

Penguin



Readers



**Women
Who
Changed
the
World**

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Women and education

“I do not wish for [women] to have power over men; but over themselves.”
Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)

Women’s **rights** start with the **education** of girls and women. If we study the **history** of women’s fight for **equality** with men, education has always been an important topic. It may be the most important topic, because women can only be **equal** to men if they have an equal education.

But the fight for equal education has met many problems. In many countries and at different times in history, girls had very little or no education. In the past, a lot of people believed that women were not as intelligent as men. People thought that a woman’s only job was being a wife and mother. Why **educate** them for that? People worried that education was not good for women. In some places, people still have these ideas. The education of girls is still a very important topic around the world.

In the 18th and 19th **centuries**, people started to think, write and talk about women’s education more and more.

There was **progress** in some countries. In 18th-century Russia, for example, Catherine the Great believed in education for everyone. In 1786, she started **free** education for all girls.

In England, writers like Catharine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft, Hester Chapone and Hannah More all wrote about **female** education. At that time, girls from richer families only learned music, drawing,

and maybe a little French and Italian. In her book *Letters on Education* (1790), Catharine Macaulay – the first English female **historian** – told mothers and fathers to educate their girls. Women could not do well, she said, because of their bad education.

One of the most important people of this time was Mary Wollstonecraft. She was an English thinker and writer who wrote about education and **social** equality

for women. Her books have been very important for women's rights, and they are still important today.

Mary was born in London in 1759. Her family were



Catherine the Great
(1729–1796)



Catharine Macaulay
(1731–1791)

not rich, but they educated her. She taught at a school and also worked as a private teacher – she taught children in someone’s house. She then wrote *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in 1787. In 1788, she began working for a London book **publisher**, who **published** her novel *Mary: A Fiction* (1788) and some of her other books. Her most famous book is *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). In it, she writes that men and women must have equal education. Boys and girls, she wrote, must go to school together.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is very important in the history of women’s rights. “Schools do not help girls and women,” wrote Mary. With real education, she said, women could be good wives and mothers, but also good workers in many jobs.

Her ideas were very new at the time. Other women wrote about better female education, but Mary’s work was really important.

She believed that education in Britain had to change. This kind of change could be good for all **society**.

Mary was writing about women and the vote a hundred years before women started fighting for it. Today, Mary Wollstonecraft is called “the mother of British feminism”. Any woman who has the vote,



Mary Wollstonecraft
(1759–1797)



A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)

and can read and write,
can say thank you to Mary
Wollstonecraft.

In 2011, a group of people
wanted to get money for a
statue of Mary in London,
so they put a picture of her
on the Houses of Parliament.

“We have a lot of statues of famous men. Let’s have a
statue of this famous woman!” they said.

In 2018, more people in **politics** and theatre joined
the group to ask for a statue of Mary Wollstonecraft.

The fight that Mary Wollstonecraft started in the
late 18th century is still not finished. Since then, many
women have fought for female education – women like
Margaret Bancroft and Jane Addams in the United
States of America (USA), and Maria Montessori in Italy.
In many places in the world, girls and women are still
fighting for an equal education.



Mary
Wollstonecraft’s
picture on
the Houses
of Parliament

One of the most famous fighters for girls' education today is Malala Yousafzai. Malala was born in 1997, in the Swat Valley in Pakistan. Her mother and father believed in education for girls. In 2007, a group of men called the Taliban came to the Swat Valley. They said, "People cannot have a television or play music." In January 2008, the Taliban said, "Girls cannot go to school."



Malala Yousafzai
(1997–present)

Malala used the name "Gul Makai" and began writing for the BBC (the United Kingdom's television and radio) about life with the Taliban. She wrote about the last days before her school closed. Malala became famous, both in Pakistan and around the world, as a fighter for girls' education. She was brave, and she spoke about girls' education a lot. But the Taliban did not like it.

On 9th October 2012, a man from the Taliban got on to Malala's bus and shot Malala in the head and neck. Two of her friends were also hurt.

Malala did not die, but she was very badly hurt. She was taken to a hospital in the United Kingdom.

People in Pakistan and around the world hoped that she could get better. When Malala got better, she decided to continue her fight for girls' education.

In the next few years, Malala met with girls around the world, and she met with many **politicians**, like the **President** of the USA, Barack Obama. Everywhere

she went, she talked about girls' education and equality.

In December 2014, Malala Yousafzai won the Nobel Peace Prize. She was only seventeen years old, and she was the youngest person ever to win it.

Today, Malala and her father, Ziauddin, work in many countries. They want to help to give girls an education. Malala has said, "I tell my story, not because it is **unique**, but because it is not. It is the story of many girls."

