to men's. Schools offered women the chance to view themselves as a distant gender group. By the 1800's women had begun to organize religious and national groups.

Lessons on the Revolutionary War

Objectives

- To have the students learn about the Revolutionary War through literature.
- To provide students with reading and research materials on the Revolutionary War and the role that women played during that time period.

Revolutionary Women of Interest

Abigail Adams (1744-1818): Abigail Adams played an important role in the idea of women's rights and roles in our country.

Eliza Lucas Pinckney (1722-1793): Agriculturist and progressive leader in childhood education.

Deborah Sampson (1760-1827): The first known American woman to impersonate a man in order to join the army and participate in combat.

Phyllis Wheatly (1753-1784): A slave whose poetry became widespread, hence becoming America's first Black poet.

Have the students create a timeline depicting when these women appeared in Revolutionary War times.

Have the students write a brief biographical sketch on each of the women previously listed.

Historical Novels on the Revolutionary War

Duey, Kathleen. *Mary Alice Peale Philadelphia, 1777* American Diaries. This is the story of a young girl who helps her wounded brother who has joined General Washington's Continental Army.

Gregory, Kristina. *The Winter of Red Snow, The Revolutionary War Diary of Abigail Jane Stewart. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1777*. Dear America. This is the story of a young girl living in Valley Forge, while General Washington was there.

Related Questions and Evaluation of Novels

What were some of the changes that Abigail and Mary felt during the Revolutionary War?

How did the war affect their families?

What were some of the activities that the girls did during the war?

What were the beliefs of the Loyalists?

What were the beliefs of the Continental Army?

Where did the two stories take place?

What similarities did the girls' lives have?

What were some of the differences in their lives?

How were their lives similar to yours?

What did you learn about the Revolutionary War by reading these books?

Would you recommend either of these books to a friend and why?

Have the students answer and discuss the above questions.

Writing Prompt

Describe a day in the life of Deborah Sampson.

Additional Suggested Reading

Collier, James Lincoln, and Collier, Christopher. *War Comes to Willy Freeman*. The story of a 13-year-old black girl in Connecticut during the Revolutionary War.

Brady, Ester Wood. *Toliver's Secret*. A young girl acts as a patriot spy after her grandfather is injured.

O'Dell, Scott. *Sarah Bishop* . The story of a young girl whose father and brother are killed during the Revolutionary War.

Made in America

During the Revolutionary war many of the colonists boycotted items made in England. Have the students create a graph depicting where a variety of items they use everyday are made. What effect would a boycott of these goods have on our lives today?

Field Trip

The New Haven Colony Historical Society

The Pardee-Morris House

325 Light House Road

New Haven, CT. (203) 562-4103

The Pardee-Morris house was built in 1685 and was burned down during the British Invasion of New Haven in 1779. The house a been restored to represent that time period. Classes can be taken to the Pardee-Morris house by contacting the Educational programmer at the New Haven Colonial Historical Society.

The Historical Society also offers a slide presentation on the Revolutionary War.

The Civil War and Women 1861-1865

The Civil War which began in 1861 and ended four years later in 1865, had a profound effect on the women who lived during that time. Black women felt the impact of the war on their family life. While the war would mean greater opportunity for freedom and other opportunities to rejoin relatives in other parts of the south, it also meant that the chance of separation of black families was greater because the Confederate government used male slaves as laborers to support their war effort. Slave women not only lost track of husbands and sons, but had to protect their children from hunger, illness, or even Confederate raiders who might do them harm.

White women were also affected by the war. As was the case during the Revolutionary War, domestic activities took on political meaning, but the seventy-five years since then had given women a lot of experience in how to organize their energies. Two weeks after the war began women formed thousands of aid societies to support the armies with supplies and money. In both the north and south women volunteered as doctors and nurses. Many ran farms, plantations, and businesses while the men were at war. Women in metropolitan areas found work in factories, in teaching and some found employment with the treasury department after men went to war, although the public did not approve of women working with men in the same office. Most women did end up in factories and managed to survive even under very poor conditions. Women with children

generally avoided factories, and instead worked at home doing war-related piece work.

