Strange Bedfellows

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Surprising Text Pairs and Lessons for Reading and Writing Across Genres

Carol Rawlings Miller

Foreword by Jim Burke

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Credits continue on page vi.

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THIS IS FOR MY STUDENTS,

WHO TAUGHT ME TO TEACH,

AND FOR MY PARENTS,

CHARLES AND JOAN RAWLINGS,

WHO TAUGHT ME TO READ.

Credits continued from page iv:

Contents

PART 3 SATIRIC PENS

PART 4 TEXT TALK

PART 5 IDENTITY: LITTLE HISTORIES

Acknowledgments

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Foreword

We read for the conversations that texts invite us to have about the world, human nature, and ourselves. Every text is an invitation to converse, and we bring to these encounters a different urgency and perspective at various stages of our lives. We live in a world now where these encounters include those so different from ourselves—or so it seems at first. As Carol Rawlings Miller proves in this wonderful book *Strange Bedfellows*, there are often surprising harmonies between seemingly discordant voices. She challenges our ideas about literature and life by putting texts that talk back to each other literally side by side for us to examine. In so doing, Miller plays the role of matchmaker, bringing together voices and ideas, topics and texts, to create couples we could not have imagined. Her work here, in all ways, embodies what Arthur Applebee calls "curriculum as conversation."

It is, however, much more than a polite textual tea party where these different authors sit around tables talking easily about [persuasion] politics or wartime or cultural identity. Carol Rawlings Miller has arranged these works around heftier, edgier ideas, using these diverse texts to answer or at least respond to essential questions appropriate to our times and the world around us. *Read this, and then let's talk*, Miller seems to be saying. Enough with the hand wringing about pedagogy; put complex, fabulous texts in students' hands, ask good questions, and fire up their intellects. Miller leads us—and in turn our students—into longstanding and urgent conversations that have become all too scarce in many classrooms in recent years, places where the curriculum has become all too safe, too plain. When she pairs Martin Luther King and Shakespeare, there is a resounding cymbal crash in the head, as there is when Miller serves up speeches by Susan Sontag and George W. Bush. A stranger set of bedfellows has not been seen in some time.

Carol Rawlings Miller puts forth much more here than a rousing collection to share with students. In recent years, English education has undergone a host of challenges and changes, many in response to the demands of the workplace and postsecondary institutions. There is, appropriately, a demand for students to be able to synthesize multiple perspectives, to critically examine different sides of an argument, and to convey these understandings through coherent, rhetorically effective writing both on the page and the screen. In *Strange Bedfellows*, the texts, while the heart of the book, are merely the beginning of a lively mix that can be used to work on genre, rhetoric, and writing. Miller has also assembled an array of types of texts through which to examine the big ideas in this book. It is not, in other words, a typical anthology of essays, but is, instead, a varied bunch of speeches, poems, articles, editorials, lyrics, and, of course, essays. Through these

different genres, Miller creates many opportunities to develop what I have referred to elsewhere as "textual intelligence," which means, in short, the knowledge of not only how to make sense of various texts but also an ability to construct a variety of types of texts for a range of purposes. Smart readers parlay their hard-won skills to become smart writers.

In fact, the reading-writing connection is a big push in this book. Because she is a classroom teacher, she is always trying to accomplish much more than merely inviting interesting people to talk to her students. Every text and pair here is accompanied by questions and prompts, suggested assignments and strategies that work to improve students' abilities as readers, writers, and thinkers. Throughout the country high schools are being asked to teach students more expository prose, to develop greater expository writing skills so when they arrive at college, they are prepared to not only read but to write about and discuss with intelligence what they read. Carol Rawlings Miller has written a book that will help both the experienced and the novice teacher do all these things. Perhaps most important, she has created a course of study that will bring back to the classroom something of the fire it once had but which recent movements have dampened. Anytime Barack Obama and Arnold Schwarzenegger come together you know it will be not just an interesting conversation but a great class.

—Jim Burke
Author of *The English Teacher's Companion*

Introduction

How do students become readers? My experience is that the proverbial best teacher is experience. Give a student a compelling, historic, unforgettable text and you might wind up with a reader. Why? Because the texts themselves create people who want to read. Through them readers come to know a sustenance and stimulation that is really like nothing else. Reading pulls us in deeply.

