

## **EXPRESSING POLITICAL OPINIONS**

### **Download Lesson Plan PDF**

This lesson explores how women expressed their political voices before they had right to vote and asks students to express themselves creatively. This lesson may take one to two class sessions.

## **STANDARDS**

- United States History National Standards: Era 5, Civil War and Reconstruction (1850 – 1877); Standard 2
- Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts, grade 8: Writing, 3, 4, 5; Speaking and Listening 1, 2, 4; Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 1, 2
- College, Career and Civic Life Framework: Dimension 2. History 12. 6-8

**Note to teachers:** If you are studying the Civil War, focus this activity on the unique experience of women living in a border state. How did women express their political sentiments? If you are not studying the Civil War, use this lesson as a way to experiment with expressive writing inspired by history. Consider previewing Maryland's Heart of the Civil War film to provide historical context.

## **PROCEDURE**

1. Discuss how the experiences of women living in border states during the Civil War, such as Maryland, may have

been unique. Heavy fighting happened in this region; homesteads and landscapes were turned into battlefields and graveyards overnight. Troops from both sides occupied buildings, towns and farms stocking up on supplies or seeking respite and medical care. Brainstorm with students how, historically, a person might have expressed feelings and opinions about the homefront experience.

2. Look at the examples of how women expressed their political voices and opinions in the Maryland's Heart of the Civil War film and on the [crossroadsofwar.org](http://crossroadsofwar.org) website (see **Content Resources**). How do these primary and secondary sources describe the role and point of view of women? What do we know of the experience of some women and why? Who do we not know as much about? Review the poem about Barbara Fritchie by John Greenleaf Whittier and diary entries of Catherine Susannah Markell. How are these sources different? Who is the intended audience for each? What might be their purpose?
3. Brainstorm what it might have been like to have been a woman living in a city with divided loyalties such as Frederick, Maryland, during this time. Create a word cloud with student responses. To prompt discussion, ask: What was the environment like? How might female residents have felt? Why? End the discussion by reviewing aloud.
4. Inspired by class discussion and **Content Resources**, students compose a poem. Consider using the Express Yourself worksheet as an organizational tool. If poetry is intimidating, try using straightforward, accessible formats such as a haiku or tanka (both forms of Japanese poetry). A haiku is a 3 line poem: 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables.

A tanka has 5 lines: 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 7 syllables.

5. After students have written poems, make time to share. Students may choose to read their poems aloud. You can also collect the work and read aloud poems at random or consider having the students trade poems and read each other's work silently.

## EXTENSIONS

Poems are a great way to close a visit to a historic site, park or battlefield. Consider asking students to write additional poems that capture experiences on field trips or something else they feel passionate about. This lesson is an opportunity for students to read letters, diaries, and newspapers to gain a fuller appreciation for writing styles of the Civil War era.

## CONTENT RESOURCES

As students review these, depending on their needs, consider creating a graphic organizer to help students analyze primary source materials. Can students summarize each source?

### About Barbara Fritchie:

- Clip from *Maryland's Heart of the Civil War* film: [14:00-15:25](#)
- *A Collection of Commentaries* flipbook: [chapter 4, pages 94 - 103](#)
- Video clip from flipbook: [Barbara Fritchie, the woman and the poem](#)
- Video clip from flipbook of John Greenleaf Whittier's poem, "[The Ballad of Barbara Fritchie](#)"

- Text of John Greenleaf Whittier's poem, "[The Ballad of Barbara Fritchie](#)"

### **About Mary Quantrell:**

- Text from flipbook: [chapter 4, pages 100 - 105](#)
- Video clip from flipbook of [Mary Quantrell's first person account](#)

### **About Catherine Markell:**

- Text from flipbook: [chapter 2, pages 42 - 43](#)
- Video clip from flipbook: [Providing for Confederate troops](#)
- Video clip from flipbook: [Greeting Confederate generals](#)

### **About Mary W. Neale:**

- Text from flipbook: [chapter 5, pages 109 - 110](#)
- Video clip from flipbook: [Colonel Rosser](#)

### **Information on the experience of women:**

- [Women & children in the midst of war](#)

### **Experiences of enslaved women:**

- [All Saints' Church, Frederick, MD](#)
- [St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Lappans, MD](#)
- [Tolson's Chapel, Sharpsburg, MD](#)

## **EXPRESS YOURSELF WORKSHEET**

Think about the conversations you've had in class. Read through the word cloud, watch the film, and review the images on the

crossroadsofwar.org website. Take your time and be quiet. Here are some questions that may help prompt your poetry writing.

1. What object (or image, artifact, poem, phrase, or story) captures your attention? Why does it stick out in your memory? Use descriptive words.
2. Who might have made that object or been the center of that story? What is it about that person that is captivating or interesting? Are you left with questions?
3. How might it have felt to be in the middle of a contested, occupied city in a border state such as Frederick, Maryland, during the Civil War? Hint: look at the word cloud for inspiration.
4. Close your eyes and think about what everyday life in a Civil War city might have sounded, smelled, and looked like back then. Do any additional words or phrases come to mind?
5. Start writing your poem and see where you end up.

[Download Lesson Plan PDF](#)