

COMMON CORE

RI 5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her argument. **RI 6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text. **RI 8** Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal texts. **RI 10** Read and comprehend literary nonfiction. **SL 1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.

DID YOU KNOW?

Mary Wollstonecraft . . .

- inspired American women's rights pioneers Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Margaret Fuller.
- was the mother of Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*.

from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Essay by Mary Wollstonecraft

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML12-718A

Meet the Author

Mary Wollstonecraft 1759–1797

Passionate, outspoken, and bold—at times even reckless—Mary Wollstonecraft was the antithesis of the proper 18th-century English lady. Inflamed with the revolutionary ideas of the Enlightenment, she denounced not only monarchy and slavery but also the institution of marriage. Her embrace of natural rights included the rights of women, children, and even animals. While still an unknown book reviewer and translator, she took on the eminent conservative Edmund Burke, one of Samuel Johnson's inner circle, by responding to his criticism of the French Revolution with her own attack on class and privilege in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). Two years later, she called for an end to the prevailing injustices against women in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Reviled by some at the time as a “hyena in petticoats,” she was the mother of feminism as we know it today.

Education of a Radical

Wollstonecraft was the second of seven children born into a middle-class family spiraling into poverty. Wishing to escape hardship, the young Wollstonecraft supplemented her meager education with extensive

reading on her own. When she came of age, she worked first as a lady's companion and later as a governess, two positions that showed her how the aristocracy lived while reinforcing her own servitude. For a while, she ran a school with her sisters in London, where she met a group of liberal reformers. These new friends gave the restless Wollstonecraft a larger, more political perspective from which to view her personal struggle for liberation.

A Life Cut Short By the time she turned 30, Wollstonecraft had written a pamphlet, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), as well as a novel. Her London publisher then hired her to write for his new journal and introduced her to reformist intellectuals such as the essayist Thomas Paine, the poet William Blake, and the political philosopher William Godwin. After writing her notorious book on women's rights, Wollstonecraft spent two years in Paris at the height of the bloody Reign of Terror, which sobered her on the French Revolution but not on its ideals. Back in London, she drew closer to William Godwin, finding in him a kindred spirit. Tragically, only a few months after marrying Godwin, she died from complications in giving birth to their only child, Mary.

Author Online



Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-718B

● TEXT ANALYSIS: COUNTERARGUMENTS

An **argument** is speech or writing that makes a major **claim**, or takes a position, about an issue and supports it with reasons and evidence. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft's purpose is to convince her readers that there should be a change of policy about women's education to provide women with greater educational opportunities. Wollstonecraft uses persuasive techniques that appeal to reason rather than to emotion to support her claim. For example, she anticipates opposing viewpoints and responds with **counterarguments**. In other words, she foresees opposing arguments and responds logically to them using reasons and evidence to refute their claims and the assumptions upon which they are based. As you read, pay attention to the counterarguments Wollstonecraft presents in the selection.

● READING SKILL: USE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To best appreciate why Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, you should have some sense of the essay's **historical context**, or the social conditions that inspired its creation. Although the essay might seem conservative by modern standards, its views were considered radical in 18th-century Britain, where few women publicly expressed discontent over their limited educational opportunities. To further your understanding of the historical context of Wollstonecraft's work, study the author biography on page 718, the background information on page 720, and the footnotes within the essay. Then, as you read, note statements that you are able to clarify by using this information.

| Statement | Explanation |
|--|--|
| "[Women] spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments." (lines 66–67) | In Wollstonecraft's era, girls were schooled primarily in domestic activities. |

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The following boldfaced words are important to your understanding Wollstonecraft's controversial essay. Try to figure out the meaning of each word from the context.

1. **vindication** from blame or guilt
2. a **prerogative** of rank
3. **inculcate** the ideas through repetition
4. not long lasting but **evanescent**
5. **feign** illness when not really ill

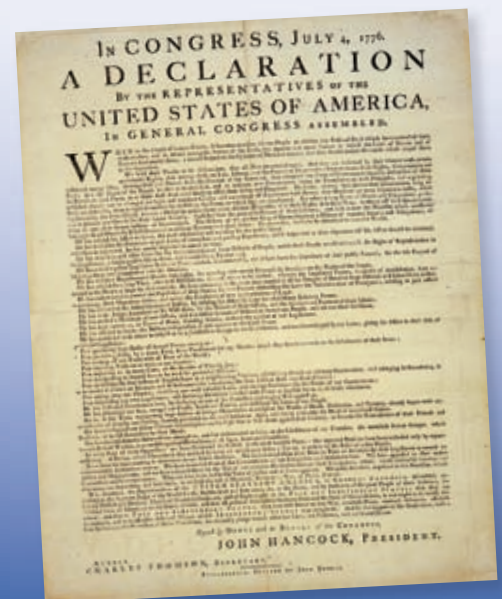


Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

What makes EQUALITY elusive?