Eclectic texts comprise this collection. I have juxtaposed writings in a variety of configurations meant in various ways to push and pull students, to educate and delight, as Horace once so usefully said. And I give strategies for teaching reading and for the interpretation and analysis of intellectually engaging material. The responsive, skeptical, curious reader is my goal as a teacher—I selected texts and created reading and writing activities here with that prize in mind.

The specific premise of *Strange Bedfellows: Surprising Text Pairs and Lessons for Reading and Writing Across Genres* is that the juxtaposition of texts has a pedagogic efficacy that is remarkable. A few days spent on some of these texts might radicalize a student's awareness of language. What is rhetoric? What is persuasion? The study of the "I Have a Dream" speech and "St. Crispin's Day" speech, for example, teaches students easily, emblematic as they are of persuasive speech.

Juxtaposing texts can work with a variety of abilities and ages, though I first noticed it's power when I was teaching a review for the English AP in Language and Composition. I saw how quickly students' reading sharpened when they had done even a few practice essays on paired texts. They could suddenly understand diction more clearly and notice strategies for structure and argumentation more quickly. They became more aware of rhetoric. They learned how to approach unfamiliar terrain more confidently, and their sophistication, in a related development, seemed to grow naturally and quickly.

Further, the relative shortness of these readings is an important part of the story. The study of reading often privileges long works. We spend long weeks on the road with this novel and that play and well we should. This is a part of literacy that builds stamina and an ability to shoulder long arcs of complexity. But an overemphasis on long works misses an opportunity. Short readings lend themselves to reading aloud in class. An entire short work, such as a personal essay or an editorial, provides examples of structure, of how pieces should have a beginning, middle, and end. Short works can make expository writing more accessible for some students; it simply narrows the field they are writing in, creating a certain kind of focus perforce.

Genuine literacy is, I think, created by a wide range of challenges, and here, as elsewhere in life, variety has a virtue all its own. Throughout this book, there are a

range of texts and types of text. There are different genres. Works of high and low culture. Old and new authors. Not all the lifting in this book is heavy. And not all of it is light. Some chapters are designed to be stimulating and substantive but also more accessible, like the one with the *Onion* articles. Going through the process of analytical investigation with in-reach texts is crucial. It builds confidence. It is, well, fun. And that fun is a little contagious. Suddenly language in all kinds of places becomes more interesting. Some pairs will be more of a challenge, and some texts will perhaps be quite conspicuously "a reach." That reaching is crucial. Students need to learn to deal with and transcend those initial reactions to older texts or formal texts. Too often professional conversation about reading turns to pleasing students by meeting their literacies. As a universal approach, this can only limit our students rather than help them flourish.

Many great texts knock us off balance. That is part of the pleasure of reading, its special call to our intelligence. But many students are too easily discouraged by complexity, too quick to be intimidated. We want them to be wide awake as readers, not cowed. Sometimes education that is too grimly serious about learning and standards subtly—and not so subtly—tells students: be very afraid. Instead, they should feel capable, with a healthy intellectual humility (not a surfeit of it). But tricky waters must be navigated when we lead them out to the unquiet deep. They have to learn how to handle challenging texts, and there is no one all-purpose answer to reading them successfully. Only by doing, and doing again, do students internalize a sort of readerly resourcefulness and general confidence. So challenging journeys should be a part of what students undertake, but we need to support them as they go and teach them well.

In this book, reading questions build from a very simple place. Students are continually asked to discuss their experience reading. What was their reaction? Did they run into any trouble understanding? What did they notice? These are simple questions, obvious, even. They are unintimidating, wonderfully good at getting the ball rolling. Then the questions become more specific, more focused on form and content and literary terms, and the questions extend to looking at both texts together. There are also student reading questions for independent work that ask students to look closely at texts.

Two writing assignments come with each lesson. Practitioners of literature are better readers, and better readers are better writers. The readings in this book explore genre; the assignments often ask them to play with different genres in their own writing. Usually one assignment is more analytical in focus and one is more creative. Not all of the analytical assignments are full-length essays and not all of them conform exactly to essay structure. Some assignments allow for literary response in the first person. Writing in the first person about literature can be a potent way to make a little room for that first-person singular instinct of youth but it also, importantly, makes reading a personal matter. In fact, expository form and conventions only become more interesting choices when students have a broader range of experience as writers about literature. Experience articulating ideas in a variety of modes mixes it up, makes writing more interesting, enlivening the voice of the student writer.

