

Women's Rights and Education DBQ

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying Documents 1-12. The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise. Your teacher may provide additional instructions and advice to use when answering the question below.

Prompt: Analyze the various ideas and attitudes towards women during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Historical Background: As parts of Europe began to stress ideas regarding equality during the 18th and 19th century, various views emerged on this issue in regards to women.

Document 1

Source: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, French writer and philosopher, *Émile*, (ostensibly a novel, but more like a treatise on education) a study of a fictional boy, Émile, as he progressed through life. This selection deals with Émile's relationship with his female fictional counterpart, Sophie, 1762.

They [women] ought to learn multitudes of things, but only those which it becomes them to know. Whether I consider the particular destination of woman, or observe her inclinations, or take account of her duties, everything concurs equally to indicate to me the form of education which befits her.

On the good constitution of mothers depends, in the first place, that of children; on the care of women depends the early education of men; and on women, again, depend their manners, their passions, their tastes, their pleasures, and even their happiness. Thus the whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life agreeable and sweet to them – these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from infancy.

Document 2

Source: Jacques-Louis David, artist and painter, *Monsieur Lavoisier* and his Wife*, 1788.

* a celebrated French scientist



Source credit: E Lessing/age fotostock

Document 3

Source: Olympe de Gouges, French writer and supporter of *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman*, 1791.

Man, are you capable of justice? The question is being put to you by a woman; and you will at least not deny her the right to do this. Tell me. What has given you the sovereign right to oppress my sex? Your strength? Your talents? Observe the creator in all his wisdom; look at nature in all its grandeur, to which it seems you want to be close, and give me an example, if you date, of such tyrannical control as this. ... Seek out, inspect and distinguish, if you can, the sexes in the workings of nature. Everywhere you will find them merged; everywhere they work together as a harmonious whole within this immortal work or art.

Source credit: From *THE ENLIGHTENMENT*, edited by David Williams, published by Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Document 4

Source: Mary Wollstonecraft, British author and initial supporter of the French Revolution, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, 1792.

My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists. I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity, and that kind of love which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.

Document 5

Source: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German poet, writer, and playwright, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels*, 1795-96.

How few are the men to whom it is given to return regularly like a star, to command their day as they command their night; to form for themselves their household instruments, to sow and to reap, to gain and to expand, and to travel round their circle with perpetual success and peace and love! It is when a woman has attained this inward mastery, that she truly makes the husband who she loves, a master; her attention will acquire all sorts of knowledge; her activity will turn them all to profit. Thus is she dependent upon no one; and she procures her husband genuine independence, that which is interior and domestic: whatever he possesses, he beholds secured; what he earns, well employed; and thus he can direct his mind to lofty subjects; and, if fortune favors, he may act in the state the same character which so well becomes his wife at home.

Document 6

Source: Mrs. John Sandford (Elizabeth Poole Sandford), middle-class British wife and writer, *Woman in Her Social and Domestic Character*, 1842.

Nothing is so likely to conciliate the affections of the other sex as a feeling that woman looks to them for support and guidance. In proportion as men are themselves superior, they are accessible to this appeal. On the contrary, they never feel interested in one who seems disposed rather to offer than to ask assistance. There is, indeed, something unfeminine in independence. It is contrary to nature, and therefore it offends. We do not like to see a woman affecting tremors, but still less do we like to see her acting the amazon. A really sensible woman feels her dependence. She does what she can, but she is conscious of inferiority, and therefore grateful for support. She knows that she is the weaker vessel, and that as such she should receive honor. In this view, her weakness is an attraction, not a blemish.

Document 7

Source: Caroline Norton, English feminist and social reformer, A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor's Marriage and Divorce Bill, 1855.

Nevertheless, so long as human nature is what it is, some marriages must be unhappy marriages, instead of following that theory of intimate and sacred union which they ought to fulfil: and the question is, therefore, what is to be the relation of persons living in a state of alienation, instead of a state of union,—all the existing rules for their social position being based on the first alternative,—namely, that they *are* in a state of union,—and on the supposition that marriage is indissoluble, though Parliament has now decided that it is a civil contract? Divorced or undivorced, it is absolutely necessary that the law should step in, to arrange that which is disarranged by this most unnatural condition. It becomes perfectly absurd that the law which appoints the husband legal protector of the woman, should not (failing him who has ceased to be a protector, and has become a very powerful foe) itself undertake her protection. She stands towards the law, by an illustration which I have repeatedly made use of,—in the light of an ill-used inferior; and she is the *only* inferior in England who cannot claim to be so protected

Document 8

Source: Jules Michelet, French nationalist historian concerned about declining French marriage and birth rates, *Love*, a marriage manual addressed to men, 1860.

It is the paradise of marriage that the man shall work for the woman; that he alone shall support her, take pleasure in enduring fatigue for her sake, and spare her the hardships of labor, and rude contact with the world.

He returns home in the evenings, harassed, suffering from toil, mental and bodily, from the weariness of worldly things, from the baseness of men. But in his reception at home there is such an infinite kindness, a calm so intense, that he hardly believes in the cruel realities he has gone through all the day.

This is woman's mission (more important than generation even), to renew the heart of man. Protected and nourished by the man, she in turn nourishes him with love.

...Man's business is to earn money, hers to spend it: that is to say, to regulate the household expenditures, better than man would.

Document 9

Source: Jenny P. d'Hericourt, feminist activist, participant in the Revolution of 1848, and writer, *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman, or Woman Affranchised: An Answer to Michelet*, 1860.

Take care, gentlemen! Our rights have the same foundation as yours: in denying the former, you deny the latter in principle.

..... Do you know why, in 1848, so many women, especially among the people, declared themselves for the Revolution? It was because they hoped that this Revolution would be more consistent with respect to them than the former had been.

When, in their senseless arrogance and lack of intelligence, the representatives not only forbid them to assemble, but *drove* them from the assemblies of men, the women abandoned the Revolution by detaching their husbands and sons from it, and you know what ensued.

Do you comprehend at last?

I will tell you truly; all your struggles are in vain, if woman does not go with you.

Document 10

Source: John Stuart Mill, English liberal writer and philosopher, *The Subjection of Women* (he credits his wife with co-writing), 1869.

The masters of all other slaves rely, for maintaining obedience, on fear; either fear of themselves, or religious fears. The masters of women wanted more than simple obedience, and they turned the whole force of education to effect their purpose. All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections.

Document 11

Source: Frederick Engels, German political philosopher and co-founder of Marxist theory, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884

As regards the legal equality of husband and wife in marriage, the position is no better. The legal inequality of the two partners, bequeathed to us from earlier social conditions, is not the cause but the effect of the economic oppression of the woman....Not until the coming of modern large-scale industry was the road to social production opened to her again – and then only to the proletarian wife. But it was opened in such a manner that, if she carries out her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and unable to earn; and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out family duties. And the wife's position in the factory is the position of women in all branches of business, right up to medicine and the law. The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules.

Document 12

Source: Mid to late 19th century engraving, *Les Fiancés*, by H. Eichens, 1885.



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