Thomas Jefferson wrote that "all men are created equal," but he and the other Founding Fathers left out many men and all women when they first considered rights in the new United States. Writing 16 years after the Declaration of Independence, Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the first to confront the issue of equality for women, but even she confined her arguments to education.

DISCUSS Consider why equal rights have historically been so difficult to achieve. How does a country generally ensure that all of its citizens are treated equally and fairly? If you don't have these rights, how are you generally treated? Write down your thoughts on these issues and then discuss them with a small group of classmates.



A VINDICATION of the RIGHTS of WOMAN

Mary Wollstonecraft

BACKGROUND In the late 18th century, daughters of English gentlemen were educated at home before being sent away to school for a few years. In addition to reading and studying foreign languages, girls learned how to play the piano, sing, draw, and do needlework. Young women were expected to marry, and those without independent wealth had few alternatives. Barred from any professional occupation, an unmarried woman could only support herself as a servant, a nurse, a governess, or some similar occupation.

FROM THE INTRODUCTION

After considering the historic page, and viewing the living world with anxious solicitude, the most melancholy emotions of sorrowful indignation have depressed my spirits, and I have sighed when obliged to confess, that either nature has made a great difference between man and man, or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial. I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but what has been the result?—a profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women, in particular, are rendered
10 weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion. The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity. One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women

vindication

(vīn'dī-kā'shən) *n.*
clearing from criticism,
blame, guilt, or suspicion;
justification

Analyze Visuals ►

Describe the expressions on the faces of the two figures shown in the painting on the opposite page. What might the image suggest about relations between men and women in the 18th century?

A Girl Reading a Letter by Candlelight with a Young Man Peering over Her Shoulder (1760), Joseph Wright of Derby. Oil on canvas, 88.9 cm × 69.8 cm. Private collection. © Bridgeman Art Library.



than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers; and the understanding of the sex has
20 been so bubbled by this specious homage,¹ that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect. **A**

In a treatise,² therefore, on female rights and manners, the works which have been particularly written for their improvement must not be overlooked; especially when it is asserted, in direct terms, that the minds of women are enfeebled by false refinement; that the books of instruction, written by men of genius, have had the same tendency as more frivolous productions; and that . . . they are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as a part of the human species, when
30 improvable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation, and puts a natural scepter in a feeble hand.

Yet, because I am a woman, I would not lead my readers to suppose that I mean violently to agitate the contested question respecting the quality or inferiority of the sex; but as the subject lies in my way, and I cannot pass it over without subjecting the main tendency of my reasoning to misconstruction, I shall stop a moment to deliver, in a few words, my opinion. In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male. This is the law of nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favor of woman. A degree of physical superiority cannot, therefore, be denied—and it is a noble **prerogative!** But not content with this natural pre-
40 eminence, men endeavor to sink us still lower merely to render us alluring objects for a moment; and women, intoxicated by the adoration which men, under the influence of their senses, pay them, do not seek to obtain a durable interest in their hearts, or to become the friends of the fellow creatures who find amusement in their society. **B**

I am aware of an obvious inference: from every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women; but where are they to be found? If by this appellation men mean to inveigh against their ardor³ in hunting, shooting, and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it be against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and
50 virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind; all those who view them with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine. . . .

My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists—I wish to persuade women

A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reread the background information on page 720. Why might Wollstonecraft have considered women's education more appropriate for a mistress than for a wife and mother?

prerogative (prĭ-rŏg'ə-tĭv)
n. a privilege or distinctive advantage

B COUNTERARGUMENTS

Reread lines 31–44. What is Wollstonecraft's counterargument to the **claim** that women are naturally inferior to men?

1. **bubbled by this specious homage** (spē'shəs hŏm'jī): deceived by this false honor.

2. **treatise**: a formal, detailed article or book on a particular subject.

3. **If by . . . inveigh** (ĭn-vā') **against their ardor**: if by this term ("masculine women") men mean to condemn some women's enthusiasm.

to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement
60 of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets⁴ of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt. . . . **C**

The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavor by satire or instruction to improve them. It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments;⁵ meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine⁶ notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves—the only way
70 of them, when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act: they dress; they paint, and nickname God’s creatures. Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio!⁷ Can they be expected to govern a family with judgment, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world?

