

“THAT MINDS ARE NOT ALIKE”: IMPLICATIONS OF GENDERED LITERACY  
AND EDUCATION IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA

Except where reference is made to the work of others, the work described in this thesis is my own or was done in collaboration with my advisory committee. This thesis does not include proprietary or classified information.

---

Melissa Lorraine Pojasek

Certificate of Approval:

---

Kevin Roozen  
Assistant Professor  
English

---

Hilary E. Wyss, Chair  
Associate Professor  
English

---

James Ryan  
Associate Professor  
English

---

George T. Flowers  
Interim Dean  
Graduate School

“THAT MINDS ARE NOT ALIKE”: IMPLICATIONS OF GENDERED LITERACY  
AND EDUCATION IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA

Melissa Lorraine Pojasek

A Thesis

Submitted to

the Graduate Faculty of

Auburn University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama  
May 10, 2007

“THAT MINDS ARE NOT ALIKE”: IMPLICATIONS OF GENDERED LITERACY  
AND EDUCATION IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA

Melissa Lorraine Pojasek

Permission is granted to Auburn University to make copies of this thesis at its discretion, upon request of individuals or institutions and at their expense. The author reserves all publication rights.

---

Signature of Author

---

Date of Graduation

## VITA

Melissa Lorraine Pojasek, daughter of Mark and Maureen Pojasek, was born September 21, 1983, in Lynn, Massachusetts. She graduated from Northwest Guilford High school in 2001. She graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington in 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, licensure to teach high school English, and a Spanish minor. In August 2005, she entered Auburn University's Master of Arts in English program as the recipient of the English Department's Mildred Enloe Yates of Mortar Board Fellowship. Upon graduation in May 2007, Melissa hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in early American literature.

THESIS ABSTRACT

“THAT MINDS ARE NOT ALIKE”: IMPLICATIONS OF GENDERED LITERACY  
AND EDUCATION IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA

Melissa Pojasek

Master of Arts, May 10, 2007  
(B.A., University of North Carolina at Wilmington, 2005)

54 typed pages

Directed by Hilary Wyss

In its most basic form, literacy is just a knowledge of letters; it was (and remains today) a basic goal of primary education. The early American educational system is intriguing because of its subtle ways of reinforcing social roles, especially in regards to women’s education. In the late eighteenth century, women were simply seen as convenient vehicles for the transmission of literacy to younger (especially male) generations. I argue that some women, such as Judith Sargent Murray, were not only aware of these obstacles, but used them in an effort to attain intellectual, social, and political freedom.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my family, especially my parents—Mark and Maureen—for their encouragement of my academic goals, even though I had to move far from home in order to pursue them. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Hilary Wyss for her cheerful enthusiasm for this project, which remained unflagged even after many, many drafts. Thanks also to committee members Dr. James Ryan and Dr. Kevin Roozen for their helpful feedback and genuine excitement for the project. Finally, thanks are due to David Milton, whose constant support and reassurance kept me writing.

Style manual used: MLA style manual, 6<sup>th</sup> edition.

Computer software used: Microsoft Word 2003.

“THAT MINDS ARE NOT ALIKE”: IMPLICATIONS OF GENDERED LITERACY  
AND EDUCATION IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA

“A knowledge of letters,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary. To Harvey Graff, a method of social control. Edward and Elaine Gordon define it as the ability to be a functioning member of society. Literacy is a complicated concept, and one that has been entangled in controversy since reading and writing became valuable and desired skills to possess. Our understanding of literacy derives from the development of Western alphabetic literacy: the use of words to convey meaning, rather than pictures or abstract symbols. As we understand it today, literacy intertwines reading and writing as inseparable skills. However, “literacy” cannot be defined as simply the ability to read and write. It is much more complicated and meaningful than that; it is using those skills to show a certain fluency “with written text that enables a person to be a functioning, contributing member of the society in which that person lives and works.”<sup>1</sup> Without that fluency, it is difficult (though certainly not impossible) to be an active member of any society that values written communication; since even “illiterate people are not wholly

---

<sup>1</sup> Gordon and Gordon, *Literacy in America* xv.

isolated from the influence of print,”<sup>2</sup> the ability to interact with such influences is vital to participation in the surrounding culture.

Reading and writing skills themselves are not necessarily the focal point of this study; rather, the possible uses and purposes for reading and writing (applications of literacy) and the meaningful implications of their acquisition by women provide a way to learn more about “the original ways in which people transform literacy to their own cultural concerns and interests.”<sup>3</sup> Harvey Graff, a leading literacy historian, notes that historically, societies have “sought through literacy and education to establish or maintain hegemony.”<sup>4</sup> The elite classes used literacy to perpetuate social divides, showing that literacy is shaped by the ideology of a culture. This is not a simple cause-effect relationship: literacy shapes the culture of a society, which in turn shapes the value and transmission of literacy, which then affects its use by the culture...and the cycle continues.<sup>5</sup> This cause-effect relationship is akin to an ideological conception of literacy, rather than an autonomous one.<sup>6</sup> An autonomous model of literacy is used to show that “writing presents utterance and thought as uninvolved in all else, somehow self-contained, complete”<sup>7</sup>—in other words, completely detached from sociohistorical context. Theorists who believe an ideological model to be more revealing, such as Street, “have come to view literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society and to recognize the variety of cultural practices associated with

---

<sup>2</sup> Kaestle, *Literacy in the United States* 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Street, “The New Literacy Studies” 430.

<sup>4</sup> Graff, *Legacies of Literacy* 12.

<sup>5</sup> Kaestle 5.

<sup>6</sup> See Street 431-436 for a full description of autonomous versus ideological models of literacy.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Ong, qtd in Street 432.

reading and writing in different contexts.”<sup>8</sup> Application of this model involves looking not only at the uses of reading and writing (to a particular group of people or in a specific time period) but also at their intended purpose for those skills, as well as the relationship to social power struggles. As an example, Street cites Rockhill’s study of contemporary Hispanic Los Angeles women “as demonstrating the multiple and contradictory ways in which ideology works. Women adopt new literacy genres that they hope will open up new worlds and identities and overcome their oppressive situations, but these genres also reproduce dominant gender stereotypes.”<sup>9</sup> Street’s citation of Rockhill suggests that the ideological model of literacy is useful to study contemporary situations, but it may also serve to illuminate the uses of literacy throughout history; more specifically, in eighteenth-century America.

Literacy became an important skill at this time for its value to a newly established republican society. However, not all citizens had access to this tool—most notably, women were closed out from advanced reading but especially from writing. By the time of the American Revolution, a literate woman was not quite as much of an anomaly as she was at the beginning of the colonial period; however, not every person was held to the same standards of literacy.<sup>10</sup> Though women had greater access to education than before, they were still greatly limited in comparison to what was available to men.

The elite classes, dominated by white males, were able to use literacy to promote their own ideology, which did not seem to have room for the education of women. The

---

<sup>8</sup> Street 434.

<sup>9</sup> Street 435.

<sup>10</sup> An in-depth examination of the links between the acquisition of literacy and gender and its ramifications on early education can be found in E. Jennifer Monaghan’s *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*. It is also mentioned in her article “Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England.” I might also note that these texts are what originally sparked my interest in the idea of a gendered literacy in early America.

male-devised educational system enforced the culture's dominant views of gender: men, suited for intellectual and professional pursuits, learned reading and writing to prepare them for participation in an increasingly business-oriented society. A woman's place, however, was in the home—meaning that she needed only elementary reading proficiency (enough to read a Bible) and no real writing skills, since writing was a business tool.<sup>11</sup> Even after the advent of the United States Postal Service, women's writing was confined to the domestic sphere (such as writing letters<sup>12</sup>) without the ability to participate in public conversations. The early American educational system suggested that even in the late eighteenth century, literacy was a tool that women were never meant to use to its fullest extent. Women were simply convenient vehicles for the transmission of literacy to younger (especially male) generations. Despite being disadvantaged by a male-dominated structure, however, women were eventually able to reappropriate this structure in order to obtain and use literacy skills for their own benefit.

Applying Street's ideological model to women's uses of literacy in eighteenth-century America illuminates the existence of “multiple and contradictory ways in which ideology works.”<sup>13</sup> I plan to show this by first examining the early American public school system's tools of instruction; the *New England Primer* was a widely used text that

---

<sup>11</sup> It is important for this study that we understand that reading and writing skills have not always been so closely linked; in eighteenth century America, for example, reading on its own was considered a religious skill—the printed word was a useful way to access the Word of God (Graff 8-10). Writing, on the other hand, was a professional skill used as a way to communicate with the larger society. Since women were limited to domesticity, they had no practical need for this skill.

<sup>12</sup> Some, such as Michael Warner (*Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*), have “linked the spread of letters to the growth of knowledge” (ix). However, this would not definitively allow female letter writers the opportunity to make their voices heard regarding public matters, since letters were most often a personal form of communication where women were concerned. Even here, literacy was a skill that was encouraged, but not to the point of participation in larger public conversations.

