

THE QUOTABLE WOMAN SPEAKS
Living History Portraits of Amazing Women

Study Guide & Discussion Points

Maya Angelou once said, “The more you know of your history, the more liberated you are.” Let’s face it: women still aren’t treated equally. Women still have to battle for equal pay, reproductive rights, and equal representation in government—not to mention being treated like human beings and not objects! For these reasons and more, women’s history is important. And that means we need to know about how women in history have contributed to literature, the arts, science and politics. Here we meet six such women.

Before watching this program, bear in mind that the women being portrayed are real women from history and the words spoken by the actress portraying them, once she is in full costume and on location, were written by the historic women, not the screenwriter who arranged passages from their works into the monologues being presented.

GENERAL DISCUSSION POINTS

1. By watching these portrayals, do you get a sense of what each woman was like? Do you think that’s important?
2. Had you heard of any of these women before? Which ones? Of those with whom you were not familiar, how do you feel about that? Why do you think so little is mentioned of them? Does this contrast with what you know about the history of the period in which she lived?
3. Why do you think women’s history is important?

MURASAKI SHIKIBU

(c. 973/978 – c. 1014/1031)

1. Many scholars conclude that she, in the 11th century, wrote the world’s first novel; does that surprise you? Why?
2. Famous in her native Japan, she barely receives a mention in the Western literature. What do you think of that?
4. Murasaki Shikibu was her pen name? Why do authors use pen names? Do you think women do so more often than men? Why?
5. Since most women did not learn to read and write in those days, what do you think the difficulties were that Murasaki had to overcome?

JUANA INEZ DE LA CRUZ

(1651 – 17 April 1695)

1. The church asked her to stop her intellectual and literary activities. Why do you suppose they did that?
2. How do you think coming from two different worlds—a native Mexican mother and a Spanish military man for a father—affected her thinking and ideas? How does this resonate in today’s world?
3. Sor Juana viewed the kitchen as a chemistry lab; have you ever approached cooking that way?

SARAH WINNEMUCCA
(c. 1844-1891)

1. Was what happened to Sarah's tribe—the Piute Indians—similar or different from the experiences of other Native Americans at that time? How so?
2. Do you see parallels for what is going on today with Native Americans? If so, what are they?
3. Travelling was arduous in Sarah's day. What do you suppose a journey across America—from the West to D.C.—was like in the mid-18th century?

SOJOURNER TRUTH
(c. 1797 – 1883)

1. Did it surprise you to learn there was slavery in New York? Why?
2. Though Sojourner never learned to read or write, she nonetheless created her autobiography and was a great orator and storyteller; she was a giant in the abolition movement. How do you imagine she gained those skills? Here's a hint: she once said, "I can't read books but I can read the people."
3. In the United States, slaves were freed at the conclusion of the Civil War. What has the aftermath been for Blacks in our country?

GOLDA MEIR
(1898 – 1978)

1. Were you surprised that Golda Meir was born in Kiev? Or that she grew up in Milwaukee? Had you ever heard of her before today?
2. Zionism is the movement that motivated her to immigrate to Israel. Have you ever considered moving to another country? If so, what motivated you?
3. Israel has been the center of controversy ever since its founding in 1948. Do you think a land can be built somewhere in the world for a new, separate, independent country? What are the problems that surround such an effort?

BENAZIR BHUTTO
(1953 – 2007)

1. Does it surprise you that a woman headed up a middle-eastern or central Asian country where, generally speaking, women are considered second-class citizens and are often uneducated?
2. What do you think of powerful family dynasties where the offspring carry on in their parents' tradition? Are they any different from the middle-class adult child who takes over his or her parents' business? What about political families like the Bushes, Kennedys, and Clintons?
3. Do you think women in powerful political positions can be as effective as men? If so, why? If not, why not?