Discussions of reading and literacy can be not only frighteningly dry but full of doomsday scenarios. The world of education, in need of dollars and support and assistance, has its own language, and like all professional languages, this language has its place. We need to know broad trends in learning; we desperately need to know who isn't getting it and why. But how the statistics are skewing and why certain populations are troping in which directions and which standard we are meeting are all, at least in tone and feeling, nothing we should share with students, however loud these discussions are in our own lives.

Indeed, we need ourselves to stay in touch with the beauty and power of reading, so uniquely human, with its strange frequency, which links us uniquely to ourselves, to other people, to history. We need to recall something in ourselves. Where was that special place we read as children? Where was the bed, the closet, the chair? What were the loved books that we pulled around us cloaklike to live in for a while? There "lives the dearest freshness deep down things," in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and we need to keep "that dearest freshness" alive in our own relationship to books—to be real guides because it really matters, still, to us, too.

So, we should bring students something rich and strange. The tragedians. The hot-for-power politicians. The president. The former slave. The poets and lyricists. The critics. The satirists, the fools, and the clowns.

TEXT PAIRS	SOCIAL STUDIES LINKS	THEMES	FOCAL POINTS	OTHER TEXTS TO TRY
SHAKESPEARE and KING	The Hundred Years War; The Civil Rights Movement	overcoming adversity; hope; national identity	persuasion, 500 years apart	Obama's 2008 Presidential Acceptance Speech; President Lyndon B. Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" Speech to Congress, 1965
OBAMA and - SCHWARZENEGGER	political party conventions	political rhetoric; campaign strategies	formula writing across party lines	Obama's 2008 Acceptance Speech; McCain's 2008 Acceptance Speech
DE GOUGES and TRUTH	feminism; enlightenment	human rights; suffrage; slavery and feminism	written versus spoken words; high and low diction	Gloria Steinem's *Outrageous Acts and Every Day Rebellions*; Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*
BUSH and SONTAG and BYLES	9/11/01; American foreign policy; The Middle East	freedom of speech; democracy; critique of leaders during wartime	style: simple versus complex language	F.D.R's "I Hate War;" Lincoln's The Gettysburg Address
OWEN and REMARQUE	World War I	adult betrayal of youth in wartime	poetry versus prose	Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*; Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles; warstories.com*
SWIFT and LEWIN	18th-century poverty; the Vietnam War	systemic social failure; hypocrisy	satire and social commentary	James Thurber's "The Unicorn in the Garden"
THE ONION ARTICLES	9/11/01; American pharmaceutical industry	21st-century America; America and history; pathologizing normal behavior	satire and social commentary; parody of American magazine writing	*The Onion* online; Saturday Night Live; The Daily Show with Jon Stewart
SEAVER and HERBERT	intellectual property; corporate power	ownership of language	satire in corporate debate	Matt Groening's *The Simpsons;* Greg Daniel's *The Office*
KIPLING and JOHNSON	America in the Philippines; racism	colonialism and racism	poetry and politics: imitation of form	Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*
YOUNG and SKYNYRD and ZEVON	the American South	the Civil War legacy: Southern history	radio, music, and public debate	Woody Guthrie's *This Land Is Your Land* in response to Irving Berlin's *God Bless America*
JAMES and LAMOTT	the contemporary literary world	jealousy	mock epic poetry and contemporary prose	Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad;* Stephen King's *On Writing, A Memoir of the Craft*
PAMUK and MITCHELL	The Ottoman Empire; old New York	urban portraiture; aging citizens and the past	descriptive technique	Virginia Woolf's essay *The London Scene*
TAN and RODRIGUEZ	immigration and education policy in late 20th-century America	immigrants and English	personal experience with political conclusions	Sherman Alexie's essay "Superman and Me"
SANDERS and UNSIGNED ARTICLE ON ALCHOLISM	alcohol abuse in American culture	drinking	personal narrative versus medical writing for lay reader	Dick Lourie's poem "Forgiving Our Fathers"
SENECA and DIDION	illness and culture	learning to cope with illness	the personal essay, old and new	Susan Sontag's essays *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors*

