

Name: _____ Class: _____

Ain't I a Woman?

By Sojourner Truth
1851

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) was an African American women's rights activist and abolitionist who fought to end slavery. Truth was born into slavery but escaped to freedom in 1826. "Ain't I a Woman?" is her most famous speech, which she delivered without preparation at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in 1851. As you read, identify language that reveals Truth's experiences as a black woman.

[1] Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women of the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I could have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man — when I could get it — and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [Intellect, somebody whispers] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negro's rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure-full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

[5] If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone,¹ these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.



"Sojourner Truth c. 1870" by Randall Studio is in the public domain.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

"Ain't I a Woman?" by Sojourner Truth (1851) is in the public domain.

1. Here Truth is referencing Eve, from the Book of Genesis, who takes a bite of fruit from the forbidden tree, and shares that fruit with Adam. Both Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden by God, which is what Truth alludes to when she says the first woman "turn[ed] the world upside down."

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best summarizes Sojourner Truth’s argument in “Ain’t I A Woman?” [RI.2]
 - A. Women work harder and sacrifice more than men, and thus deserve greater privileges than men.
 - B. Women will not receive equal rights until men acknowledge that black women are equal to white women.
 - C. There is no one type of woman and as a result, men should stop telling women what to do.
 - D. Women of all races deserve the same rights as men regardless of their capabilities.

2. PART B: What evidence from the text best supports your answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. “I think that ‘twixt the negroes of the South and the women of the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon.” (Paragraph 1)
 - B. “That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere.” (Paragraph 2)
 - C. “I could have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me!” (Paragraph 2)
 - D. “If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again!” (Paragraph 5)

3. Which statement best describes how paragraph 2 contributes to the meaning of the speech? [RI.5]
 - A. She undermines expectations of what a woman should be by sharing the injustices she experienced as a black woman.
 - B. She demonstrates how women need help from men in order to work and live successfully by discussing how difficult her work was.
 - C. She highlights what it is like to be an enslaved woman to show just how important it is to fight for emancipation.
 - D. She paints white male slave owners as villains by demonstrating how much she has suffered as a slave.

4. "If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure-full?" What does this quote from paragraph 3 mean as it is used in the excerpt, and how does it impact the meaning of Truth's speech? [RI.4]

5. PART A: Which of the following best describes Truth's tone in the passage?

- A. critical
- B. pessimistic
- C. begging
- D. serene

6. PART B: Which phrase from the speech best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]

- A. "I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me!" (Paragraph 2)
- B. "Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it?" (Paragraph 3)
- C. "Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him." (Paragraph 4)
- D. "Obliged to you for hearing me" (Paragraph 6)

7. How does Truth's repeated use of rhetorical questions develop her central argument? [RI.5] Explain your answer using evidence from the text.