<sup>13</sup> Street 435.

reifies eighteenth-century gender norms while simultaneously hinting at the potential value of women's literacy. I will use the phenomenon of women's academies to show the increasing value of women's literacy and the continuing existence of contradictory messages being transmitted to women. I will then argue that with the politicization of women's education (by way of the construct of Republican motherhood), women such as Judith Sargent Murray were able to legitimate their participation in a conversation about educational reform and the need for women's intellectualization. Murray in particular is a figure who used the apparently constrained educational system to argue for expanded women's social and political rights along with their intellectual freedom, sparking a larger conversation which ultimately paved the way for the women's education boom of the early nineteenth century.

### **Tools of Instruction: Primers as a Reinforcement of Traditional Values**

In eighteenth-century America, children encountered literacy before they attended formal public schools. Reading, the most basic literacy skill, was often taught by family members. Furthermore, before the advent of formal public schooling, many children (girls as well as boys) attended dame schools, which were the typical beginning path to literacy for children of the eighteenth century. This kind of school usually started with a mother instructing her own children and extending the offer to neighbors who could not read well enough to teach their own children; it sometimes served as a mode of income for a woman, as well.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes referred to as "petty schools," these informal

---

<sup>14</sup> Gordon and Gordon 12-13.

institutions were private ventures in the early colonial period; they later evolved into the more effective public school system later on with help from town treasuries.<sup>15</sup>

Families were charged a nominal fee for beginning reading instruction.<sup>16</sup> Some children attended as early as age two and a half, but until educational laws emerged in the late eighteenth century, it was unclear how long children stayed in these schools.<sup>17</sup> The chief aim of these schools was to teach reading, but the schools' curricula and efficacy depended on the individual instructor; some women were more prepared to teach than others. Generally, students were taught by "memorizing the alphabet and passages of Scripture and connecting these verbal lessons with the printed word,"<sup>18</sup> making the skills gained useful for only minimal use.

As Monaghan notes, dame schools may have also served as an early preschool or caregiver; however, "the important point is not how much these young children could absorb of their instruction but the generality of the belief that they could and should be introduced to reading so young."<sup>19</sup> It is also important that only reading was taught at dame schools, in conjunction with the fact that women were leading the dame schools. Women, as instructors of reading, were fulfilling a motherly duty. It was the social norm of the time: reading, considered a religious and moral skill because of its connections to the Bible, was taught at home, where the mother fostered this skill. Writing, a professional skill, needed a separate school with a male instructor; the dame schools did not teach writing because so many of the teachers could not write well themselves.

---

<sup>15</sup> Gordon and Gordon 14. This evolution took place, as they note, when "male masters were hired during the winter to conduct reading and writing schools and women still conducted regular summer schools" (14).

<sup>16</sup> Urban and Wagoner, *American Education: A History* 43.

<sup>17</sup> Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* 30.

<sup>18</sup> Urban and Wagoner 43.

<sup>19</sup> Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write* 363.

Schoolmasters were necessary and thus mandated by later laws to teach writing and more professional educational pursuits. But before admission to these writing schools, attendance at a dame school was necessary to gain basic reading skills—a building block of literacy.

At a typical dame school, students were presented with an array of texts that formed a sequence: hornbook, primer, psalter, and Bible.<sup>20</sup> All students were at least expected to finish dame school with the ability to read the Bible, making a knowledge of religion an integral part of literacy expectations. It also meant that literacy was seen as a religious skill; teaching girls basic reading was meant to enhance their spiritual lives, not give them access to extensive literacy skills. The link between education and religion is reinforced by the catechisms present in many primers, including the widely circulated *New England Primer*. This primer is of particular interest; used both in school as well as in many homes, it used religious messages to teach both literacy and Christianity to young children. In other words, by “learning a set of religious metaphors, the child learns about his or her place in the world.”<sup>21</sup> This reading is rather ungendered, but I argue that especially for girls, these metaphors serve to teach them their “place” by reinforcing their position within society and with the educational system.

The *New England Primer* was published in many different editions throughout the colonial and post-revolutionary period in America.<sup>22</sup> The edition I am examining was

---

<sup>20</sup> A closer look at the sequence of instructional texts (as well as their implications for learning to read and write) is found in Monaghan’s “Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England” as well as her book *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*. Gordon and Gordon note that this sequence was promoted by Locke, suggesting that Enlightenment ideals were a shaping influence on eighteenth-century American educational practices.

<sup>21</sup> Watters, “‘I Spake as a Child’: Authority, Metaphor, and *The New England Primer*” 194.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Heartman’s *The New England Primer Issued Prior to 1830* provides a thorough look at the evolution of the primer from its initial use through the early nineteenth century. His study notes that the

published in 1790.<sup>23</sup> It begins with the alphabet and a syllabary marked “Easy Syllables for Children.” It continues to give lists of words separated by the number of syllables they contain, up to six. Punctuation is addressed as well as the ordinal number system. The alphabet is presented in verse using common words that would probably be familiar to young children—apple, ball, cream, dog, etc. A short question and answer catechism is given, followed by the alphabet illustrated by woodcuts; this section is probably one of the most recognizable features of the *New England Primer*. The alphabet is presented yet again in the form of lessons for youth, which is followed by prayers and several poems of religious material. This 1790 edition includes a longer catechism as an addendum to the primer itself.

The primer is at first glance gender neutral. However, this text subtly undermines the gender “equality” of the dame school by suggesting that females are to be passive users of literacy, in accordance with the gender norms of the time. The first place this idea comes into play in this particular primer is in its depictions of the alphabet, one an illustrated version and one a poetic rendering of moral virtues.

“An Alphabet of Lessons for Youth” is a set of moral virtues for each letter of the alphabet. It is evident especially in this alphabet of lessons that the primer was intended for a male audience. The alphabet of lessons is written about children, but always refers to the child with a masculine pronoun or as a son. Children are warned with morals such as “Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given

---

earliest extant version of this primer in America is dated from 1727, though he states that earlier editions were sure to have been used prior to that.

<sup>23</sup> *The New England Primer*, accessed from *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800*.

him.”<sup>24</sup> Though seemingly irrelevant, the fact that it happens repeatedly is significant. By assuming that the reader is male and never female, this text makes an interesting statement about the expectations of a typical classroom in which this primer might appear, reinforcing to the female student that she was not expected or encouraged to be learning within a public classroom.

The only mention of women in the entire section is in the very first set: “A wise son maketh a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.”<sup>25</sup> This particular passage suggests that a woman is responsible when a family member goes astray, making the wife a family scapegoat. Girls would learn that as women, they are not only expected to be mothers but they are also expected to take the blame for their children—but never take credit for their successes. It is not an enviable position; if they grow up to have foolish children, women have failed. Even this failure, though, reinforces for girls that their role is that of wife and mother, rather than an intellectual being.

The penultimate verse reads, “Young men, ye have overcome the wicked one.”<sup>26</sup> Most of the lessons derive from Christian principles, and this one comes at the end. One interpretation of this verse would be that after learning and taking to heart the previous twenty-four lessons, a young man would have the skills to resist Satan’s temptations. Those skills would derive from religious knowledge learned in the primer or in the Bible; in other words, the skills needed to resist temptation could be learned through formal schooling. Thus, another interpretation of this verse could be that by attending school, a

---

<sup>24</sup> *New England Primer* 14.

<sup>25</sup> *New England Primer* 13.

<sup>26</sup> *New England Primer* 15.

young man would learn the skills necessary to thwart the devil's temptations. Where does that leave young women? They were discouraged from participating in the educational system while also being warned of the potential evils of ignorance. This situation puts enormous pressure on education and shows girls that it *is* of utmost value—while simultaneously telling them that it is out of reach.

Another depiction of the alphabet is the woodcut-illustrated alphabet so unique to the *New England Primer*. The alphabet represents the belief of early Euro-Americans that reading and writing were necessarily linked to the surrounding culture,<sup>27</sup> which to early Americans often included religion. In this section, each letter of the alphabet is illustrated with a picture as well as a rhyme, many of which allude to the Bible. Of twenty-six letters of the alphabet, only three directly reference women, while ten reference men; only one additional woodcut indirectly references a female figure. Despite the numerical imbalance, the implied messages of this section are extremely interesting; they present women with several models of behavior, some potentially empowering, but overall reinforce the message that women are secondary to men in every aspect of life—including the educational realm.

Unsurprisingly, the letter A states that “In Adam’s fall / We sinned all.”<sup>28</sup> The use of such a well-known Biblical allusion seems standard for a society in which Christianity was so deeply entrenched. The illustration shows a tree with Eve to its left and Adam to its right. What is interesting about this rhyme is its focus on Adam; Eve was there, and she is even pictured, but she is not named. Eve’s presence in the Garden of Eden is completely eliminated in the text, making her voiceless and thus powerless. It

---

<sup>27</sup> Patricia Crain expands on this idea in relation to the alphabetization of early America in *The Story of A*.

<sup>28</sup> *New England Primer* 9.

is surprising, too: Eve is typically a central character in narratives of the Garden of Eden and mankind's fall from grace. Many myths and legends sprout from her participation in that fall, including arguments that the fall from grace was all Eve's fault; here in the primer, it is all ignored. On the one hand, it pinpoints Adam, a man, as the source of the fall rather than Eve, a woman. This could be seen as empowering for Eve, as it indirectly suggests that she was not to blame for being tricked by the serpent. However, without even a name she cannot even participate in the story—she is a passive character. This mirrors the conclusions of other sections of this primer: women were educated to be passive members of society. This example also illustrates the notion that women were to be seen but not heard in society; by having the power to read but not to write, women could not make themselves heard by putting their voices out into society through writing.

