

Name:

Date:

Who is Sojourner Truth?

Sojourner Truth was an African American abolitionist and women's rights activist in the 19th century. Sojourner was born a slave in Ulster County, New York in 1797; she was subjected to the horrific and violent conditions of life as a slave until she was able to escape with her daughter in 1826. A year later, in 1827, New York became the first state to pass a law for the total abolition of legal slavery. As a free woman, Sojourner became heavily involved with the Christian church and began to speak publicly about the injustice of slavery as well as the oppression she personally faced as a Black woman. On her journey of advocacy, she met with other women activists who were fighting for equal rights, including the right to vote. It was on a women's rights lecture tour that Sojourner delivered her most memorable "Ain't I A Woman?" speech. She continued to fight for equal human rights until her death in 1883.

Sojourner Truth: Ain't I A Woman? Delivered 1851 Women's Rights Convention, 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? [member of audience whispers, "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.

Close Reading Questions Multiple Choice

1. What does the phrase **out of kilter** mean as it is used in the passage?
 - a. Properly working
 - b. Not in balance
 - c. Engineered accurately
 - d. Quickly defeated

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

2. 'Twixt is a contraction for the word "betwixt." What does the word 'twixt mean as it is used in the passage?

- a. Despite
- b. Abuse
- c. Divided
- d. Between

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

3. What does the idiomatic phrase "in a fix" mean as it is used in the passage?

- a. In a troublesome situation
- b. In a partnership you don't want
- c. In a situation that is best for all
- d. In sync with what the majority believes

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

4. What does the underlined word mean in the following statement from the text, "and no man could head me!"?

- a. To support something
- b. To surpass
- c. the upper part of the human body
- d. the top of a ship's mast

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

5. What is Truth referring to when she states, she could "bear the lash as well!"

- a. She can handle the tough labor of working on a farm
- b. She can handle the critical feedback given to her as a worker
- c. She can handle the physical abuse of being whipped as a slave
- d. She can handle the trauma of giving birth to many children

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

6. What is the purpose of the following metaphor? "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?"

- a. To show that intelligence has nothing to do with how much rights a person deserves
- b. To prove that women only received half the rights men do
- c. To say that if someone is unintelligent, they won't recognize the injustice going on
- d. To illustrate that women are treated equally as bad as Black slaves

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

7. What does the word **obliged** mean as it is used in the passage?

- a. To make someone legally bound
- b. To promise something
- c. To have a strong urge to do something
- d. To be grateful

8. According to Truth, what religious counterclaim do others use to argue that men are the greater sex?

- a. Men are more intelligent than women biologically.
- b. In the Bible, men are more willing to sacrifice themselves.
- c. Jesus Christ was a man.
- d. Women are more likely to hurt themselves in toilsome situations.

9. How does Truth refute the argument from question 8?

- a. Women work just as many hours as men in the fields.
- b. Christ came from a woman.
- c. Women can be made wiser if given the chance.
- d. Men would be emotional too if they were expected to raise the children.

10. What is the author's tone?

- a. Informal and confident
- b. Unsure and humorous
- c. Formal and religious
- d. Desperate and demeaning

11. Which detail from the text **BEST** supports the answer to question 10?

- a. "What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights?"
- b. "And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them."
- c. "And now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say."
- d. "I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?"

12. Which of the following claims is **NOT** made by Truth in the text?

- a. Women are just as strong as men.
- b. Black women should be treated like all other women.
- c. Women should be able to work and have children.
- d. When women are determined, they can create change.

Open-Ended Questions

1. What is the role or position of the writer?

2. Who is the audience?

3. What is the format of this text?

4. What is the topic of this text?

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5. What is the author's purpose? How do you know?

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

6. What is Truth's main strategy in convincing her audience of her viewpoints?

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7. Why does Truth repeat the question "Ain't I A Woman?" Does she want people to answer her?

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8. What is the effect of Truth referring to the audience for a response? How does it help her argument?

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9. Why does Truth say, "Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place!" Does Truth want to be treated fragile like white women are? Explain.

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10. Why is Truth's memorable speech from 1851 still so powerful today?

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Open-Ended Questions Answer Key

1. What is the role or position of the writer?

Public speaker and women's right activist.

2. Who is the audience?

Anyone who attended the Women's Rights Convention in 1851. It was probably mostly women, but there were men there too, as she addresses a man in the audience. She wants to lecture to women because she hopes they will join in her fight for equal rights (not just for white women, but for Black women). Sojourner also wants men to hear her speech, since she hopes to change the way that America views women as lesser than men.

3. What is the format of this text?

It is a speech.

4. What is the topic of this text?

The topic of her speech is women's rights and the demand for equal human rights.

5. What is the author's purpose? How do you know?

The purpose of this speech is to **persuade** the audience that giving women the same rights as men, such as the right to vote, is what is fair. She points out that the argument "women are not as smart or strong as men" doesn't make any sense. She uses examples from her life as a former slave and her experiences as a mother to show that she is just as strong as any man she knows. She also points out that Black women are women too.

6. What is Truth's main strategy in convincing her audience of her viewpoints?

Sojourner continuously points out the lack of logic present in the man's argument about males being the superior sex. By refuting the counterclaim, she is able to prove she has the strongest argument.

7. Why does Truth repeat the question "Ain't I A Woman?" Does she want people to answer her?

She repeats this question for emphasis and the urgent need for people to join her cause. By repeatedly pointing out the fallacy that women should be treated as fragile human beings—yet she is treated roughly-- demonstrates to the audience that there is no logic in the current laws of society. White women are treated differently than Black women. She does not want people to actually answer her; the question is rhetorical because she is obviously a woman.

8. What is the effect of Truth referring to the audience for a response? How does it help her argument?

Sojourner is trying to appeal to her audience by making them feel like part of the movement. She wants them to become passionate and angry with her. The effect is, the audience feels involved and that they can trust her which helps her argument since it will most likely lead to their support.

9. Why does Truth say, "Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place!" Does Truth want to be treated fragile like white women are? Explain.

She is saying that men argue that women need to be treated sensitively and delicately, but that apparently only applies to white women. She calls out this unsound argument and hypocrisy, not because she wants to be treated that way, but because it is unfair. Instead, she makes the point that women are not as weak as men think they are.

10. Why is Truth's memorable speech from 1851 still so powerful today?

Her speech can still resonate with women today, especially African American women. Women today still struggle to prove that they are not less intelligent, nor less strong than men. The fight for equal rights continues, such as the desire for equal pay, and overall just the hope to be treated with respect and without bias. Just like in 1851, African American women are fighting even harder to end racism in America in addition to the gender equality issues.