NEW TEXT PAIR	NEW FOCUS
King and Obama	American dreamers: African-Americans speaking forty years apart
Shakespeare and Owen	signing up: the call to fight
Sontag and Unsigned *Onion*	9–11-01 commentary
Sontag, Lewin, and Owen	war critique
King and Johnson	American racism
King, Skynyrd, Young	the American South: George Wallace
Lamott and Sanders	personal experiences and lessons learned
Lewin and Bush	America's military
King and Tan	American diversity
Tan and Truth	varieties of English
Rodriguez and Sanders	parents
King, Kipling, Johnson	the legacy of racism
Rodriguez and Obama	American diversity
Rodriguez, Tan, Schwarzenegger	the immigrant experience

PART **1**

Persuasion Politics

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.	"I Have a Dream" speech
William Shakespeare	"St. Crispin's Day Speech," *Henry V*
Barack Obama	Keynote Address at the Democratic Convention, 2004
Arnold Schwarzenegger	Keynote address at the Republican Convention, 2004
Olympe de Gouges	*The Rights of Women*
Sojourner Truth	"Ain't I a Woman?" speech

Olympe de Gouges
The Rights of Women
FORM: *Political Pamphlet*
DATE: 1791

Sojouner Truth
"Ain't I a Woman?"
FORM: *Speech*
DATE: 1854

HISTORICAL NOTE

Teaching core texts of early feminism provides an occasion to consider how the quest for equal rights emerges out of the context of Enlightenment ideas. In our own lifetimes it's easy to equate feminism primarily with the women's movement of the 1960s and early 1970s and not fully trace its ideas back farther. De Gouges reminds us otherwise. Even today, there is no global consensus about the role of women in society, and in America, feminism as a concept or rallying cry seems to come in and out of focus, depending on events. With the perspective of time and in light of recent history, Americans have become newly conscious of the status of women in our country. And when events call our attention to how women are treated elsewhere, we see the status accorded women in our society in a new light. So questions arise with new force: Why are women subjugated to men in some societies? What is the origin of that impulse? Is it driven by religion? Economics? *Is* there a biological component? Why should the subjugation of women be repelled?

The Intersection

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France and America were aflame with Enlightenment ideas. At the heart of their revolutions and political controversies and finally their political documents were world-changing, incendiary ideas. These ideas were catching. Assertions of the rights of man, for instance, seemed to proliferate fertile, disquieting questions. All men are created equal. Very good. What defines a man? Who should vote? Are not slaves men? And what about women? Should they not, too, enjoy the rights due to citizens? If countries extended suffrage to a greater pool of men, then why should the right not be extended to include women? In this period, feminism as a movement began in earnest. In texts born of this period, two women, a French playwright and an African American abolitionist, wove arguments in very different ways yet made the same essential assertion: Women should have the same rights as men.

In her pamphlet *The Rights of Women*, French woman Olympe de Gouges directly echoes the form of a document central to the French Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, written in 1789. Radical in this and all else, she soon found herself guillotined during the Reign of Terror. Some sixty-two years later in America, a former slave, Sojourner Truth, also addresses the rights of women, coming at the topic dually armed for argument with her experience as a slave and a woman. In fully dialectical English, inflected with the Dutch of her former masters, her speech is one of the pithiest, most forceful arguments ever levied against the justifications for the subjugation of women.

Points for Discussion: The Rights of Women

HALLMARKS *aphorisms, argumentation, constitutional form (prefatory remarks in direct address, declarative statements of principles)*

FORM AND CONTENT Olympe de Gouges quite directly uses the form and ideas of the Declaration of Rights of Man, which was considered a cornerstone text for the French Revolution. It was published in pamphlet format, which was quite common to the eighteenth century. Ask students to describe what sort of document this seems to be. What do they make of the use of articles to delineate points? Why do makers of political documents do this? What is the purpose of making each point discrete and easy to refer to? Point out to students that de Gouges' articles directly correlate to the French Declaration of Human Rights but with

modifications based on the rights of women: "Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights." Why do students think she so directly worked from the Declaration, rather than coming up with articles conceived on their own? Is she solely paying respect to that document? Or is this strategic?

What would students say is her intention in this document? In some sense this is a call to arms: Were students moved by what she says? Can they relate to it at all? What do her comments suggest about the status of women in French society? What about her use of language? How formal is it? (It's more grand than formal.) How complex? How is she asserting "full possession" of her intellectual faculties in the way she writes?