If then it can be fairly deduced from the present conduct of the sex, from the prevalent fondness for pleasure which takes place of ambition and those nobler passions that open and enlarge the soul; that the instruction which women have hitherto received has only tended, with the constitution of civil society, to render them insignificant objects of desire—mere propagators of fools!—if
80 it can be proved that in aiming to accomplish them, without cultivating their understandings, they are taken out of their sphere of duties, and made ridiculous and useless when the short-lived bloom of beauty is over, I presume that *rational* men will excuse me for endeavoring to persuade them to become more masculine and respectable.

Indeed the word masculine is only a bugbear:⁸ there is little reason to fear that women will acquire too much courage or fortitude; for their apparent inferiority with respect to bodily strength, must render them, in some degree, dependent on men in the various relations of life; but why should it be increased by prejudices that give a sex to virtue, and confound simple truths with sensual reveries?⁹ **D**

FROM CHAPTER 2

Youth is the season for love in both sexes; but in those days of thoughtless
90 enjoyment provision should be made for the more important years of life, when reflection takes place of sensation. But Rousseau,¹⁰ and most of the male writers

4. **epithets** (ěp’ə-thěts’): descriptive terms.

5. **accomplishments**: This term, when applied to women, designated only those achievements then considered suitable for middle- and upper-class women, such as painting, singing, playing a musical instrument, and embroidery.

6. **libertine** (lĭb’ər-tĕn’): indecent or unseemly.

7. **seraglio** (sə-răl’yō): harem.

8. **bugbear**: an object of exaggerated fear.

9. **confound . . . reveries** (rĕv’ər-rĕz): confuse simple truths with men’s sexual daydreams.

10. **Rousseau** (rōō-sō’): The Swiss-born French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) presented a plan for female education in his famous 1762 novel *Émile*.

Language Coach

Roots and Affixes The English word *acquire* and the Spanish *adquirir* come from the same Latin root (*quaerere*, “to seek”) and contain the same prefix, *ad-* (“to”). However, in English *ad-* becomes *ac-* before the letter *q*. What does *acquire* mean in line 58?

COMMON CORE RI.6

C SARCASM

Sarcasm is a mocking or joking tone. It may be used to emphasize a point by saying the opposite of what is meant. In line 54, Wollstonecraft asks other women to “excuse” her for “treat[ing] them as rational creatures.” Wollstonecraft does not intend to apologize to women. On the contrary, she believes women are thoroughly rational and thus deserving of greater education. At whom does Wollstonecraft direct this sarcastic remark? Why does she do so?

D COUNTERARGUMENTS

Reread lines 63–88. What counterarguments does Wollstonecraft use to refute the **assumption** that improved education will make women too masculine?

who have followed his steps, have warmly **inculcated** that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point: to render them¹¹ pleasing.

Let me reason with the supporters of this opinion who have any knowledge of human nature, do they imagine that marriage can eradicate the habitude of life? The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone. Will she then have sufficient native energy to look into herself for comfort, and cultivate her
100 dormant faculties? or, is it not more rational to expect that she will try to please other men; and, in the emotions raised by the expectation of new conquests, endeavor to forget the mortification her love or pride has received? When the husband ceases to be a lover—and the time will inevitably come, her desire of pleasing will then grow languid, or become a spring of bitterness; and love, perhaps, the most **evanescent** of all passions, gives place to jealousy or vanity.

I now speak of women who are restrained by principle or prejudice; such women, though they would shrink from an intrigue with real abhorrence, yet, nevertheless, wish to be convinced by the homage of gallantry that they are cruelly neglected by their husbands; or, days and weeks are spent in dreaming of the
110 happiness enjoyed by congenial souls till their health is undermined and their spirits broken by discontent. How then can the great art of pleasing be such a necessary study? it is only useful to a mistress; the chaste wife, and serious mother, should only consider her power to please as the polish of her virtues, and the affection of her husband as one of the comforts that render her talk less difficult and her life happier. But, whether she be loved or neglected, her first wish should be to make herself respectable, and not to rely for all her happiness on a being subject to like infirmities with herself. **E**

The worthy Dr. Gregory fell into a similar error. I respect his heart; but entirely disapprove of his celebrated *Legacy to his Daughters*.¹² . . .

120 He actually recommends dissimulation, and advises an innocent girl to give the lie to her feelings, and not dance with spirit, when gaiety of heart would make her feet eloquent without making her gestures immodest. In the name of truth and common sense, why should not one woman acknowledge that she can take more exercise than another? or, in other words, that she has a sound constitution; and why, to damp innocent vivacity, is she darkly to be told that men will draw conclusions which she little thinks of? Let the libertine draw what inference he pleases; but, I hope, that no sensible mother will restrain the natural frankness of youth by instilling such indecent cautions. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; and a wiser than Solomon¹³ hath said, that the heart should be

inculcate (in-kŭl'kāt') v.
to impress on the mind
by frequent repetition;
to teach; to instill

evanescent (ĕv'ə-nĕs'ənt)
adj. quick to disappear

E HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reread lines 89–117. In his writings, the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau placed a high value on liberty and equality. How does this information help you appreciate the radical nature of Wollstonecraft's argument?

