

Judith Sargent Murray

Objectives

By using the writings of Judith Sargent Murray, a late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writer, students will gain a better understanding of life and education in early America. They will also be given the opportunity of improving their reading and comprehension skills.

The Judith Sargent Murray lesson and handouts are adaptable for grades 4-6.

Mississippi Department of Education 2011 Curricular Connections		
Common Core Language Arts	Sixth Grade Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8
	Reading Standards for Informational Texts Grade 3	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9
	Reading Standards for Informational Texts Grade 4	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9
	Reading Standards for Informational Texts Grade 5	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9
Social Studies	Fourth Grade Mississippi Studies	4b, 6a
	Sixth Grade World Geography and Citizenship	6c
	Eighth Grade United States from Exploration through Reconstruction	1e, 3a, 4c, 4d

Judith Sargent Murray

Objectives:

Students will gain a better understanding of life and education in early American history while improving reading and comprehension skills.

Materials: *Judith Sargent Murray Biography*; *Biography Worksheet*; *Letters Worksheet*; *Judith Sargent Murray Resource Packet* (print on legal size paper).

Procedures:

Activity One: Judith Sargent Murray Biography

1. Have students read and discuss the provided biography on Judith Sargent Murray.

Discussion Points:

- a. What did Judith Sargent Murray do that made her different from many of the ladies of her time period?
 - b. What deficiency did she see and work to make better?
 - c. What do you think of Judith Sargent Murray and her actions during the early years of the United States?
2. Distribute the *Biography Worksheet* and either pair the students up and have them interview each other. Or send students home to interview a female family member or friend who they admire or feel is exceptional.
 3. Students should use the information gathered in the interview to write a biography of their interviewee.

Activity Two: Writings of Murray

1. Distribute documents from the *Judith Sargent Murray Resource Packet* to pairs of students.
2. Have students read the documents and answer the questions using the *Letter Worksheet*.
3. Discuss their findings as a class.

Extension Activities: Researching Education Firsts

Allow students to discover the growth of education and its availability to Mississippians and Americans throughout history by researching other education pioneers or schools such as:

- a. Laurence C. Jones
- b. Booker T. Washington
- c. Piney Woods Country Life School
- d. W.E.B. DuBois
- e. Mississippi University for Women
- f. Horace Mann

Judith Sargent Murray Biography **May 5, 1751 – June 9, 1820**

Imagine a world where only white boys whose parents had money were offered an education. No one else was considered important enough to be educated; they only needed to be trained in a trade to work as a farmer, blacksmith, cooper, carpenter, or sailor. Not so long ago that was the thought here in America. White girls with money were offered basic private educations. Those with no money were left to teach themselves or remain illiterate and ignorant of basic math, geography, and other subjects. In most of this country it was illegal to teach Africans to read at all. Yet there were citizens who over time have stepped up to change the way things were done. One of the earliest was a young lady named Judith Sargent Murray.

You may or may not have heard of Mississippi's first Territorial Governor, Winthrop Sargent. You might even learn how the frontiersmen of early Mississippi did not like his strict rules known as "Sargent Codes". But did you know his older sister was a published author, a playwright, and corresponded with some of the most important people of the day? By today's standards that may not sound impressive, but when you think that Mrs. Murray was doing this in the late 1700s and early 1800s that is quite a different story.

Judith Sargent was born to a wealthy family in Gloucester, Massachusetts, the eldest of four children. She was educated as a young girl should be, in reading, writing and domestic skills, but she knew that this was not enough. She watched her brother's tutors educate him in not only reading and writing, but also mathematics, science, and other subjects that would prepare him for Harvard College. Judith, having no tutors, took it upon herself to learn these subjects on her own.

As she grew up she did exactly what a girl of that time was supposed to do. She married John Stevens, and though she and Stevens did not have children, they adopted two of his young orphaned relatives. Eventually she met John Murray, a Universalist preacher her brother had invited to visit. She considered this preacher her mentor and began to follow the Universalist Church and Murray's teachings. This new religion was not popular with the Congregationalist Church in Gloucester, and Judith and some of her family members were kicked out of the church.

Murray traveled a great deal and Judith began to write to her mentor for guidance. From theological inquiries to news of the British arriving during the Revolutionary War, Judith's letters detailed life in Gloucester. During this time Judith found herself in charge of the education of not only her adopted children but also the other children of the Universalist church. This is one of the first places that she was able to address her ideas on the equality of education between girls and boys. She wrote the lessons and they became published and used as an educational guide for other Universalist churches.