"I shall never cease to say it, the problem is laid down, and it must be solved. She who bears half the burden ought to have half the right. Half of the human race is deprived of equality; it must be given to them. This will be one of the grand glories of our grand century. Let the right of woman counterbalance the right of man—that is to say, let the laws be placed in conformity with the morals and manners of the country." (French author Victor Hugo, 1875, in The New York Times*)*

TONE AND AUDIENCE De Gouges addresses both the men and women of revolutionary France in this speech. Significantly, though, at line 118 in her Postscript she says, "Oh women, women! When will you cease to be blind? What advantage have you received from the Revolution?" Ask students, "What is de Gouges' attitude toward women here? What is her attitude toward men? How much anger do you sense? Does it seem warranted?"

France was one of the last Continental powers to grant women the right to vote. Many countries rather quickly granted the vote after the First World War but France did not until 1944. Switzerland did not give women the right to vote until 1971 and in 1984 Lichtenstein enfranchised women.

FOCAL POINT: LANGUAGE AND AUTHORITY In this document, de Gouges uses the language of authority, speaking declaratively, speaking in the imperative, speaking aphoristically, speaking for all French women. She argues persuasively that the sexes in the animal kingdom "everywhere they cooperate in harmonious togetherness in this immortal masterpiece." What happens everywhere, what all women demand are "truths," she fully claims to be entitled to define and articulate. How do students react to this? How does de Gouges' use of language compare to the opening of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"? Does her way of speaking seem quite in line with this American document from 1776? Are we simply seeing here all the hallmarks of eighteenth-century revolutionary rhetoric?

Points for Discussion: *"Ain't I a Woman?"*

HALLMARKS *anaphora, argumentation, biblical allusion, dialect, direct address*

FORM AND CONTENT Sojourner Truth gave this speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1854. In it she argues against the notion that women are inferior, citing all the work she did as a slave and repeatedly asking "Ain't I a

Woman?" The context was a meeting about the rights of women, and she rose to counter various arguments that had been made on the floor: most clearly that women needed special treatment due to their fragility, that they were intellectually lesser, and that Christ was not a woman and therefore women were inferior. Referencing her own experience—which was hard to argue with—and confidently citing the Bible, she proceeded to dismantle arguments made before her. What sorts of things appear to have been said before she speaks? Ask students what her counterarguments are. How persuasive do they find them? Why has this speech remained so popular?

TONE AND AUDIENCE From the moment Truth uttered her first words to the crowd in Akron, her language asserts the superiority and sway of a mother's tongue. She took the stage amid booing and hissing, which she briskly labeled "a racket." She referred to the audience as children. Ask students to look closely at the opening paragraph: How does she speak to them? Ask students to circle word choices that stand out to them. How else does Truth make her opponents look small? It's astounding how her word choices all feed her intent to diminish her opponents' force. At line 18 she refers to the argument about intellect as "mean." In another she refers to "that little man in black there." Guide students to examine Truth's tone early on, for example, when she says "the white men will be in a fix pretty soon." What is she suggesting about white men? Why will they be in a fix? After her speech, activist Lucy Gage reported that "Hundreds rushed up to shake hands with her, and congratulate the glorious old mother." Is there anything else motherlike about her speech, apart from her calling her audience children?

FOCAL POINT: DIALECTIC

Sojourner Truth's English was distinctive. She spoke with a Dutch accent because her first owners were Dutch settlers in New York. She was not literate, and yet she was well versed in the Bible and became a preacher, accustomed to public speaking. Ask students, "Do you like her way of speaking? Do you know anyone who speaks this way? What is the effect of hearing such truths from a former slave? What is the rhetorical power of dialect? Does it have a sort of authority? Does it seem more authentic? More true? Why?" Basically it was not a choice for Truth to speak this way; this was how she spoke. But the white activists for women's rights who gave her the rostrum *did* make a choice. What do students make of that? Considering her speech in all its aspects, why does it make sense that she gained a forum for her ideas?

Sojourner Truth was a remarkable woman in every way. Indeed she was a formidable-looking woman, nearly six feet tall. She was nobody to trifle with: When on one occasion she was accused of being a man, she bared her breasts to indicate that she was not. She had mothered children, endured and escaped slavery, experienced religious revelation, worked as a preacher, lived in a commune, and met the likes of Frederick Douglass and Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant. She recruited black soldiers for the Union Army. She had numerous friends and patrons, many of them white, who supported her work, which was extraordinary in its reach and tirelessness. Hers is truly a remarkable story.