The rhyme for Q, “Queen Esther comes, / in royal state, / To save the Jews from / dismal fate,”<sup>29</sup> also shows the mixed messages within this primer. Children would probably be familiar with the Biblical story of Esther, who as a young girl hid the fact that she was Jewish, married King Xerxes, and uncovered a plot to kill all the Jews in her city. She risked her life to step forward and expose the plot, asking King Xerxes to save her people, and was thus rewarded.<sup>30</sup> Esther is a powerful woman; however, it is the fact that she is performing an act of religious merit that is being celebrated. To a young reader, this would enforce the idea that women are to strive to serve God, regardless of

---

<sup>29</sup> *New England Primer* 11.

<sup>30</sup> Esther's story of saving the Jews is told in Esther 2-7 and Esther 8:1-8. This and all other Biblical references were taken from *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, edited by Wayne Meeks. It has been acknowledged that it is difficult to determine exactly what version of the Bible was being read at any particular point in history. At this time, there was a theoretical aversion to the Anglican King James version being published in England and exported to the colonies. However, the Geneva Bible was the Bible of the Puritans; it may or may not have been used widely by the end of the eighteenth century. Because of this indeterminacy, I've chosen to use an academic source to review the stories discussed in the primer, which are consistent with the implications of the stories' plot lines in the primer.

social standing or political power. In this light, it is noteworthy that Esther's Biblical authority as a powerful figure is inconsistent with the accompanying woodcut illustration. The picture shows two crowned figures, one larger figure sitting in a throne, with the second, slightly smaller, figure kneeling before the other. The smaller figure is presumably a woman, with the larger figure being a man; in context with the Biblical story, we may deduce that the woodcut depicts the scene where Esther pleads with Xerxes to save the Jews from the planned slaughter. Although Esther is unquestionably performing a brave act, she is still kneeling to a man—implying that she can only effect change through supplication of the male in power. This sends the message that females are limited in the power they have; if the male in charge says no, their influence ends there.

In the alphabet's references to men, however, the man is portrayed as either an independent being or in relation only to God—not to women. For example, “Job feels the rod / Yet blesses God”<sup>31</sup> represents the letter J. The message here is markedly different from the religious message that we get from Queen Esther's rhyme. Job is revered simply because he worships, while Esther must perform a great religious act to be recognized by the larger male-dominated society; after all, she must do something truly remarkable in order to gain admiration from the man who would be choosing to include her rhyme in the primer. On her own, worshipping like Job is simply not enough for her to create history.

Or is it? We cannot overlook the fact that Esther was chosen to represent the letter Q. Why not any of the other queens in the Bible? She is doubtless a strong

---

<sup>31</sup> *New England Primer* 10.

woman, something that young girls must have been able to pick up on while reading the primer. She is also the only woman not pictured in a traditional passive role; she is a wife, but she is also a savior of the Jews. It is the only part of this section in the primer that might give a young girl the idea that females could take an active approach to life. Hidden within the strongly gendered rhetoric of the primer, Esther can be seen as a gleam of hope for a young girl desiring to be a truly active member of Revolutionary New England society.

However, this is not true for each of the three references to women within the woodcut alphabet. The very next letter, “R,” portrays Biblical Rachel: “Rachel doth mourn / For her firstborn.”<sup>32</sup> This passage is particularly interesting for the connections it makes to motherhood; it is the only reference to family within this illustrated alphabet. In the Bible, Rachel desperately wanted to give her husband another son after her firstborn, Joseph, was sold into slavery. However, she remained infertile, which she saw as an affliction from God.<sup>33</sup> Putting this story in context with the primer’s rhyme, it would seem that Rachel is mourning for her barrenness in comparison to Jacob’s other wife, Leah, who bore several sons while Rachel remained childless. It puts Rachel’s identity as a mother at the forefront; she is recognized for her desire to conform to the expectations of society—bearing children. It is also worth noting the accompanying woodcut: Rachel is shown alone. Jacob, the father of her child, is not included in the depiction, suggesting that it is Rachel’s fault that she has not borne a child. The picture combined with the rhyme makes for a powerful message, emphasizing to young girls not only the importance of procreation, but also the responsibility of the female, not the male, to

---

<sup>32</sup> *New England Primer* 11.

<sup>33</sup> The story of Rachel and Jacob is found in Genesis 29-35.

ensure familial happiness. It is the same lesson taught in the earlier section, as well: “A wise son maketh a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.” The repetition of this message speaks to its importance within the early American societal structure. The foundation to a secure family is in part a devoted wife, without whom the family could not function as a unit.

Several letters later, “U” is represented with “Uriah’s beautiful wife / Made David seek his life.”<sup>34</sup> Children would be familiar with this Biblical tale of murder and adultery;<sup>35</sup> however, Bathsheba is not even named in the rhyme, putting the focus on the men in the tale. Yet even unnamed, Bathsheba, rather than David, must take the blame for the death of Uriah. With the wording of the rhyme, it is as if Bathsheba forced David to kill Uriah, when David’s lust was actually the impetus for the killing. This implies that women are to take the blame for men’s actions, and this message is reinforced by the illustration next to the rhyme. Bathsheba lies in Uriah’s arms while David looks in through a window. Bathsheba is pictured looking like a doll lying in her husband’s arms, reinforcing her role as a passive wife. Readers would know that she was blamed; the accompanying illustration hints that Bathsheba did not argue against these false accusations. Female readers might apply this lesson to their marriages later in life, believing it is natural to take the blame for a husband’s occasional fault or bad deed. As earlier in the alphabet of lessons, women are made the scapegoat: expected to do all they can to help their family unit prosper, yet also expected to take the blame unquestioningly for the faults of others along the way.

---

<sup>34</sup> *New England Primer* 12.

<sup>35</sup> The story of David and Bathsheba is found in 2 Samuel 11:1-27.

With these three examples, we begin to see several different messages being presented to young girls, even before they were introduced to institutionalized schooling practices. Though some messages (such as the traditional role of a wife) are repeatedly enforced, others (like Esther's story) leave room for encouraging transgressive actions. What is a young girl to think? This primer is a crucial example of the complicated ideological implications of literacy. In attempting to transmit literacy through the primer, social values were inextricably linked. Several options were presented, but it was unclear exactly which values were the "right" ones. Women could choose the values they thought important and/or necessary, but it was never dictated which ones would add up to social and intellectual freedom.

### **Gender and the Early Educational System**

While *The New England Primer* was widely used by both sexes, the early public school system did not allow equal access for girls. Looking at groups from whom formal schooling was withheld sheds some light on how literacy was so valued in eighteenth century America; one such group is girls. As Carl Kaestle argues, though, schooling is not necessarily equated with literacy; after all, the number of people attending school may not necessarily reflect the number of people who have mastered literacy skills. But literacy and schooling *are* connected to a certain extent, because "educational policy and praxis define who is to be literate within a society and to what degree, and thus they determine what tests for and uses of literacy are appropriate for certain social groups."<sup>36</sup> Thus, educational policies and practices can show us who was *not* being taught these

---

<sup>36</sup> Davidson, *Revolution and the Word* 133.

skills and was thus being excluded from education. In order to analyze the ideological implications of literacy, it is important not only to notice who was being taught literacy, but also where and how it was being implemented and institutionalized.

The eighteenth century American educational system had its roots in Puritan religious ideals.<sup>37</sup> Puritans believed that reading the Bible was central to understanding God, so the inability to read the Bible meant a hindrance to spiritual fulfillment. Thus, reading instruction was important to Puritans because it was so intimately connected with religion. The importance the Puritans placed on literacy is due to the fact that it was a religious skill. This is reflected even their laws—Massachusetts’ first literacy law was established by Puritans in 1642 to ensure religious grounding for schools. Within the next decade, at least nine schools opened their doors to encourage the spread of literacy.<sup>38</sup>

The “general public sentiment”<sup>39</sup> of the Puritans was that reading was to be taught by the family, which led to the flourishing of dame schools, discussed earlier. They continued to be popular well into the eighteenth century, when education became more institutionalized. By 1789, dame school instructors were required to be licensed;<sup>40</sup> at this time, schooling was increasingly becoming the responsibility of the town. In New England, towns showed their dedication to education by budgeting for schooling options, which at the time included summer schools and traveling teachers.<sup>41</sup> As education became more institutionalized, girls were increasingly excluded; as education left the domestic realm (ie, the dame school) and entered the public, it was seen as less

---

<sup>37</sup> A more detailed picture of Puritan school instruction is provided by Sheldon Cohen in *The History of Colonial Education 1607-1776*.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon and Gordon 5-8.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon and Gordon 13.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon and Gordon 14.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon and Gordon 14-15.

appropriate for girls to participate. However, Boston enacted a law in 1789 marking the first inclusion of girls in Massachusetts' town-funded public schools.