Meanwhile, Judith had been writing essays that had been published in the *Gentleman's and Lady's Town and Country Magazine*. After the war Judith's husband John Stevens revealed that the war and its blockades had lost him a great deal of money because he could not trade goods with other ports. His debts were so great that he was about to be sent to debtors' prison. Thus, John left his wife and their two adopted daughters, secretly fleeing to the West Indies to try and regain his fortune. After a year, news came from the West Indies that John Stevens had not made his fortune, but had died, leaving Judith a widow a world away in Massachusetts.

A year later, in 1788, John Murray proposed to the Widow Stevens and they were married. Judith's writings begin in earnest after she married Murray. Judith began writing poetry and submitting writings to the Massachusetts Magazine under the pseudonym or pen name "Constantia." Soon other essays and publications followed. She began to travel outside of Gloucester to New York and Philadelphia where she met George and Martha Washington and John and Abigail Adams, with whom she began correspondences with.

As Judith continued to write, she took on other pseudonyms such as "Honora Martesia" and "The Gleaner." The latter, who was thought to be a man, was considered more acceptable in this time for publishing opinions. Her *Gleaner Essays* were popular enough that they were published and attracted a number of subscribers from which Judith gained a small income. There were three volumes of essays published over the years. However, Judith was not only a writer of essays, but also a playwright. She is thought to be the first American playwright to have her play, *The Medium*, produced in America. Her second play, *The Traveler Returned*, was also produced for American audiences. Judith also helped found The Ladies Academy in Dorchester, Massachusetts, a school with a rigorous education for girls in 1804. When John Murray suffered a paralyzing stroke in 1809, Judith took care of his needs while editing his writings and sermons for publication.

John Murray died in 1815. Judith was left a widow again and followed her married daughter Julia Maria Bingaman and her family to Natchez where Julia's husband's family had a home. Leaving Massachusetts Judith packed what was most important to her. She packed her husband's papers and twenty volumes of letter books. The letter books contained copies of all the correspondence that Judith had carried out over the years. She did very little writing while in Natchez but was surrounded by family, for her brother who had served as the Territorial Governor of Mississippi, lived there with his family. Judith spent the rest of her life there at the Bingaman's Oak Point Mansion where she died in 1820.

Judith's daughter and granddaughter did not live long lives and had no descendants to take possession of Judith's belongings. In 1984, there was a discovery of her letter books at Arlington Mansion in Natchez. No one is quite sure how they came to be there, but they included details of the life, the thoughts, and the opinions of one of America's first women editorialists, playwrights, and educators. The letter books were given to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History to be preserved. They were subsequently published and made available to researchers around the world.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Biography Worksheet

Using the questions below interview a classmate or family member. On a separate sheet of paper, write a one page biography of the person you interviewed using the answers you gathered.

Name? _____

When and where were you born? _____

Who are your parents? _____

Do you have any pets? What kind? How many? Names? _____

Do you have any siblings? How many? Are they older or younger than you? _____

What is your favorite memory? _____

What is/was your favorite subject to study in school? Why? _____

What kind of job do you want to do/have? _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Letter Worksheet

Part I. The Letters

Answer the questions about the letters that were written by Judith Sargent Murray.

1. Letter number _____ Date _____ Addressee _____

2. What is the purpose of this letter?

3. What is she requesting?

4. What tone or attitude does she have in this letter? Why?

5. Do you think you would be able to write a letter to the President or former President today? Why or why not?

Part II. The Gleaner

Follow this link http://jsmsociety.com/Gleaner_I.html Read the first edition of *The Gleaner* and answer the questions below.

1. Who does it say is the writer of this piece? _____

2. We know Judith Sargent Murray was the writer and editor of *The Gleaner*. Why do you think she took on this different persona and not admit that it was herself?

3. We know that George Washington and John Adams knew it was Judith Sargent Murray who was the author. Why do you think she only put forth the effort to cover up her name on public pieces and not the letters?

4. After reading all the information what is your opinion or idea of Judith Sargent Murray and her actions or accomplishments during her life?

5. She chose several different pen names over the years. What would you choose for your pen name?

**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY LESSON PLANS
TEACHER EVALUATION**

COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME _____

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS _____

EMAIL (OPTIONAL) _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS _____ GRADE LEVEL _____

LESSON TITLE _____

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?
2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students' attention span?
3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?
4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?
5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:
___ multi-day unit ___ multi-week unit ___ other
6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?

Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.

4=excellent, **3**=good, **2**=average, **1**=inadequate

<u>Directions and notes</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	
<u>Curricular Connections</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	
<u>Student worksheets</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	N/A
<u>Interactive activities</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	N/A
<u>Historic images</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	N/A
<u>References and resources</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	N/A
<u>Activity One</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	
<u>Activity Two</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	N/A
<u>Activity Three</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	N/A
<u>Activity Four</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	N/A
<u>Extension Activities</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	N/A
<u>Overall unit</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	

We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement. Comments may be entered in the space below.