With the Internet, not to mention simple video, historical memory works differently than it used to. In the past, we were dependent on the highly colored, wonderfully rich, utterly fallible reminiscences. Here we have women's rights leader Frances Gage recalling Sojourner Truth's speech:

> *The leaders of the movement trembled on seeing a tall, gaunt black woman in a gray dress and white turban, surmounted with an uncouth sun-bonnet, march deliberately into the church, walk with the air of a queen up the aisle, and take her seat upon the pulpit steps.*
>
> *A buzz of disapprobation was heard all over the house, and there fell on the listening ear, "An abolition affair!" "Woman's rights and niggers!" "I told you so!" "Go it, darkey!"*
>
> *I chanced on that occasion to wear my first laurels in public life as president of the meeting. At my request order was restored, and the business of the Convention went on.*

After the speech Gage recalled that:

> *Amid roars of applause, she returned to her corner, leaving more than one of us with streaming eyes, and hearts beating with gratitude. She had taken us up in her strong arms and carried us safely over the slough of difficulty turning the whole tide in our favor. I have never in my life seen anything like the magical influence that subdued the mobbish spirit of the day, and turned the sneers and jeers of an excited crowd into notes of respect and admiration. Hundreds rushed up to shake hands with her, and congratulate the glorious old mother, and bid her God-speed on her mission of "testifyin' agin concerning the wickedness of this 'ere people." (Frances Gage, 1889, in* The History of Women's Suffrage*, coauthored with Elizabeth Cady Stanton)*

Points for Discussion: *Connecting the Authors*

Ask your students to look at the two speeches and consider first their differences. One is highly written, shaped in the language of a foundational Republican document; the other is oral, formed in part at least reactively: Truth is speaking in response to specific comments made at the Akron convention. One is written in highly polished language, asserting intellectual authority with highly literate, politically informed language. The other is spoken in confident, dialectical English with economy of expression: What's there is choice. Ask them to consider the differences between speeches and political documents. What is the power of a speech? What can happen in such a context that cannot with a written document? What is the appeal of polished writing? What is the appeal of dialectical, familiar speech? And, for all their differences, what ideas do these two women share?

FOCAL POINT: RHETORIC Both of these writers make use of rhetorical questions. In a rhetorical question, the speaker poses a question for which no answer is expected or desired. Ask your students to go through both texts and underline them. What is their force and importance in these speeches? Why do these writers use rhetorical questions instead of assertions? Why doesn't Truth say, "See, I am a woman and I can do all these things." What does her repeated question underscore? How does it create tone? The repeated question conveys impatience: how absurd it all seems as she stands before them there.

To link this text pair to contemporary women's roles and issues, it might be interesting to scan the cover lines of current women's magazines for rhetorical questions. And further, you might encourage a rollicking class discussion of whether women have come a long way, baby. Obviously there are countless ways to link this text pair to the speeches, writings, and careers of prominent contemporary women in politics.

OLYMPE DE GOUGES — The Rights of Women

1. This document opens with a rhetorical question: "Man, are you capable of being just?" What is the effect? Why does the speaker begin provocatively?
2. De Gouges says that man "wants to command as a despot a sex which is in full possession of its intellectual faculties." In this period of Revolutionary France, an implication of despotism was highly charged. Why does she use the word *despot* here?
3. Rather famously, de Gouges wrote in Article 10 that because women have the right to mount the scaffold (for execution) "she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum." A *rostrum* is a platform for public oration. What do you think she means here?
4. In the Postscript, de Gouges addresses her sex: "Woman, wake up; the tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe; discover your rights. The powerful empire of truth is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, supersition, and lies." When she says "discover your rights," what does she suggest about rights? Do they exist because they are articulated in a document? Or are they, does she imply, naturally existing?

SOJOURNER TRUTH — *"Ain't I a Woman?"*

"If Sojourner Truth seems somewhat larger than life, it is because she was." (Ira Berlin, *The New York Times,* 1996)

1. How does Truth speak to her audience? What kind of language does she use?
2. What lines does she say that specifically counter the idea that women are fragile?
3. What is the impact of her repeated rhetorical question "Ain't I a Woman?"
4. Whom is she alluding to when she says, "If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again!"

Spotlight on Rhetoric: The Imperative

The imperative or command form of the verb is employed in all sorts of situations. The use of the imperative is often quite benign and even bland in everyday life. Everybody uses the imperative, from babies pointing to boxes of cookies ("Open") to teachers giving homework ("Read Chapter 10").

