

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 7: Lesson 10 Read and analyze an excerpt from a speech by Lucretia Mott

Discourse on Women (excerpted)

Lucretia Mott  
1849

The question is often asked, “What does woman want, more than she enjoys? What is she seeking to **obtain**? Of what rights is she **deprived**? What **privileges** are withheld from her?” I answer, she asks nothing as favor, but as right, she wants to be acknowledged a **moral**, responsible being. She is seeking not to be governed by laws, in the making of which she has no voice. She is deprived of almost every right in **civil society**, and is a **cypher** in the nation, except in the right of presenting a **petition**. In religious society her disabilities, as already pointed out, have greatly **retarded** her progress. Her **exclusion** from the **pulpit** or ministry—her duties marked out for her by her equal brother man, subject to **creeds**, rules, and **disciplines** made for her by him – this is unworthy her true **dignity**. In marriage, there is assumed **superiority**, on the part of the husband, and admitted **inferiority**, with a promise of **obedience**, on the part of the wife. This subject calls loudly for examination, in order that the wrong may be **redressed**. **Customs** suited to darker ages in Eastern countries, are not **binding** upon **enlightened** society. The **solemn covenant** of marriage may be entered into without these lordly assumptions, and humiliating **concessions** and promises....

Walker, of Cincinnati, in his *Introduction to American Law*, says:.... “the law of husband and wife, as you gather it from the books, is a **disgrace** to any civilized nation. The theory of the law **degrades** the wife almost to the level of slaves. When a woman marries, we call her condition **coverture**, and speak of her as a femme covert. The old writers call the husband baron, and sometimes, in plain English, lord. The merging of her name in that of her husband is **emblematic** of the fate of all her legal rights.... The legal theory is, that marriage makes the husband and wife one person, and that person is the *husband*. On this subject, reform is loudly called for. There is no foundation in reason or **expediency**, for the absolute and **slavish subjection** of the wife to the husband, which forms the foundation of the present legal relations. Were woman, in point of fact, the **abject** thing which the law, in theory, considers her to be when married, she would not be worthy the companionship of man.”

There are many instances now in our city, where the wife suffers much from the power of the husband to claim all that she can earn with her own hands. In my **intercourse** with the poorer class of people, I have known extreme cruelty, from the hard earnings of the wife being thus robbed by the husband, and no redress at law....

Let woman then go on—not asking as favor, but claiming as right, the removal of all the **hindrances** to her elevation in the scale of being --- let her receive encouragement for the proper **cultivation** of all her powers, so that she may enter profitably into the active business of life;...

cypher: an unimportant person

petition: a legal or political request of those in government

creeds and disciplines: principles and ways of behaving

redressed: corrected

covenant: contract  
concessions: something yielded or conceded

coverture: women protected and controlled by their husbands

emblematic: symbolic

expediency: practicality

abject: worthless/servile

intercourse: dealings

cultivation: development

**Writing prompt:** Think back to the previous lessons when we studied Abigail Adams' letter to her husband. Then consider what we've just read. Write a paragraph about what you think had changed, if anything, related to equal rights for women between 1776 when Abigail wrote about it to her husband, and 1849 when Lucretia Mott spoke about it to a crowd of listeners. Remember to support your thoughts with the information that you wrote down in your notes.