11. **them:** that is, females.

12. **Dr. Gregory . . . Daughters:** In his 1774 work *A Father's Legacy for His Daughters*, John Gregory (1724–1773) offered a plan for female education that remained popular for decades.

13. **a wiser than Solomon:** King David, reputed author of many psalms in the Bible and the father of King Solomon, who was known for his wisdom. The words that follow draw on ideas in Psalm 24, which states that only those with “clean hands, and a pure heart” shall ascend into Heaven.



In the Artist's Studio (1800s), Thomas Myles. Oil on canvas, 39.4 cm × 29.2 cm. Private collection.
© Bridgeman Art Library.

130 made clean, and not trivial ceremonies observed, which it is not very difficult to fulfil with scrupulous exactness when vice reigns in the heart.

Women ought to endeavor to purify their heart; but can they do so when their uncultivated understandings make them entirely dependent on their senses for employment and amusement, when no noble pursuit sets them above the little vanities of the day, or enables them to curb the wild emotions that agitate a reed over which every passing breeze has power? To gain the affections of a virtuous man, is affectation necessary? Nature has given woman a weaker frame than man; but, to ensure her husband's affections, must a wife, who by the exercise of her mind and body whilst she was discharging the duties of a daughter, wife, and
 140 mother, has allowed her constitution to retain its natural strength, and her nerves a healthy tone, is she, I say, to condescend to use art and **feign** a sickly delicacy in order to secure her husband's affection? Weakness may excite tenderness, and gratify the arrogant pride of man; but the lordly caresses of a protector will not

feign (fān) v. to make a false show of; pretend


gratify a noble mind that pants for, and deserves to be respected. Fondness is a poor substitute for friendship! . . .

Besides, the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practicing various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband; and if she, by possessing such substantial qualities, merit his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions. . . . **F**

If all the faculties of woman's mind are only to be cultivated as they respect her dependence on man; if, when a husband be obtained, she have arrived at her goal, and meanly proud rests satisfied with such a paltry crown, let her grovel contentedly, scarcely raised by her employments above the animal kingdom; but, if, struggling for the prize of her high calling, she look beyond the present scene, let her cultivate her understanding without stopping to consider what character the husband may have whom she is destined to marry. Let her only determine, without being too anxious about present happiness, to acquire the qualities that ennoble a rational being, and a rough inelegant husband may shock her taste without destroying her peace of mind. She will not model her soul to suit the frailties of her companion, but to bear with them: his character may be a trial, but not an impediment to virtue. . . . **G**

These may be termed Utopian dreams. Thanks to that Being who impressed them on my soul, and gave me sufficient strength of mind to dare to exert my own reason, till, becoming dependent only on him for the support of my virtue, I view, with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex.

I love man as my fellow; but his scepter, real, or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and not to man. In fact, the conduct of an accountable being must be regulated by the operations of its own reason; or on what foundation rests the throne of God?

It appears to me necessary to dwell on these obvious truths, because females have been insulated, as it were; and, while they have been stripped of the virtues that should clothe humanity, they have been decked with artificial graces that enable them to exercise a short-lived tyranny. Love, in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion, their sole ambition is to be fair, to raise emotion instead of inspiring respect; and this ignoble desire, like the servility in absolute monarchies, destroys all strength of character. Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women be, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics,¹⁴ and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature. 

F COUNTERARGUMENTS

Wollstonecraft suggests that a woman's marriage will actually improve if she "strengthens her body and exercises her mind" (line 146) instead of pretending "sickly delicacy" (line 141). According to Wollstonecraft, what kinds of improvements to the marriage will occur?

G HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reread the information about Wollstonecraft's career on page 718. How might her experiences have influenced the views she expresses in lines 152–163?

14. **languish** (läng'gwīsh) **like exotics**: wilt like plants grown away from their natural environment.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** In what area does Wollstonecraft concede male superiority?
2. **Clarify** According to Wollstonecraft, why do most women go along with the “false system of education” that fails to develop their reason?
3. **Clarify** Why does she think women need strong minds and bodies?