The Civil War created a situation wherein women were able to develop skills of organization that would serve them in public and political activities more than ever before in American history. One example of their efforts in the political arena was the work of the women's rights leaders who organized the Women's National Loyal League to petition the American congress to abolish slavery. By the end of the war they had collected 400,000 signatures. These wartime activities became newsworthy and suggested a shift in gender roles, giving women increased acceptance in the public sphere.

Lessons on the Civil War

Objectives

- To provide students with reading and research material on the Civil War to create a clearer understanding of the role that women had during that time in history.
- To teach students about the Civil War through literature.

Women of Interest during the Civil War

Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906): A women suffrage leader.

Clara Barton (1821-912) :A famous nurse during the Civil War.

Sarah Grimke and Angelina Grimke: (1792-1873, 1805-1879) Daughters of a slave holding family, the Grimke sisters helped pioneer the antislavery and women's rights movement.

Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910): An American author and reformer.

Lucy Stone (1818-1893): American feminist and abolitionist.

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883): An effective speaker on the rights of women and blacks.

Harriet Tubman (1820 -1913): Served as a nurse and cook for the Union Army during the Civil War. She also acted as a scout and a spy.

Have the students create a timeline depicting when and where these women appeared during the Civil War.

Have the students write a brief biographical sketch on each of women previously listed.

Historical Novels on the Civil War

Denenberg, Barry. *When Will this Cruel War be Over? The Civil War diary of Emma Simpson. Gordonsville, Virginia, 1864* . The story depicts in diary form the life of a young girl living in Virginia during the Civil War.

Porter, Connie. *Meet Addy*. American Girl Collection. The series begins with Addy trying to escape slavery and ends with the struggle Addy endures in trying to unite her family after the Civil War ends.

Related Questions and Evaluation of Novels

What were some of the main differences in the lives of Emma and Addy?

Where were each of the girls from?

What were the life styles of the two girls?

How were the lives of the two girls similar?

What effect did the Civil War have on both of the girls?

How did the war affect each of their families?

What activities did the girls do?

Do you think the two girls could have been friends if they had ever met?

Would you recommend these books to a friend and why?

Have the students answer the above questions and hold discussions on the books and time periods in which they occurred.

Writing Prompt

During the Civil War many people were treated unfairly. In our everyday lives we treat each other unfairly or unkindly without even thinking about it . Write about a time you were treated unfairly or unkindly and how it made you feel. What did you learn from this experience on how you should treat others?

Additional Suggested Reading

Humerace, Belinda. *A Girl Called Boy* . The story of a contemporary girl who travels back into the time of slavery.

Humerace, Belinda. *Tancy* . The story takes place at the end of the Civil War, when a young girl searches for her mother who was sold into slavery when she was a baby.

Clapp, Patricia. *The Tamarack Tree* . A young girl originally from England gives an account of the Civil War from her experience at the forty-seven day siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Field Trip

The New Haven Colony Historical Society

The Grove Street Cemetery

227 Grove Street

New Haven, CT. 10655

The Historical society offers tours of the Grove Street Cemetery which is the first chartered burial ground in the United States. At the cemetery students will be able to trace New Haven's historical history. Roger Sherman, Eli Whitney, Josiah Willard Gibbs, Lyman Beecher and Dr. Worthington Hooker are just a few of the famous gravesides students can view.

Culminating Unit Lesson

This unit provides teachers with the opportunity to hold group discussions with the entire class or small groups to discuss the issues that confront girls in today's society,

as a culminating lesson. Teachers should provide students with information on topics such as drugs, divorce, death and other issues. The students should be encouraged to keep journals or diaries to express their feelings.

Student Bibliography

Annotations of the following historical novels can be found in the text of this paper.

