

Teaching Materials

Teaching Strategies

We have designed this section to be inherently comparative, dividing it into two sections to deal, respectively, with male preoccupations regarding women's lives and women's own concerns. Each of the sources was selected with two questions in mind. First, how similarly or differently did early modern men and women think about women's nature and role? Second, how were women's views across the globe similar or different?

We recommend starting with men's views, investigating similarities and differences across cultural boundaries. Male conceptions of women's nature were quite similar across cultural divides, in one way or another stressing women's inferiority. Moreover, in most cases, the concept of physical and mental female inferiority was inherited, central to the religio-philosophical traditions upon which the early modern period was built. The question remains: why did early modern peoples across the globe not question misogynist customs? This is perhaps one of the more interesting—and difficult—questions to ask when discussing the excerpts here. The fact remains, however, that the causes for female inferiority were not universally agreed upon—nor were the prescriptions for acceptable female behavior. It might help also to flesh out these differences, to contextualize culturally the study of women during the period.

The second step we recommend is taking the same approach to the sources by women. Did women around the world see themselves—and the world in general—similarly? What would account for those similarities and/or differences? Perhaps most importantly, finally, is to compare the male-authored and female-authored sources and the stances on gender which each espoused. Did women agree with male conceptions of gender difference and its consequent marginalizing of women to the private sphere? In other words, did women embrace or reject traditional patriarchal strictures? As the sources here indicate, they did both. The most challenging issue in the study of early modern women, this concurrent rejection and acceptance of patriarchy is the pivotal subject to discuss. In our experience, it is also the most interesting and thought-provoking for students.

The above approach should help you place early modern women in the context of their cultural worlds, while allowing you to foreshadow future discussions on the questioning of misogynist traditions which emerged most clearly in the 18th through 20th centuries.

Discussion Questions:

- How were women viewed across the globe during the early modern period? What similarities exist between the views held by the disparate cultures mentioned in the excerpts? What could account for these similarities?
- What role did religion play in these perceptions? How did different religio-philosophical beliefs, such as Christianity and Confucianism, portray women differently? What do these differences say about the role of women in different societies?
- How did women see themselves? Did women themselves accept any of the

negative images presented of them? If so, why?

- Despite negative images, what opportunities existed for women to play an active role in their societies? How were early modern women able to make a place for themselves in a patriarchal world?
- How did the lives of early modern women compare to the lives of women in other historical periods? Was there great change throughout the ages in the way women were treated or seen? How so?

Lesson Plan: Visual Versus Written Sources in the Early Modern Period

Time Estimate

Three 45 to 60-minute class periods.

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

1. engage in a discussion of how women perceived, or were perceived by their respective societies, during the Early Modern Period.
2. understand how to “look” at objects, which do not have any words that could be clues, using the material culture process known as Fleming’s Model.
3. explain how visual sources were perceived and understood by those that created them during the Early Modern Period.
4. explain how other societies/cultures/people in World History might perceive these European visual sources.
5. incorporate these findings into an essay format.

Materials

- Sufficient copies of the [Material Culture Handout](#)
- Sufficient copies of the following European visual sources, stapled together:
 - Source 6: Painting, “The True Woman”
 - Source 12: Painting, “Susanna and the Elders”
- Sufficient copies of the following non-European sources, stapled together:
 - Source 9: Autobiography, Bahina Bai
 - Source 4: Nonfiction, Confucian Doctrine
 - Source 7: Petition, Ming China

Note: You may chose to print out the annotation for each source in addition to the source itself for your students, but I believe this is giving them too much information that they need to discover on their own. Also, if you would like to include the European textual sources in the module you can print them off as well in order to augment the European visual sources.

- Sufficient copies of the [Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Texts](#)

Strategies

- **Historical Background:** The Early Modern Period (1400—1800), although a Western interpretive paradigm, marks new changes in the origins of global interdependence. As Europeans increasingly began to explore beyond their borders through the development of ocean travel, the Indian Ocean Basin and the traditional land routes of Asia continued to

thrive and exchange commercial goods, religious ideas, and biological diseases that would forever change the world. Regular contacts by Europeans in the Americas and in Oceania did not signal immediate Western domination, as the great land empires of the Ming (China), Mughal (India), and several African kingdoms remained outside the reach of direct control.

- Before beginning this particular unit on women during this era it would be an excellent idea to familiarize students with the intricacies of the origins of global interdependence. Placing emphasis on the fact that while although Europeans were becoming more dominant in the Atlantic World region, they were not dictating how the world process of organization would work. Students should come away from this exercise with an understanding that unlike previous eras that had only sporadic contact, the Early Modern Period squarely placed all kinds of men and women in direct contact with each other. Around the world, women were always at the center of changes in gender roles, and thus took an active part in a pivotal age of exchange.

Day 1: Material Culture

- First, pass out copies of the **Material Culture Handout**. Spend time going over the quotes and explaining to the students that material culture is all around us.
- If possible, find an object that does not have any markings or words on it. This could be an artifact/object such as a shard of a pot or a piece of brick. The more simple and mundane looking the better. (I had a student who brought in a piece of cuneiform.) Next, pass the object around the room, and have everyone examine it. You may want students to write a short paragraph explaining what they see.
- Have the class now look to the bottom of the **Material Culture Handout**, and read out loud the process of artifact analysis known as Fleming's Model.
- Now, go through each of the steps of the Model using the sample object or image and then list them on the board. Do not allow students to skip ahead. They will try to move past the identification stage, but inform them that this is the most important.
- Once each of the steps is completed, explain to them that all objects are worthy of our examination, and that different groups of people across time have interpreted objects in different ways. Make sure they understand that

having an open mind when approaching objects is absolutely crucial when we are trying to discover point of view (POV).