Within the context of argumentation, the imperative has a different force and often conveys an authoritative tone. De Gouges commands us "Observe the Creator in his wisdom." Sojourner Truth tells us "Look at me! Look at my arm!" In literature and in speeches, the conspicuous presence of the imperative is often highly suggestive and deserves close consideration.

Find It

Find examples of three or more of these devices, underlining them and noting in the margin where they appear.

1. alliteration
2. allusion
3. anaphora
4. aphoristic sentences
5. apostrophe

Point of View

Write from the point of view of the opposite sex. This need not be an entire story, just an entire page in which you narrate events from the other point of view. Do everything in your power to avoid over-the-top clichés such as "I chipped a nail and almost started to cry" (the vanity-obsessed woman) or "I turned off the phone when I saw her name come up on caller ID" (the callous, self-absorbed man). Just create the plausible, simple human thoughts of your character and make their gender believable. In order to do this, you do need to imagine a specific individual.

Building an Argument

The push for women's rights and the vote for women emerged within the context of ever-broadening terms of suffrage for American voters. At first in America, only white, male landowners could vote. Then, after the Civil War, the Thirteenth Amendment accorded voting rights to all men over twenty-one, regardless of race, and the Nineteenth Amendment made voting legal for women. The Twenty-sixth Amendment was passed in 1971, granting all citizens over the age of 18 the right to vote. One argument in favor of lowering the voting age in 1971 was that if you were old enough to be drafted to fight and possibly die in the Vietnam War, then you were old enough to be able to vote (the logic of which is fairly unimpeachable). Think hard. How might one justify lowering the voting age?

Write an argument either for or against lowering the voting age to sixteen. Be sure to argue carefully in defense of your points. If you argue in favor, what supports your position? Why are sixteen year olds up to the task of voting? If against, what factors line up against their suffrage?

Before you start to write, consider what kind of piece you want to write. You could write a personal essay, but you could use a different form, too, such as a speech, a manifesto, or a chatty editorial for a youth-oriented magazine.

Be sure to suit your words to your audience: Speak appropriately. If slang is right for your audience, then use it. Consider whom you are trying to persuade. Other teenagers? Legislators? The general public? What will appeal?

Olympe de Gouges — The Rights of Women

1748–1793
born France

Man, are you capable of being just? It is a woman who poses the question; you will not deprive her of that right at least. Tell me, what gives you sovereign empire to oppress my sex? Your strength? Your talents? Observe the Creator in his wisdom; survey in all her grandeur that nature with whom you seem to want to be in harmony, and give me, if you dare, an example of this tyrannical empire. Go back to animals, consult the elements, study plants, finally glance at all the modifications of organic matter, and surrender to the evidence when I offer you the means; search, probe, and distinguish, if you can, the sexes in the administration of nature. Everywhere you will find them mingled; everywhere they cooperate in harmonious togetherness in this immortal masterpiece.

Man alone has raised his exceptional circumstances to a principle. Bizarre, blind, bloated with science and degenerated—in a century of enlightenment and wisdom—into the crassest ignorance, he wants to command as a despot a sex which is in full possession of its intellectual faculties; he pretends to enjoy the Revolution and to claim his rights to equality in order to say nothing more about it.

Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen

Mothers, daughters, sisters and representatives of the nation demand to be constituted into a national assembly. Believing that ignorance, omission, or scorn for the rights of woman are the only causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments, the women have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of woman in order that this declaration, constantly exposed before all the members of the society, will ceaselessly remind them of their rights and duties; in order that the authoritative acts of women and the authoritative acts of men may be at any moment compared with and respectful of the purpose of all political institutions; and in order that citizens' demands, henceforth based on simple and incontestable principles, will always support the constitution, good morals, and the happiness of all. Consequently, the sex that is as superior in beauty as it is in courage during the suffering of maternity recognized and declares in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following Rights of Woman and of Female Citizens.

continued on following page

Article 1

Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights. Social distinctions can be based only on the common utility.

Article 2

The purpose of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of woman and man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and especially resistance to oppression.

Article 3

The principle of all sovereignty rests essentially with the nation, which is nothing but the union of woman and man; no body and no individual can exercise any authority which does not come expressly from it [the nation].