“The System of Public Education” (1789) created strict standards for a public education system; the law mandated admissions requirements, hours of operation, the curriculum, school location, and membership of the school board. Under the new law, one school would teach “the rudiments of the Latin and Greek languages”<sup>42</sup> in order to prepare students for a university education. Each part of town—north, south, and center—had its own separate writing school and reading school. The writing schools were to teach writing and arithmetic, while the reading schools taught spelling, grammar, and composition. Students were admitted to the reading and writing schools after ample preparation at “Women’s Schools”<sup>43</sup> and, according to the law, attended from the ages of seven to fourteen. A committee, like a modern-day school board, was also established by the Boston law in order to keep an eye on the students’ progress as well as that of the schoolmaster. “The System of Public Education” is remarkable for creating a broad education system; with teaching reading, writing, and math in addition to Greek and Latin, Boston society seems to have had an extensive idea of what literacy encompasses. However, there are several implicit messages about gender and literacy within this text that suggest females were held to lower expectations of literacy.

This Boston law required young girls to be educated in basic reading, writing, and introductory mathematics: “in these schools, the children of both sexes be taught writing, and also arithmetic”<sup>44</sup> as well as being “taught to spell, accent and read both prose and

---

<sup>42</sup> “The System of Public Education” 1.

<sup>43</sup> “The System of Public Education” 2.

<sup>44</sup> “The System of Public Education” 1.

verse, and also be instructed in English Grammar and Composition.”<sup>45</sup> This suggests that there was some motivation for educating young girls; since all students were required to learn these skills, there was an inherent value for basic literacy in early New England society. (This was reinforced by the fact that there were so many schools in just one town, ostensibly ensuring that all children would have access to becoming literate.) Females were technically included in having access to this tool, suggesting that they would have some use for it later in life. Their inclusion in this law seems to say that New England society was educating young girls in the same manner as young boys.

However, there are some discrepancies within this law suggesting that although girls were technically included in this law, they were not actually expected to highly develop their burgeoning literacy skills. There are marked differences in the amount of time spent in the classroom, “the boys attending the year round, the girls from the 20<sup>th</sup> of April to the 20<sup>th</sup> of October following.”<sup>46</sup> The extra time allotted for boys to be in school would allow them to spend more time on material, giving them the chance to explore more advanced reading, writing, and arithmetic. Even though the students might cover the same breadth of material, the extra time would allow the young boys to have more depth of knowledge, enhancing their reading and writing abilities. With these advantages, a boy could leave school with a higher rate of literacy than a girl. This suggests that though girls were expected to be literate, they were not expected to be as literate as boys.

When girls were attending school, the classes were split into same-sex groups, according to the text of the law, with all girls attending writing classes in the mornings

---

<sup>45</sup> “The System of Public Education” 2.

<sup>46</sup> “The System of Public Education” 2.

while all the boys were attending reading classes, and vice versa for the afternoon classes. It reinforces the idea that girls were held to different standards of literacy while additionally hinting that they were not expected to be able to catch up with the boys, who would by then be far ahead academically. By dividing them into separate classes, the law suggests that there was no need to catch the girls up on what the boys had been learning while they were away—they simply continued on a different track of education. The value of literacy was different for each sex; while girls learned basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, boys were taught skills far beyond these basics, suggesting a higher value of these skills if possessed by a male.

The text of the 1789 Boston law suggests that a public school student's track of education would ultimately result in a university education; the first paragraph states "That there be one School in which the rudiments of the Latin and Greek languages shall be taught, and scholars fully qualified for the Universities."<sup>47</sup> The wording of this is gender-neutral; it would suppose that males as well as females had access to a University education. However, later in the document the curriculum for the Latin school is listed, along with the mandate "That those Boys who attend the Latin School, be allowed to attend the Writing Schools in the following Hours..."<sup>48</sup> Girls were not included in Latin classes and would thus be barred from entrance to a university without the proper prerequisites. As is evident even today, a university education would open opportunities to upward social mobility in addition to its intellectual benefits; sadly, these opportunities were expected only of males.

---

<sup>47</sup> "The System of Public Education" 1.

<sup>48</sup> "The System of Public Education" 4.

## Women's Education

As we have seen, public schools did not do much to privilege the education of young girls. Women remained domestic creatures, restricting their own learning to reading (often the Bible) and perhaps some rudimentary writing. Their skills were used for “womanly” pursuits, often confined to the home. For example, Nancy Shippen, a young Philadelphia girl, used her skills to keep a journal. This journal was for personal purposes, not for participation in the larger academic, intellectual, or political community. In May 1783, Shippen writes about education. She seems ambivalent towards her own education, yet makes plans for her daughter: “I wish in some particulars that it [her daughter’s education] may differ from mine. In some respects I wish it may be as good.”<sup>49</sup> It is unclear which parts of her education she would have changed, but she does describe the educational plans she hopes to fulfill for her daughter by listing thirty-five elements of a successful girl’s education. These elements include “Insinuate into her the principles of politeness & true modesty, & christian humility,” “Inculcate upon her that most honorable duty & virtue SINCERITY,” and “Particularly inform her in the duties of a single & married state.”<sup>50</sup> Since Shippen could write herself, there is a good chance that her daughter would be taught by her (since reading and writing were traditionally family-taught values). However, there is no mention of desiring her daughter to use those kinds of skills within the larger community—simply a preparation for domestic life as a virtuous single woman or a moral wife. The educational practices of the eighteenth century seemed to suggest to women that a moral education was to be expected, but not much else.

---

<sup>49</sup> Livingston, *Nancy Shippen: Her Journal Book* 147.

<sup>50</sup> Livingston 148-149.

In order to expand women's intellectual opportunities, academies for women were established around the time of the Revolution to provide an alternative to traditional public schooling.<sup>51</sup> These schools were often privately funded and thus were able to establish their own curricula to include areas of study that were not available to women in public schools. Mary Kelley's study of several academies of the first half of the nineteenth century found that these private schools' curricula were not that different from those being taught to boys.<sup>52</sup> In theory, this is a fantastic discovery! If the public educational system was not inviting girls to learn, it would seem that private schools were the answer. These academies allowed women to be intellectually elevated, as males had been able to do for quite some time. However, we must look at the shift in thinking that took place just before the nineteenth century; what were the motives for educating women in this way, and why did so many academies suddenly allow for such intellectual curricula?

One early educational advocate was Dr. Benjamin Rush, a well-known figure of the time; not only a physician and intellectual, Rush was involved in politics, as well—he signed the Declaration of Independence as a delegate from Pennsylvania. His ideas on educational reform were popular through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. In 1787, he traveled to Philadelphia to present a lecture at a ladies' academy; his speech, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," presents his viewpoints on what sorts of education a proper American lady should attain. This speech was influential enough to be printed in

---

<sup>51</sup> More discussion about different female academies (their purposes and inceptions) can be found in Chapter 6 of Joel Spring's *History of Education and Culture in America*.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*. Kelley discusses academies of the North as well as the South. I have chosen to limit my study to the schools of the northern colonies to allow myself the space to go in depth about this specific area. However, Kelley provides great insight for those who wish to study the southern as well as northern states' educational practices during approximately the same period, continuing well into the nineteenth century.

1787 by two different publishers: Prichard and Hall in Philadelphia and Samuel Hall in Boston. It is appropriate that Rush would address this academy, because he was one of the original trustees from the school's inception in July 1786.<sup>53</sup>

There must be something said for Rush in that he gave more consideration to the thought of educating women than others of his day, such as Thomas Jefferson,<sup>54</sup> who “responded to a correspondent in 1818 that the subject of female education had ‘never been a subject of systematic contemplation with me.’ ”<sup>55</sup> Especially in contrast to Jefferson, Rush seems to be an early advocate for the intellectualization of women; however, by examining his speech, we can see that he still placed tight restrictions on women's literacy.

In his address to the ladies' academy, Rush advocated a certain curriculum for women. It included “a knowledge of the English language,” “a fair and legible hand,” “some knowledge of figures and bookkeeping,” “an acquaintance with geography and some instruction in chronology,” some domestic arts such as singing and dancing, reading, and Christian religion.<sup>56</sup> These subjects are broader than previous women had access to and were frequently taught in ladies' academies. Further on, Rush states that women should learn bookkeeping because “There are certain occupations in which she may assist her husband with his knowledge; and should she survive him [...] she cannot

---

<sup>53</sup> Rudolph, *Essays on Education in the Early Republic* 25.

<sup>54</sup> Jefferson's ideas on female education were very narrow, even in comparison to those of Benjamin Rush. Jefferson advocated a much more domestic curriculum; he and Rush were especially split on the value of women learning French and the art of drawing. More discussion on this topic is found in Urban and Wagoner's *American Education: A History*.

<sup>55</sup> Urban and Wagoner 87.

<sup>56</sup> Rush, “Thoughts Upon Female Education” 7-9. For further discussion of the relationship of fine arts to women's education, see Cristina Ossato, “Women's Education and the Flourishing of the Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century America.”

fail of deriving immense advantages from it.”<sup>57</sup> By being told that they would only need these skills if their husbands died, young girls were being told that they only needed this information to become a dutiful helper to make their husbands’ lives easier. Geography and history were to be learned, according to Rush, so that a woman could become “an agreeable companion for a sensible man,”<sup>58</sup> again reinforcing the idea that women were fully expected to marry and subsume their interests to their husbands’. Throughout his speech, Rush continues to allude to this idea; he makes it quite clear that women are to be educated in preparation for their lives as wives and mothers. This seems to be the purpose of educating women at all, according to Rush and his contemporaries.