Brady, Ester Wood. *Toliver's Secret*. New York: Random House Inc.,1976.

Bulla, Clyde Robert. *A Lion to Guard Us* . Illus. Michele Chessare. New York: Harper and Row, 1989.

Clapp, Patricia. *Constance: A Story of Early Plymouth* . New York: Lothrop,1968.

Clapp, Patricia. *The Tamarac Tree* . New York, NY.: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1986.

Collier, James Collier, and Collier, Christopher. *War Comes to Willy Freeman* . New York: Delacorte Press,1983.

Dalgliesh, Alice. *The Courage of Sarah Noble*. Illus. Leonard Weisgard. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.

Denenberg, Barry. *When Will this Cruel War be Over? : The Civil War Diary of*

Emma Simpson, Gordonsville, Virginia,1864. (Dear America ; 1) New York, NY.: Scholastic, Inc.,1996.

Deuy, Kathleen. *Mary Alice Peale, Philadelphia,1777*. (American Diaries; #1) New York, NY.: Simon and Shuster,1996.

Duey, Kathleen. *Sarah Anne Hartford, Massachusetts,1961* . (American Diaries; #4) New York, NY.: Simon and Shuster,1996.

Fritz, Jean. *The Cabin Faced West* . Illus. Feodor Rojankovsky. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1958.

Gregory, Kristine. *The Winter of the Red Snow: The Revolutionary War Diary of Abigail Jane Stewart, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania,1777 to July 1778*. (Dear America ; 2) New York, NY.: Scholastic Inc.,1996.

Tripp, Valerie. *Happy Birthday, Felicity: A Springtime Story*. (American Girls Collection) Illus. Dan Anderson. New York, NY.: Scholastic Inc., 1991.

Porter, Connie. *Meet Addy: An American Girl* (American Girls Collection) Illus. Melodye Rosales. New York, NY.: Scholastic Inc., 1994.

Hurmenace, Belinda. *Tancy* . New York, NY.: Clarion Books, 1984.

Hurmenace, Belinda. *A Girl Called Boy*. New York, NY.: Carion Books, 1982.

O'Dell, Scott. *Sarah Bishop* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980.

DeClue, Denise. *Women Shaping History*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Raintree publishers Limited,1979.

This juvenile literature offers biographies of women who were prominent in the women's movements from colonial times to present.

Egger-Bovet, Howard and Smith-Baranzini, Marlene. *Brown Paper School. USKids History: Book of the American Revolution*. Illus. Bill Sanchez. Boston: Little, Brown and Company,1994.

Discusses the events leading up to the Revolutionary War and life in the colonies during that time.

Egger-Bovet, Howard and Smith-Baranzini, Marlene. *Brown Paper School. USKids History: Book of the American Colonies*. Illus. D.J. Simison. Boston: Little, Brown and Company,1996.

Discusses the growth of the American colonies.

Hakim, Joy. *A History of Us. From Colonies to Country. Book Three* . New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 1993.

An excellent series containing 10 volumes. Volume three contains information about a variety of Americans during the colonial period to the revolution.

Warner, John F. *Colonial American Home Life*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1993.

This is the second book in a series that describes the social life and customs of the people in the American colonies.

Teacher Bibliography

Evens, Sara M. *Born for Liberty. A History of Women in America*. New York, NY.: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1989.

This book gives an excellent overview of the lives and roles of women American history.

Forester, Margaret. *Significant Sisters. The Grassroots of Active Feminism 1839-1939*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1984.

This book offers an excellent account of two important American women from the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Blackwell and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Kerber, Linda K., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

A resourceful anthology of women's history in America.

Norton, Mary Beth. *Liberty's Daughter. The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980.

This book offers an in-depth study of American women during the eighteenth century

Zophy, Angela Howard, editor, and Kevenik, Frances M., associate editor. *Handbook of American Women's History* . Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (Vol.696), 1990.

A reference guide to American women's history.

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