Article 4

Liberty and justice consist of restoring all that belongs to others; thus, the only limits on the exercise of the natural rights of woman are perpetual male tyranny; these limits are to be reformed by the laws of nature and reason.

Article 5

Laws of nature and reason *proscribe* all acts harmful to society; everything which is not prohibited by these wise and divine laws cannot be prevented, and no one can be *constrained* to do what they do not command.

proscribe— outlaw

constrained— forced

Article 6

The laws must be the expression of the general will; all female and male citizens must contribute either personally or through their representatives to its formation; it must be the same for all: male and female citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, must be equally admitted to all honors, positions, and public employment according to their capacity and without other distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents.

Article 7

No woman is an exception: she is accused, arrested, and detained in cases determined by law. Women, like men, obey this rigorous law.

Article 8

The law must establish only those penalties that are strictly and obviously necessary, and no one can be punished except by virtue of a law established and *promulgated* prior to the crime and legally applicable to women.

promulgated— proclaimed public

Article 9

Once any woman is declared guilty, complete rigor is [to be] exercised by the law.

Article 10

No one is to be disquieted for his very basic opinions; woman has the right to mount the *scaffold*; she must equally have the right to mount the *rostrum*, provided that her demonstrations do not disturb the legally established public order.

scaffold— platform for hanging or beheading

rostrum— stage for public speaking

Article 11

The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of woman, since the liberty assures the recognition of children by their fathers. Any female citizen thus may say freely, I am the mother of a child which belongs to you, without being forced by a barbarous prejudice to hide the truth; [an exception may be made] to respond to the abuse of this liberty in cases determined by the law.

Article 12

The guarantee of the rights of woman and the female citizen implies a major benefit; this guarantee must be instituted for the advantage of all, and not for the particular benefit of those to whom it is entrusted.

Article 13

For the support of the public force and the expenses of administration, the contributions of woman and man are equal; she share all the duties and all the painful tasks; therefore, she must have the same share in the distribution of positions, employments, offices, honors and jobs.

Article 14

Female and male citizens have the right to verify, either by themselves or through their representatives, the necessity of the public contribution. This can only apply to women if they are granted an equal share, not only of wealth, but also of public administration, and in the determination of the proportion, the base, the collection, and the duration of the tax.

Article 15

The collectivity of women, joined for tax purposed to the aggregate of men, has the right to demand an accounting of his administration from any public agent.

continued on following page

Article 16

No society has a constitution without the guarantee of the rights and the separation of powers; the constitution is *null* if the majority of individuals comprising the nation have not cooperated in drafting it.

null— invalid

Article 17

Property belongs to both sexes whether united or separate; for each it is an inviolable and sacred right; no on can be deprived of it, since it is the true patrimony of nature, unless the legally determined public need obviously dictates it, and then only with a just and prior indemnity.

Postscript

Woman, wake up; the *tocsin* of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe; discover your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The flame of truth has dispersed all the clouds of folly and usurpation. Enslaved man has multiplied his strength and needs recourse to yours to break his chains. Having become free, he has become unjust to his companion. Oh, women, women! When will you cease to be blind? What advantage have you received from the Revolution? A more pronounced scorn, a more marked disdain. In the centuries of corruption you ruled only over the weakness of men. The reclamation of your patrimony, based on the wise decrees of nature—what have you to dread from such a fine undertaking? The *bon mot* of the legislator of the marriage of Cana? Do you fear that our French legislators, correctors of that morality, long ensnared by political practices now out of date, will only say again to you: women, what is there in common between you and us? Everything, you will have to answer. If they persist in their weakness in putting this non sequitur in contradiction to their principles, courageously oppose the force of reason to the empty pretensions of superiority; unite yourselves beneath the standards of philosophy; deploy all the energy of your character, and you will soon see these haughty men, not groveling at your feet as *servile* adorers, but proud to share with you the treasures of the Supreme Being. Regardless of what barriers confront you, it is in your power to free yourselves; you have only to want to. Let us pass not to the shocking *tableau* of what you have been in society; and since national education is in question at this moment, let us see whether our wise legislators will think judiciously about the education of women.

tocsin— warning bell

bon mot— witty remark

servile— slave-like

tableau— picture

SOJOURNER TRUTH — *"Ain't I a Woman?"*

1797–1883
BORN UNITED STATES

Delivered 1851 at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [audience member suggests intellect] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.