One such contemporary, perhaps less well-known, was the Reverend Joseph Pilmore. In 1788, Pilmore made a similar address to the “Young Ladies and Instructors of Mr. Poor’s Academy” in Philadelphia.<sup>59</sup> The address was made “In presence of the Visitors, and a large number of Spectators” on March 4, 1788. It may be worth noting also that this particular academy was owned by a man; unlike the earlier dame schools, this institution of higher learning may have been recognized as more of a man’s (an intellectual’s) responsibility. Like Rush, Pilmore is advocating women’s education more than other men of the Revolution; however, we must pay attention once again to the motives behind their ideas.

Pilmore notes that women’s academies solve a problem: that of sending girls to school away from “the kind attention and watchful care of an affectionate and pious

---

<sup>57</sup> Rush 9.

<sup>58</sup> Rush 9.

<sup>59</sup> The full title of Pilmore’s speech is “An Address, On the Importance of Female Education, Delivered to the Young Ladies and Instructors of Mr. Poor’s Academy in Arch-Street, Philadelphia,” dated March 1788 and published by Robert Smith of Philadelphia.

mother, and the pleasing guardianship of a sensible and judicious father.”<sup>60</sup> This is the opening statement of the speech; from the beginning, Pilmore is reinforcing traditional family roles. Christian values and principles are of utmost importance to Pilmore, which echoes the sentiments of earlier schooling ideas: education is a way to give a student the ability to be in touch with God through reading the Bible. These ideas permeate his speech; he describes women as delicate flowers in need of refinement and protection; however, “even...blest with proper culture, noxious weeds will often spring which, if not prevented by the gardener’s (or the tutor’s) friendly hand, will greatly retard their growth, deform their verdant beauty, and disappoint our pleasing hopes.”<sup>61</sup> Pilmore insinuates that it is the teacher’s job to protect these women from harm; even with proper education, these women have the tendency to be easily corrupted. While he advocates educating these girls through academies, he still seems to believe that women need to be nurtured and protected by their intellectual superiors: men. Pilmore goes on to make this abundantly clear, exhorting the audience (of “gentlemen) to remember their duties to protect these poor, innocent women: “...consider what a charming opportunity is hereby afforded you, of furnishing the succeeding generation with the most noble plants, and extending virtue, religion, and happiness, to ages yet unborn! O! May indulgent heaven ever smile on your important work, and crown your generous labours with success.”<sup>62</sup>

But why is this opportunity so important? Pilmore notes that by helping these young ladies, men can ensure that future generations will learn these Christian morals and values. How? These women will ultimately go on to become mothers, where they will

---

<sup>60</sup> Pilmore 4.

<sup>61</sup> Pilmore 8.

<sup>62</sup> Pilmore 10-11.

use these values to pass on to their children. Despite all the other education they may receive at the academy, the women are still relegated to a domestic position; they are meant to use their literacy skills not necessarily for their own benefit, but for the benefit of future generations. Women are thus useful as vehicles for literacy transmission, according to this text's implications.

After addressing the “gentlemen” of the crowd, Pilmore finally addresses the women. However, he all but ignores formal education, rather concentrating on the importance of Christian virtue. After assuring the men of their rewards for supporting the ladies, Pilmore reminds the women to “keep continually in mind the loss your nature has sustained by the Fall—the various calamities entailed on the human race—and all the miseries which necessarily attend on every voluntary transgression of Gods most holy law. You, and all have sinned; therefore be deeply humbled, and repent—”<sup>63</sup> This passage is interesting in comparison to the mention (or lack thereof) of Eve in *The New England Primer*. In the primer, Eve was not individually named or given blame; however, Pilmore has chosen to allude to the same figure in a more explicit way. By making his speech at a ladies' academy, Pilmore is acknowledging, even promoting, this form of education; however, he tempers this by reminding women that they carry the blame for the fall of mankind. It is an interesting strategy: women are given the tools they need to participate in an increasingly literate society, but they are then “reminded” of their limitations as the weaker sex. Pilmore is a bit more restrictive than Rush, giving women the tools they need but then not being actively helpful in showing them how to use these tools as a way into public discourses.

---

<sup>63</sup> Pilmore 12.

Both of these texts seem to suggest that though provisions were made for women to be educated, “no such opportunity was afforded girls to make the most of themselves, as had been forced upon most boys for a half-dozen generations.”<sup>64</sup> So even though they were educated, there was really nowhere to go after that, which makes all that education seem rather useless. This suggests that New England society was willing to educate women, but not open doors to allow them to apply that knowledge in higher education or in any sort of workforce. It was a sort of compromise: women were allowed to study *some* intellectual subjects—math, geography—but were also required to be skilled in domesticity. Thus, being an intellectual was not something that a woman could choose instead of domestic life; it was simply an optional addition to what was expected of her. As Mary Kelley notes, “a woman’s right to advanced schooling [was] contingent upon her fulfillment of gendered social and political obligations,”<sup>65</sup> even after the development of intellectual curricula for ladies’ academies.

The same messages that were in the primer and the public schooling law are present within Rush’s and Pilmore’s texts: women were allowed access to the tools of literacy, but were not told how to combine or use them to their fullest extent. Though these ideas put confines on women’s literacy, they simultaneously gave women an opportunity for potential advancement: women were able to glimpse the possibilities that education held for them. Here, we again see a confusing presentation of values: women had access to many areas of education, but which ones was she supposed to actually use? She could become an adept bookkeeper or mathematician, but she was never told how to apply it to her own social or personal advantage. Men like Rush and Pilmore increased

---

<sup>64</sup> Boone, *Education in the United States* 69.

<sup>65</sup> Kelley 25.

the number of opportunities to which women had access, though they were not willing to show these women how to combine them for their greatest effectiveness. As a result, American society would be filled with women with the *potential* to be active members of society; the abilities to read and write in addition to the skills learned at an academy would more than adequately prepare a woman for participation in professional or social scenes. Not all women, however, were able to combine their newfound skills in a powerful and meaningful way. But with the impending importance of sustaining a newly independent country, women began to use these skills to their advantage in order to solidify their place within the family in hopes of reaching the larger society. By making themselves indispensable to the family as educators, women retained a firm hold of their limited educational privileges.

### **Republican Motherhood's Ties to Literacy**

It is worth noting that in Revolution-era America—when all these texts were published—education increasingly served as a way to preserve the ideals of the new nation; it was centered on social usefulness.<sup>66</sup> It was also becoming more specific to an American nationalism markedly different from a British identity. American reformers aspired to high standards beyond those that were currently in place in England, as Mary Beth Norton notes:

In Britain the last decades of the eighteenth century witnessed no comparable upsurge in reformist impulses concerning female education, no vast expansion in the number of female academies. The most advanced

---

<sup>66</sup> See Wayne Urban and Jennings Wagoner, Jr's *American Education: A History* for more information on Revolution-era American school development and philosophy.

thinkers of the day in England—Hannah More, Erasmus Darwin, and Thomas Gisborne—continued to emphasize ornamental accomplishments rather than practical necessities of domesticity and motherhood.<sup>67</sup>

Norton continues to explain that American educational goals were unique due to the increased importance of republican values after the Revolutionary War. Rush notes that it was of utmost importance to ensure the planting of these values in young men: “The equal share that every citizen has in the liberty, and the possible share he may have in the government of our country, make it necessary that our ladies should be qualified to a certain degree by a peculiar and suitable education, to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government.”<sup>68</sup> He continues, “a most important part of the service that she could thus render would be the influence [a mother] would have in making the youth of the land the real guardians of democracy.”<sup>69</sup> Not only would the sons need patriotism, but also literacy, for “in a democracy especially, literacy becomes almost a matter of principle, a test of the moral fiber of a nation.”<sup>70</sup> The mother’s position took on increased importance, since she would be responsible for instilling this moral fiber into her children. This was an expansion of the woman’s role from simply a housewife to a “vision of the ideal woman—an independent thinker and patriot, a virtuous wife, competent household manager, and knowledgeable mother.”<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters* 271.

<sup>68</sup> Rush 6.

<sup>69</sup> Hansen, *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century* 59.

<sup>70</sup> Davidson 125.

<sup>71</sup> Norton 256.

The term “Republican mother” was coined by Linda Kerber to explain the newly politicized role of the mother.<sup>72</sup> She likens it to “the classic formulation of the Spartan Mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves to the good of the *polis*,”<sup>73</sup> and notes that it is rooted in the Enlightenment philosophy of men such as Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. According to Kerber, these men deplored the intellectual woman but acknowledged her roles as a wife and mother—essentially, a woman existed only in relation to the men of the republic. This was the dominant feeling at the time, as we saw earlier in the primer. As a wife and mother, however, a woman is placed in the domestic role; as the importance of patriotic virtue increased, so did the necessity of instilling it into young children. Enter the Republican mother, “a device which attempted to integrate domesticity and politics.”<sup>74</sup> The development of this structure marked an ideological shift to a more weighted consideration of women’s education. Women were not only being educated, but they were being educated for a distinct purpose—even if that purpose was confined to a domestic role.