- **Homework:** Have the students examine the two visual sources: **Source 6: Painting, “The True Woman”** and **Source 12: Painting, “Susanna and the Elders”**. You may want to print out for them the annotations for these two sources in order to establish context for the period of study, but it is also useful to have them look at the sources alone.

Day 2: European Sources

- Split the class into two groups. Have each group perform the Fleming’s Model on each source, and write it down. (15-20 minutes) Depending on the class size, you may want to give two groups one painting, and two the other one.
- Next, have each group present some of their findings to the class. (15-20 minutes) Your conclusions should lead you to surmise that each of these sources depict women in both similar and different ways. See the source annotations for some of these differences. Depending on the class level you might want to place an emphasis on more difficult concepts for comparison. Have students list these differences on the board.
- After this, pass out the second stapled packet that includes the non-European sources. Have the students choose one non-European source. Have the students fill out a **Primary Source Analysis Worksheet: Texts** for their non-European source.
- **Homework:** Using this worksheet, write a one-page response on how their image from Europe compares in its depiction of women to the non-European source. They need a thesis statement and evidence from each source in order to support their points.

Day 3: Non-European Sources, Conclusions

- Have a class discussion about the students' findings. Read some of the written non-European sources out loud during the class. Make a list of similarities and differences between these worlds. What in the end does it tell us about women during the Early Modern Period?
- Students should find some glaring similarities in the portrayal of women by men. For example, Greek philosophy conceived of women’s physical frailty as leading also to their irrationality and intellectual inferiority, while Confucian ideology implied that, just as emperors were to rule over

subjects, men were to be lords over women. Grade the one-page reviews for content such as the use of Fleming's Model, and their observations about the written sources.

- If you have time, end the discussion with how these sources impact the study of women. In the end, did students think that the visual sources were easier to examine and appraise than the written sources? Why or why not? You should conclude that visual sources are just as important as written sources, and should be examined with the same critical eye. Both kinds of sources need rigorous kinds of models for examination, if we as students of history are to attempt to understand their meaning.
- All too often we stereotypically think of European societies during this period as advanced (written and visual due to the Renaissance), and non-Western societies as simply image-bound in a language that we cannot understand. These kinds of distinctions need to be obliterated as we conceive of this period as one of diverse interactions.

Differentiation

Advanced Placement (AP) Students: Placing this particular unit after a discussion of global interdependence, but before the revolutions of the 18th-century would work very effectively. If you are looking for other supplementary materials and background, this exercise works well in conjunction with Kevin Reilly's, *Worlds of History: A Comparative Reader, Volume One: To 1550*, "Gender and Family in the World: China, Southeast Asia, Europe, and New Spain, 1600—1750." (Bedford: St. Martin's Press, 2004.)

Document Based Question (Suggested writing time: 40 minutes)

Directions: The following question is based on the documents included in this module. This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents. Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
- Uses at least nine of the twelve sources.
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
- Takes into account both the sources of the documents and the authors' points of view.
- You may refer to relevant historical information not mentioned in the documents.

Question: Compare and contrast the ways in which women were perceived by men during the Early Modern Period. Did societies around the world have similar or different understandings about the roles that women should play? Based on your understanding of periodization, is there something different about women in world history during this era?

Be sure to analyze point of view in at least seven of the documents or images.

What additional sources, types of documents, or information would you need to have a more complete view of this topic?

Bibliography

Aughterson, Kate, ed. *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

An extensive sourcebook of contemporary materials regarding women in England from the 14th to the 17th centuries, this book expands upon the nature and source of European misogynist attitudes towards women. It is an outstanding compilation of often difficult-to-find primary sources about and by early modern European women.

Davis, Natalie Zemon and Arlette Farge, eds. *A History of Women in the West, v. III: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

This is an wide-ranging and insightful general study of women in early modern Europe. The book investigates the gendered social practices of the period, as well as the cultural discourses which shaped those practices. An excellent overview, this is the ideal book for those first investigating the subject.

Findly, Ellison Banks. *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

This book concentrates on the life of Nur Jahan (1577-1645). However, its introductory sections offer as well discerning general information about Muslim women in India during the Mughal period.

Ko, Dorothy. *Teachers of the Inner Chamber: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

This book offers a rebuttal to the traditional histories of women in China which argue that women were perennially victimized and oppressed. Rather, the author argues that Ming women were able to negotiate prescribed codes of conduct, particularly through their development of a literary voice. Perhaps too feminist a portrayal, the book nevertheless offers a nuanced view, as women are not conversely depicted as agents of subversion.

Lux-Sterritt, L. "Between the Cloister and the World: The Successful Compromise of the Ursulines of Toulouse, 1604-1616." *French History* v16 i3 (Sept 2002): 247-68.

This article investigates an example of the Ursulines "voluntary" decision to enclose their convents in the early 17th century. Originally designated as congrégées, Ursulines were charged with educating and catechizing women of all social classes. The essay is particularly helpful in offering a basic idea of the role of women—nuns in particular—in early modern Europe and the lands they hoped to Christianize.