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## Duration

One or two class sessions of approximately 40 minutes each

## Resources

### 1. YouTube Video: Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?"



[marcoap.co/truth](https://marcoap.co/truth)

### 2. Student Activities



## Objectives of Lesson

- To compare two different accounts of the same historical event
- To analyze a source in light of speaker, audience, and rhetorical occasion
- To assess the intersection of gender and race in the history of women's rights in America

## College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- **Topic 4.11:** The Age of Reform (p. 105)
- **Key Concept 4.1.III.C:** "A women's rights movement sought to create greater equality and opportunities for women expressing its ideals at the Seneca Falls Convention."
- **Topic 4.12:** African Americans in the Early Republic (p. 106)
- **Key Concept 4.1.II.D:** "Enslaved blacks and free African Americans created communities and strategies to protect their dignity and family structures and they joined political structures aimed at changing their status."
- **Topic 5.5:** Sectional Conflict: Regional Differences (pp. 121–122)
- **Key Concept 5.2.I.B:** "African American and white abolitionists, although a minority in the North, mounted a highly visible campaign against slavery, presenting moral arguments against the institution, assisting slave escapes, and sometimes expressing a willingness to use violence to achieve these goals."

## Student Activities

- Read and annotate two accounts of Sojourner Truth's speech at the 1851 Akron Women's Rights Convention.
- Respond to sourcing questions about these two accounts.
- Hypothesize about the reasons for the differences in the accounts.
- Research what historians have proposed as reasons for the differences in the accounts.

## How to Use This Lesson

This lesson can be used to discuss the historical content of the women's rights movement and how it overlapped with the abolitionists' movement. It also can be used to stress the importance and value of sourcing and contextualization in historical analysis. Frances Gage's account of Sojourner Truth's speech at the 1851 Akron Women's Rights Convention has become one of the most widely recognized pieces of oratory in American history. However, what many don't realize is that Gage's account was not published until 12 years after the event and it differs significantly from a newspaper account of the speech that was published just one month after the event. These two different accounts offer an excellent opportunity to apply the skills of historical sourcing in order to understand how sourcing can help historians assess conflicting accounts of the same historical event.

## The Process

- Step 1: Introduce the speech:** Provide students a brief background of the women's rights movement and the Seneca Falls Convention. Give the students a basic introduction to Sojourner Truth and the 1851 Akron Women's Rights Convention.
- Step 2: Read and annotate:** Have students read and annotate Frances Gage's 1863 account of Sojourner Truth's speech. You can show the video performance we filmed of the 1863 speech. This is the account that became famous and from which the speech became known as the "Ain't I A Woman" speech. (**NOTE:** Do not stress to the students the date of Gage's account or the fact that it is published 12 years after the event. See if the students pick up on this and if they think it is significant. Also, do not mention that you will be analyzing the second, 1851 account yet, and don't hand the students that part of the assignment until you are finished with the discussion of Gage's account.)
- Step 3: Sourcing and analysis:** Have students complete the sourcing and analysis questions for this speech and discuss their answers.
- Step 4: Read and annotate:** After completing steps 1–3, provide the students with Marius Robinson's 1851 account of the speech from the *Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle*.
- Step 5: Analyze and source:** Have students complete the sourcing, comparison, and analysis questions and discuss their answers.
- Step 6: Hypothesize and research:** Have students hypothesize about the reasons and motivations behind the differences in the accounts. If time allows or for homework, have the students research what professional historians have said about the reasons for the differences in the accounts, and have each write a brief summary of what they find in their research.

## Introduction

In 1851, three years after the Seneca Falls convention, a woman's rights convention was held in Akron Ohio. Numerous activists gave speeches in support of women's rights at this meeting. One of those activists was Sojourner Truth. She was familiar to the people attending the convention because she'd previously published a narrative about her life as a slave. She was not scheduled to speak, but on the second day of the convention she took an opportunity to address the audience. The speech she gave eventually turned into the famous "Ain't I A Woman" speech. While many have heard its title and can recite some lines from it, there's a very complex story behind this famous speech that historians can explore to help us better understand American society then and now.