This function of an American woman was viewed as progressive by some, as Kerber and Rosemary Zagarri both note, because of its willingness to recognize women’s “crucial, though indirect, contribution to the commonwealth. They had a political role to play.”<sup>75</sup> In the political realm, this was a shift; however, I would argue that its implications for literacy are far less empowering. Women’s education seemed progressive, as did the idea of indirectly participating in politics as a republican mother.

---

<sup>72</sup> See Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective” for a more detailed description of the development of this structure.

<sup>73</sup> Kerber, “Republican Mother” 188.

<sup>74</sup> Kerber, “Republican Mother” 203.

<sup>75</sup> Zagarri, “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother” 205.

However, when these two ideals combined, they served only to reinforce the social structure of post-colonial New England while simultaneously reinforcing a woman's place as a passive user of literacy; an active user, on the other hand, would use literacy to better her social position instead of simply using it to pass it along to the next generation. Republican motherhood meant a concentration on moral education instead of a concentration on intellectualism. Why would women need subjects such as literature, mathematics, or science if they were only to pass along virtue and patriotism to their children?

The ideology of Republican motherhood is directly reflected in the curriculum of ladies' academies of the time period. An emphasis on moral education would be of utmost importance, which not only Rush but also Rev. Joseph Pilmore noted; Pilmore says very little about academics and concentrates on moral and religious education of women.<sup>76</sup> Nowhere is literacy mentioned as an end in itself; it is instead meant to be learned by women in order to bolster the opportunities of male children, who would grow up to continue the cycle. This ideology reflects that of the republican mother.

Kerber notes that "In a society in which deference was fast eroding, republican mothers played a conservative, stabilizing role, deflecting the potential of the revolutionary experience."<sup>77</sup> She goes on to say that "consciousness of their civic obligation also meant that old boundaries on women's lives were stretched, making room for the questioning of hierarchies within the family and outside it, in the public world."<sup>78</sup> The idea of it being a socially conservative institution is in direct opposition to its

---

<sup>76</sup> See Pilmore's "An Address on the Importance of Female Education," 1788.

<sup>77</sup> Kerber, "The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation" 484.

<sup>78</sup> Kerber, "Republican Ideology" 485.

potential political implications. I would agree that the role of the Republican mother is a conservative one; however, I would counter her suggestion that it would deflect the potential of the revolutionary experience. The institution was not a radical structure in and of itself; but it could be used as such by intelligent, motivated women. This perhaps mirrors the ladies' academies; they were not necessarily radical, either, but could be used in a radical fashion by a woman who wanted badly enough to participate in American society to a larger extent. Republican motherhood also served to legitimate women's participation in the debate on education. Since women's vital role in educating children was acknowledged, women were able to use that power to force their way into the larger debate on education—meaning that they would finally have a venue in which to argue for women's intellectual rights.

This situation is intriguing when looking at it in terms of the ideological model of literacy, as well. We have seen how the “multiple and contradictory ways in which ideology works”<sup>79</sup> can be applied to eighteenth century women's literacy, but here we can also see the second part of that argument. Republican motherhood was one of the “new literacy genres” that could potentially “open up new worlds and identities,” allowing women to break free of the gendered power structure. At the same time, Republican motherhood reinforced the stereotypical role of a woman as a mother first. Though Republican motherhood served as a repressive institution, stifling the intellectual ambitions of women who were becoming increasingly anxious to develop them, its *use*

---

<sup>79</sup> Street 435.

simultaneously proved to be a stepping stone to more advanced intellectual opportunities for women.<sup>80</sup>

### **Taking Action: Judith Sargent Murray**

As with any social change, the ideal of the republican mother met with resistance from some groups, including those who advocated for women's rights at the time.<sup>81</sup> Even from its inception, republican motherhood was not seen as advancement by all.

However, some chose to use the position purposefully, as evidenced in some women's writings of the time period, such as Judith Sargent Murray's poetry and essays. These women argued that women were being denied intellectual and political rights; they wanted direct roles in government as well as opportunities to make contributions to the intellectual discourse of the time. These women more than anyone saw their place as to "hover on the fringes, creating a milieu for discussions in their salons, offering their personal and moral support to male friends and lovers, but making only minor intellectual contributions."<sup>82</sup> Upper-class, privileged women such as Murray were also well-educated in a curriculum similar to that advocated by Rush. Murray's privileged status led to an appreciation for education that was reflected in the similar beliefs of many of her contemporaries such as Abigail Adams, Susanna Rowson, and Mercy Otis Warren. What makes Murray's contributions unique (and vital to this particular discussion) is her strong belief in literacy and education. Murray is a bridge between the passive and active users of literacy described earlier. Educated to be a passive user of literacy, Murray was

---

<sup>80</sup> Kerber, "Republican Ideology" 488.

<sup>81</sup> Kerber, "Republican Mother" 188.

<sup>82</sup> Kerber, "Republican Mother" 187-88.

presented with the range of values and tools that were given to the girls who read the *New England Primer* and attended women's academies. Unlike many of those women, however, Murray was a woman who was able to glimpse the treasure available to women when literacy was used purposefully, combining the tools of literacy in a meaningful way.

Judith Sargent Murray's hope was that education would allow any individual to reach his or her highest potential—despite obstacles of gender.<sup>83</sup> Murray was a privileged woman from a well-connected merchant family in Gloucester, Massachusetts. As a woman of twenty-five, she looked back upon her education and complained of its narrow focus, especially in comparison to that of her brother. She was sent to writing school for three months as a young woman,<sup>84</sup> but resented that her teacher was ill fit to teach her how to write. Notably, these preparations were not uncommon for girls like Murray: “the practices of the Sargent family toward education were customary among prosperous families in Massachusetts.”<sup>85</sup> Her privileged standing did allow Murray more access to reading materials as well as the leisure time to devote to studying; this status helped her guide her own education.<sup>86</sup> She was educated enough to help educate her younger brother, Fitz William, but Murray knew that she could only teach him so much. She despised her fear that one day Fitz William would “realize her deficiency as a preceptor and challenge her,”<sup>87</sup> making her yet again inferior because of her lack of education. Murray's experiences prove that even an elite, privileged woman did not have

---

<sup>83</sup> Janet Rider, *A Quest for Self: The Social and Intellectual World of Judith Sargent Murray* 9.

<sup>84</sup> Cibbarrelli, *Libraries of the Mind* 134.

<sup>85</sup> Rider, 34-35, qtd page 35.

<sup>86</sup> Rider 36.

<sup>87</sup> Rider 57.

enough truly intellectual opportunities to satisfy the needs of her role as a teacher for her family members—thus proving that more education was necessary to become a truly effective republican mother figure.

As she grew older, Murray proved to be an aspiring active user of literacy, rather than simply a vehicle for its transmission to the next generation. She was self-motivated enough to utilize her connections to further her education. For instance, she made use of social networking combined with the burgeoning print culture of the post-Revolutionary era, joining “reading associations where she and her close friends read and debated reading materials, both in print and manuscript form. Reading and sociability expanded Judith’s intellectual horizons.”<sup>88</sup> She was motivated enough to be self-educated, attempting to rectify “what she perceived as an inadequate education as a child by a commitment to reading during her adult years.”<sup>89</sup> William Cibbarelli’s study of her reading habits and how they informed her beliefs is useful in showing us what reading material she felt was not only appropriate but important for a woman to be aware of. Murray had a “preference for belles lettres, philosophy and political science”<sup>90</sup> as well as female writers: novels, plays, and poetry figured prominently in her reading. Murray’s familiarity with women writers is significant in that the “presence of women intellectuals [...] strengthened the ideological foundations of her hypotheses”<sup>91</sup> that women were not necessarily the intellectual inferiors of men.

Murray was forceful in her advocacy for female intellectualism, believing that it started with early education for both boys *and* girls. Some of Murray’s writings even

---

<sup>88</sup> Rider 65.

<sup>89</sup> Rider 67.

<sup>90</sup> Cibbarelli 144.

<sup>91</sup> Cibbarelli 144.

describe her idea of a “proper” education for a young woman. In *The Gleaner* (1798), a collection of previously published essays, she advocates some of the same ideas as Benjamin Rush: “writing, arithmetic, geography, astronomy, music, drawing” and “an attachment of the fine arts.”<sup>92</sup> Murray’s plan uses letter writing as a method to teach girls how to write in both English and French. The suggested reading covers a range of areas, including the traditionally feminine subjects—however, Murray’s motivation was different than Rush’s: she “believed young women needed to have comprehensive knowledge as well as essential skills in the event they were widowed, divorced, or chose not to marry. Murray believed a daughter’s traditional training was not subservient to a male social construct,”<sup>93</sup> but instead provided her with the means to support herself independently, whether she chose that path or was forced upon it.