Text Analysis

4. **Analyze Argument** What **claim**, or position on an issue, does Wollstonecraft make in her essay? Identify three examples of reasons or evidence that she offers to **support** her **claim**.
5. **Understand Historical Context** In the late 18th century, some writers were beginning to question traditional attitudes toward women, but most people would have found it hard to imagine the changes in gender roles that occurred over the next two centuries. Which of Wollstonecraft’s statements anticipate modern ideas about women and their place in society? Which statements are more in line with 18th-century views? Cite examples from the text.
6. **Interpret Figurative Language** Wollstonecraft uses figurative language to appeal to her audience and enhance her argument. Explain the figurative language in the following passages:
 - flowers in too rich soil (lines 11–15)
 - tyranny and monarchy (lines 173–179)
 - liberty, virtue, and nature (lines 179–182)
7. **Evaluate Counterarguments** How well does Wollstonecraft use counterarguments in developing her points? Analyze the following passages to arrive at your conclusion:
 - Rousseau’s view on female education (lines 89–117)
 - Dr. Gregory’s Legacy to his Daughters (lines 118–145)

Text Criticism

8. **Different Perspectives** What might Wollstonecraft say about the women in popular culture today? Name specific women that she would most likely admire and those she might criticize. Explain the reasons for your choices.

*What makes **EQUALITY** elusive?*

If Mary Wollstonecraft were alive today, what issues about women’s lives do you think would concern her most? Why?

COMMON CORE

RI 5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her argument. **RI 8** Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal texts. **RI 10** Read and comprehend literary nonfiction.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Indicate which choice best completes each sentence.

1. An **evanescent** image (a) vanishes, (b) reappears, (c) lingers.
2. Someone who **feigns** amnesia (a) has completely lost his or her memory, (b) has forgotten a few things, (c) is pretending.
3. To **inculcate** an idea, someone might (a) contradict it, (b) ask you to repeat it, (c) ask you to ignore it.
4. If someone accused of a crime gets **vindication** in court, he or she will likely (a) go to jail, (b) go free, (c) pay a large fine.
5. A **prerogative** is (a) a question to be asked, (b) a problem to be avoided, (c) a privilege to be enjoyed.

WORD LIST

evanescent
feign
inculcate
prerogative
vindication

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

• affect • challenge • consent • final • respond

What **challenges** do women face today? How might they **respond** to them? Discuss this in a small group, using at least one additional Academic Vocabulary word in your discussion.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: ANALOGIES

An **analogy** compares two items that may have many points of similarity or may be alike in only one way. Analyzing an analogy can help you clarify an idea. Wollstonecraft draws an analogy between women’s minds and plants grown in over-fertilized soil in her discussion of women’s education (lines 11–15):

The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity.

You can use the relationship between words in an analogy to determine their meanings or connotations. For example, Wollstonecraft believes too much emphasis is placed on superficial qualities like beauty. Therefore, when she refers to a plant’s *flaunting* leaves, you can guess that *flaunting* is a negative word for something attractive—that is, “showy or gaudy.”

PRACTICE These questions refer to the analogy above. Answer each question.

1. Does a woman’s *conduct* refer to her beliefs or her actions?
2. Is someone with a *fastidious* eye picky or penetrating?
3. If you *disregard* something do you pay more attention to it or less?

COMMON CORE

L5 Demonstrate understanding of word relationships. L6 Acquire and use accurately general academic words.

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central

Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML12-728

Differing Roles for Women

Literacy rates for both genders were on the rise in 18th-century England, but women were still excluded from universities and discouraged from pursuing careers. Instead, their lives were defined in advance for them: most women were destined solely for domestic roles as wives and mothers. Those who preferred to take a different path risked a serious social and financial backlash. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft likened women's situation in her day to slavery:

Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women be, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature.

The authors in this section write in a variety of genres. Examples in this section include Behn's and Smith's poems, Burney's personal diary, and Wollstonecraft's persuasive essay. Some of these authors write directly about their gender; others do not. What they all share, however, is the choice they made as women to become writers in the face of great cultural resistance.

Writing to Reflect

Choose two of the writers from this section. Why might the subjects they discuss have been controversial for a woman in 18th-century England to write about? What do you think these women may have gained from taking a risk and becoming writers rather than choosing not to do so?

Consider

- the subject each writer discusses
- how each writer portrays this subject
- what it might mean for an 18th-century female writer, rather than a male writer, to express her thoughts about this subject



Extension

SPEAKING & LISTENING

Develop an **oral response** to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. You may wish to deliver a speech or team up with a partner and perform an imagined dialogue between Wollstonecraft and a modern-day reader.

COMMON CORE

W 2 Write explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information. **SL 1a** Come to discussions prepared. **SL 1c** Challenge ideas and conclusions.