As budding historians, you will take up this task. As you get started, there are a few things you should understand about the context of this speech. This was not a prepared speech. It was extemporaneous, and recording devices were not yet invented. In fact, Sojourner Truth could not read or write so she was unable to write out this speech in her own words. However, by all accounts it was a very powerful speech, and consequently it was covered by a local newspaper. The speech was memorable, and as the women's rights and abolitionist movements continued through the 1850s and 1860s, Sojourner Truth remained an active spokesperson for the movements. Eventually, this led to a republication of her speech in 1863 in an account by Frances Gage. Gage was the president of the Akron Women's Rights Convention, and in 1863, she read an article published by Harriet Beecher Stowe that described Sojourner Truth. Gage decided to expand on this story and retell the events of the Akron Convention that had happened 12 years earlier. In this retelling of the story, Gage wrote out the "Ain't I A Woman" speech that you will analyze below.

## Part 1

Read and annotate the account of the speech according to the instructions.

### Annotation instructions:

1. Highlight or underline any information within the prompt or passage that relates to the context.
2. Circle any evidence that reveals something about the audience.
3. Bracket any information that is revealed about the speaker.
4. Write notes in the margins about important or confusing vocabulary, as well as questions or insights that you have about the text.

**Source: "Sojourner Truth" by Mrs. F.D. Gage, *Independent*  
April 23, 1862**

The second day the work waxed warm. Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Pres- byterian, and Universalist ministers came in to hear and discuss the resolutions brought forth. One claimed superior rights  
*Line* and privileges for man because of su- perior intellect; another because  
5 of the manhood of Christ. If God had desired the equality of woman, he would have given some token of his will through the birth, life, and death of the Savior. Another gave us a theological view of the awful sin of our first mother. There were few women in those days that dared to "speak in meeting," and the august teachers of the people, with long-  
10 winded bombast, were seeming to get the better of us, while the boys in the galleries and sneerers among the pews were enjoying hugely the discomfiture, as they supposed, of the strong-minded. Some of the tender-skinned friends were growing indignant and on the point of losing dignity, and the atmosphere of the convention betokened a storm.

## NOTES

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## Part 2

Answer the following historical sourcing questions. One set of questions asks for you to analyze the sourcing information for the original speech. The other set asks you to analyze the sourcing of Gage's account of the speech. The background information at the beginning of this assignment as well as your own knowledge of this era will be helpful in addressing these questions.

### Set 1

1. What was the historical context for the Akron Women's Rights Convention and Sojourner Truth's speech?

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2. Who was the intended audience for Sojourner Truth's speech in Akron, Ohio in 1851?

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3. Describe the point of view of Sojourner Truth as she delivered the speech in 1851.

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4. Describe Sojourner Truth's purpose in delivering her speech.

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**Set 2**

1. What was the historical context for the publication of Gage’s article on Sojourner Truth, published in 1863?

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2. Who was the intended audience for Gage’s article on Sojourner Truth?

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3. Describe the point of view of Frances Gage as she wrote her article in 1863.

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4. Describe Frances Gage’s purpose in writing her article in 1863.

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5. Write a paragraph in which you explain why any of the answers that you have given above might affect our historical understanding of the “Aint I a Woman” speech.

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**Answer the following historical sourcing questions.**

1. What is the historical context for the publication of the speech in this article?

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2. Who was the intended audience for this article?

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3. What was the point of view of Marius Robinson as he recounted the speech in this article?

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4. What was Marius Robinson's purpose as he wrote the article?

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**Analyze these accounts as a historian.**

1. Describe the similarities in these two accounts of Sojourner Truth’s speech.

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2. Describe the differences in these two accounts of Sojourner Truth’s speech.

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3. Hypothesize about why the differences exist.

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4. Explain the ways these two different accounts of the speech alter our understanding of:

- Sojourner Truth
- Frances Gage
- The Women’s Rights movement
- The Abolitionist movement

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