Thus, part of Murray’s educational plan was the advocacy of republican motherhood as a means to becoming an intellectual. Many of her writings were quite radically feminist for her time by advocating women’s intellectualism, which seems oppositional to her belief in republican motherhood.<sup>94</sup> Though the two ideas seem mutually exclusive, her position provides us with an example of a well-educated woman (for her time) wielding her literacy skills as tools for women’s intellectual rights.

In October 1784, Murray published “Desultory Thoughts Upon the Utility of Encouraging a Degree of Self-Complacency, Especially in Female Bosoms” in the *Gentleman and Lady’s Town and Country Magazine*.<sup>95</sup> This work is an earlier look at Murray’s developing use of traditional women’s roles as a means to higher education. In

---

<sup>92</sup> Murray, *The Gleaner* VII p 57, qtd. in Cibbarelli 155.

<sup>93</sup> Cibbarelli 156.

<sup>94</sup> Zagarri 203.

<sup>95</sup> Accessed from the Judith Sargent Murray Society website at <[www.hurdsmith.com/judith/index.htm](http://www.hurdsmith.com/judith/index.htm)>.

this essay, Murray begins with a poem, followed by an essay that more specifically elaborates on the themes within the poem. With the poem, Murray submitted to the confines of traditionally feminine writing; it showed her ability to write “as a woman.” It is bold of her to subvert the accepted forms of expression in order to present such radical ideas. In form, she calls attention to the fact that she has mastered what women are expected to know; in content, she demands to be able to move on to the next step of education. With the essay included after this poem in the publication, she daringly breaks traditional form in addition to continuing the ideas set forth in the poem. The form of the essay defiantly asserts her ability to write “like a man,” forcing her readers to question the idea that only men could publish in this form.

The poem argues that education can be a way for a young girl to assure herself of happiness and moral probity later in life; she also suggests that it will give young girls high self-esteem, which will allow them to strive for happiness: “Self-estimation will debasement shun, / And, in the path to wisdom, joy to run; / An unbecoming act in fears to do, / And still, its exaltation keeps in view.”<sup>96</sup> Murray contrasts the possibilities of young girls to the harsh realities faced by women who have been only marginally educated, warning that without education, “Compass nor helm there is, our course to guide: / Nor may we anchor cast, for rudely tost / In an unfathom’d sea, each motive’s lost, / Wildly amid contending waves we’re beat, / And rocks and quick sands, shoals and depths we meet.”<sup>97</sup> A frightening, stark landscape is painted, almost as if she wanted to scare girls into believing that education is a key to a successful life. Without those powerful literacy skills, Murray notes that she is unable to ground herself in society,

---

<sup>96</sup> Lines 9-12.

<sup>97</sup> Lines 16-20.

instead becoming lost in a chaotic mass. She ends the poem by reflecting on her mourning of her own lack of education: “Ne’er taught to ‘rev’rence self,’ or to aspire, / Our bosoms never caught ambition’s fire.”<sup>98</sup> She believes that without education to ignite a spark, a young girl will not be ambitious in life.

But what did Murray mean by ambitious? In the essay following the poem, she elaborates on how a young girl could apply the ambition she would glean from a proper education. Without the sense of self-worth taken from education, a young girl would grow up thinking “that she possesses few, or no personal attractions, and that her mental abilities are of an inferior kind, imbibing at the same time, a most melancholy idea of a female.”<sup>99</sup> One might expect Murray to immediately argue that this intellectualism would lead to a woman’s inability to participate in the larger society. Instead, Murray suggests that such a girl will “probably, throw herself away upon the first who approaches her with tenders of love, however indifferent may be her chance for happiness.” She would then be left by this flatterer and become an “Old Maid,” making her a member of “a class whom she has been accustomed to regard as burthens upon society.” Here, Murray is essentially arguing that a proper education would prepare girls to be self-satisfied so that they would not be foolish enough to throw away their future happiness in marriage by being seduced by the first smooth talker they may meet. This strategy uses a familiar social role, that of the wife, to argue for women’s education. Without education, these girls will become a burden on society, which will also not allow them to be wives or mothers.

---

<sup>98</sup> Lines 25-26.

<sup>99</sup> Accessed from the Judith Sargent Murray Society website at <[www.hurdsmith.com/judith/index.htm](http://www.hurdsmith.com/judith/index.htm)>.

Despite the seemingly conservative views of this essay, Murray does manage to address the value of an intellectual woman, something that hints at her more subversive intent. She says that in order to foster this sense of self-worth, men must “address her [woman] as a rational being” so that “the most valuable consequences would result.” She then addresses these young girls directly, directing them to “reverence [...] your intellectual existence; you must join my efforts, in endeavouring to adorn your mind, for, it is from the proper furnishing of that, you will become indeed a valuable person.” This call to action is buried right in the middle of the essay. It is a bold statement; she calls directly for women to see the value in intellectualization and strive actively towards it. However, it is prefaced and concluded by arguments for intellectualization as providing a chance for a smart marriage. By burying her main argument within a somewhat conservative one, she is able to voice her opinion without completely ignoring the social norms of the time. Like with republican motherhood, Murray attempts to use the existing social confines to her own advantage.

Murray later published “On the Equality of the Sexes” (1790) in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, which was circulated in both America and England.<sup>100</sup> It begins with a poem that protests the current place of women in education; she argues that women are capable of and deserve to be intellectual equals to men. She begins by acknowledging “That minds are not alike,” which might have been read by men as stating that women are intellectually inferior to men; however, she hints through the rest of the poem that there is a reason minds are not alike—not all people are given the same opportunities for advancement. The next few lines suggest the depiction of a woman

---

<sup>100</sup> Accessed from the Judith Sargent Murray Society website at <[www.hurdsmitth.com/judith/index.htm](http://www.hurdsmitth.com/judith/index.htm)>.

aching for intellectual freedom: “Their eager gaze surveys the path of light, / Confest it stood to Newton’s piercing sight. / Deep science, like a bashful maid retires, / And but the ardent breast her worth inspires.” It is interesting that she characterizes the field of science as female, which might have been the first clue to her readers that she was making a statement in opposition to popular thought. She continues to extol the virtues of education, but then remarks that there are some “who never can the path of knowledge love, / Whose souls almost with the dull body one.” This description makes the reader think that lack of education weighs the soul down. Murray connects intellectualism with Godliness even more clearly by saying that the unlearned person “Can scarcely boast its origin from God.” Her readers would have accepted that all souls are equal before God, so by making this connection she sparks a question: why are all people not considered equal in the realm of education?

This presentation of women contrasts sharply with her description of privileged men who *were* able to be highly educated: “While others, emulous of sweet applause, / Industrious seek for each event a cause, / Tracing the hidden springs whence knowledge flows, / Which nature all in beauteous order shows.” Her view is that women are hindered, even to the point where their souls are trapped, while men have the freedom to soar to new heights of learning. In the final section of her poem, she charges that even though men have sometimes proven themselves to be undeserving of this freedom, it still stands accepted by most that women are incapable and unworthy of these same freedoms. Murray again links intellectualism with spirituality, noting that these gendered distinctions exist only on earth and not in the eyes of God: “Yet haste the era, when the world shall know, / That such distinctions only dwell below; / The soul unfetter’d, to no

sex confin'd, / Was for the abodes of cloudless day design'd." Murray leaves her readers with the thought that men and women are spiritual equals; it does not take much to take this idea to the next level—that if there is no gender distinction in front of God, why is it fair to maintain that separation in all aspects of the earthly life?

Like "Desultory Thoughts," Murray uses the poem to preface a substantial essay, again calling attention to how she, as a woman, has mastered the methods of both feminine and masculine writing. In the essay that follows, Murray takes offense at the accusation that women are intellectually inferior: "we can only reason from what we know, and if opportunity of acquiring knowledge hath been denied us, the inferiority of our sex cannot be fairly deduced from thence."<sup>101</sup> She goes back to the idea of elementary education, saying that young girls are more often seen as smarter than young boys; she asks at what point does it change, noting the domestication of women leads to a void of education. She creates a scenario in which she suggests that without sufficient leeway to develop intellectually, women could quite easily "seek to fill up time from sexual employments or amusements."<sup>102</sup> This would take away virtue, which is exactly what republican mothers are supposed to impart to their children.

It is at this point where Murray seems to become less transgressive; she goes on to advocate the education of women so that they might learn more about God and so become better wives and mothers: "In astronomy she might catch a glimpse of the immensity of the Deity [...] she would hail the goodness of God."<sup>103</sup> She continues to argue that women have ample time to become educated, such as while doing needlework

---

<sup>101</sup> Murray, "On the Equality of the Sexes" 1.

<sup>102</sup> Murray, "On the Equality of the Sexes" 2.

<sup>103</sup> Murray, "On the Equality of the Sexes" 2.

when intelligent conversation would be an improvement over idle gossip. However, Murray continues to present more radical ideas, emphasizing the idea that gender is an unnatural distinction. She accuses men of using their power as a plot to keep women uneducated: “The superiority of your sex hath, I grant, been time out of mind esteemed a truth incontrovertible; in consequence of which persuasion, every plan of education hath been calculated to establish this favourite tenet.”<sup>104</sup> This definitely makes her arguments radical, giving modern-day readers doubts about whether she truly meant what she said in her more conservative points.

Murray seems to be advocating both a conservative republican motherhood *and* a highly literate female class. One way to reconcile these ideas to each other might be reflected in the previous discussion of the form of the poem being subversive; Murray used the existing form of writing to introduce new ideas. Because the existing confines of gender were contradictory, she was able to use them to successfully introduce radical ideas and spread them through publication in America as well as England.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, perhaps she viewed republican motherhood as a method in which women could begin to influence public policy, which would include education as well as politics.<sup>106</sup> Linda Kerber suggests that women like Murray used this construct “to claim for women the independence and self-sufficiency that *Common Sense* had made a commonplace for adult men.”<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes” 5.

<sup>105</sup> Accessed from the Judith Sargent Murray Society website at <[www.hurdsmith.com/judith/index.htm](http://www.hurdsmith.com/judith/index.htm)>.

<sup>106</sup> Mary Beth Norton argues a similar point. In “The Evolution of White Woman’s Experience in Early America,” she argues that “only after women had acquired a public role, however restricted, could the extent of that role become a topic for discussion, definition, and debate” (618).

<sup>107</sup> Kerber, “Republican Ideology” 488.

The same argument can be made for Murray's discussion of education as a way for women to occupy their time during domestic duties such as needlework or housekeeping. These are the already established forms that Murray is using as agents of change. She packages her argument so that men are less likely to disagree; if women are still doing all they are "supposed" to be doing domestically, advanced education doesn't seem all that bad. Thus, she continues what we have seen is a pattern with her: she subverts the traditional form of domesticity even as she uses it to her own advantage. It is as though she knows that there are certain limitations she must stay within; by using her resources to expand her own opportunities, she simultaneously expands the opportunities for other women.

Murray is taking the lesson we learned earlier from the story of Esther in the *New England Primer*; she was perceptive enough to see the small window of opportunity in Esther's story as empowerment. This connection is fascinating especially in light of some of Murray's arguments. After earlier discussion of the *New England Primer's* implicit messages within its religious messages, it is intriguing that Murray seems to be touching on some of the very same points within her essay. She also reads Biblical passages as having implicit meanings; however, hers are decidedly different from those of the male-authored primer. In the primer, we examined the messages within the woodcuts mentioning women; Murray references some of the very same Biblical passages that the woodcuts use. In our discussion of David and Uriah, we noted how the woman is pictured as being of base moral character; Murray echoes this argument, but references David rather specifically. She states that he is an example of a fallen man, because he was "dignified with the title of the man after God's own heart, and yet how

stained was his life.”<sup>108</sup> Perhaps even more interesting is her discussion of Adam and Eve, another Biblical story also used in the primer. She states that Eve sinned because “a laudable ambition fired her soul, and a thirst for knowledge impelled the predilection so fatal in its consequences.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, Eve sinned in a quest to educate herself, while Adam followed suit simply because he was imitating what Eve did: “blush when ye remember, that he was influenced by no other motive than a bare pusillanimous attachment to a woman! By sentiments so exquisitely soft, that all his sons have, from that period, when they have designed to degrade them, described as highly feminine.”<sup>110</sup> Even in her readings of religious texts, Murray emphasizes the unfair link between gender and education.

Cathy Davidson presents Judith Sargent Murray as a feminist writer as well as a writer who advocated educational reform due to gender inequalities. She notes that “for Murray, too, feminist reform could best begin in the family. Women’s greater domestic equality could then pave the way to larger forms of equality as well.”<sup>111</sup> This further proves that Murray noted the boundaries of propriety and used them to her own advantage. Davidson analyzes other writings of Murray’s—such as her sentimental fiction—but states that

Through their subject matter alone, these essays, dealing with such disparate topics as military strategy, the new Constitution, political philosophy, or legal reform, attest to at least one woman’s wide-ranging intelligence and her readiness to address cogently issues ostensibly beyond

---

<sup>108</sup> *New England Primer* 6.

<sup>109</sup> Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes” 5.

<sup>110</sup> Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes” 6.

<sup>111</sup> Davidson 209.

woman's ken. [...] Murray regularly advocated the need for better female education and argued the relationship between such education and greater independence. She also stressed the importance of female education for fulfilling the traditional role of wife and mother but noted, too, that "marriage should not be presented as a summum bonum [*sic*]." For Murray, education would serve a woman in whatever state she happened to find herself.<sup>112</sup>

Murray was remarkable not only for giving commentary on "masculine" issues, but for doing it elegantly and skillfully. She not only fought for women's political and intellectual rights, but also personified them. By proving that a woman could hold her ground in a man's domain, she disproved gender expectations of the time and led the way for generations of women to follow in her footsteps.

### **Effects of the Fight for Women's Literacy**

As we have seen, the Revolutionary period in America was a time of great change in education. Despite sweeping reforms, the Revolutionary era was still a period of great limitation for women. While overtly claiming to elevate the status of women, the Revolutionary curriculum subtly undermined the position of women by privileging the education of men.

From the time young girls entered school, they were told they were not smart enough to achieve the same goals as young boys. Subliminally as well as overtly, it would have been enough to thwart any timid young girl's education. Certainly, the

---

<sup>112</sup> Davidson 207.

creators of the educational system could not have anticipated the backlash of the Revolution against the historically male-dominated intellectual domain.

Women such as Judith Sargent Murray were able to overcome these obstacles. They provide us with Revolutionary examples of women who rebelled against the gender structures in favor of women's literacy. These women, among others, were able to make their voices heard when so many other women's voices were buried in the rhetoric and mixed messages of the early educational system. It is to these women that I myself owe the honor of being a participant in the modern university system.

## Works Cited

- Boone, Richard G. *Education in the United States: Its History From the Earliest Settlements*. Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.
- Cibbarelli, William. *Libraries of the Mind: A Study of the Reading Histories of Mercy Warren, Abigail Adams, and Judith Sargent Murray*. Dissertation. State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2000.
- Cohen, Sheldon S. *History of Colonial Education 1607-1776*. New York: Wiley, 1974.
- Crain, Patricia. *The Story of A*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Gordon, Edward E. and Elaine H. Gordon. *Literacy in America: Historic Journey and Contemporary Solutions*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003.
- Graff, Harvey J. *Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Hansen, Allen Oscar. *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926.
- Heartman, Charles. *The New England Primer Issued Prior to 1830*. New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1934.
- Kaestle, Carl F. *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading Since 1880*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Kelley, Mary. *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Kerber, Linda K. "The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation." *American Quarterly* 37.4 (1985): 474-495.
- . "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective." *American Quarterly* 28.2 (1976): 187-205.
- Livingston, Anne Home Shippen. *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book*. Editor Ethel Armes. New York: B. Blom, 1968.
- Meeks, Wayne A., Editor. *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.

- Monaghan, E. Jennifer. *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005.
- . “Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England.” *Reading In America: Literature and Social History*. Editor Cathy Davidson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Murray, Judith Sargent. “Desultory Thoughts Upon the Utility of Encouraging a Degree of Self-Complacency, Especially in Female Bosoms.” *Gentleman and Lady’s Town and Country Magazine*, 1784. Accessed online from “Judith Sargent Murray Society.” <<http://www.hurdsmith.com/judith/index.htm>>
- . “On the Equality of the Sexes.” *Massachusetts Magazine*, 1790. Accessed online from “Judith Sargent Murray Society.” <<http://www.hurdsmith.com/judith/index.htm>>
- Norton, Mary Beth. *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980.
- . “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Early America.” *The American Historical Review* 89.3 (1984): 593-619.
- Ossato, Cristina. “Women’s Education and the Flourishing of the Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century America.” *RSA Journal* 10 (1999): 93-112.
- Pilmore, Rev. Joseph. “An Address On the Importance of Female Education, Delivered to the Young Ladies and Instructors of Mr. Poor’s Academy in Arch-Street, Philadelphia.” Philadelphia: Robert Smith, 1788. Accessed from *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800*. NewsBank InfoWeb. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>
- Rider, Janet. *A Quest for Self: The Social and Intellectual World of Judith Sargent Murray*. Dissertation. University of Connecticut, 2005.
- Rudolph, Frederick, editor. *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Rush, Benjamin. “Thoughts Upon Female Education, Accommodated to the Present State of Society, Manners, and Government, In the United States of America.” Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1787. Accessed from *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800*. NewsBank InfoWeb. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>

- Spring, Joel. *The American School 1642-1996, Fourth Edition*. New York: The McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 1997.
- Street, Brian. "The New Literacy Studies." *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*. Editor Ellen Cushman. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2001. 430-442.
- The New England Primer*. Lancaster: J. Bailey, 1790. Accessed from *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800*. NewsBank InfoWeb. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>
- "The System of Public Education, Adopted by the Town of Boston, 15<sup>th</sup> Octob. 1789." Accessed from *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800*. NewsBank InfoWeb. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>
- Urban, Wayne, and Jennings Wagoner, Jr. *American Education: A History*. Boston: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2000.
- Warner, Michael. *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Watters, David H. "'I Spake as a Child': Authority, Metaphor, and The New-England Primer." *Early American Literature* 20.3 (1985): 193-213.
- Zagarri, Rosemarie. "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother." *American Quarterly* 44.2 (1992): 192-215.