



We Can Do It! AMERICAN WOMEN IN HISTORY

Bright Star Touring Theatre

Study Guide

About the show:



Rosie the Riveter was an image used during World War II to encourage women to work in order to support the war.

Hillary and Sarah are on a class field trip to the National Women's Hall of Fame Museum in Seneca Falls, New York. They take a wrong turn and end up in an attic - an attic that's filled with pictures, clothing, books, and more! When they start to investigate, they realize that they're surrounded by important objects from throughout history! The biggest surprise is yet to come - the two girls actually get to meet many American women from Deborah Sampson to Eleanor Roosevelt!

We Can Do It: American Women in History shares the stories of over 30 American women who helped to shape our country into the land it is today. Through their work as soldiers, athletes, politicians, explorers, and teachers (among other professions), American women have been brave, smart, and creative in order to accomplish their goals. American women have helped to change the way we treat others and think about the world around us. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote in 1848, American women fought to make sure that "all men and women are created equal."

From names you may have heard before, like Amelia Earhart and Clara Barton, to names that may be new, like Elizabeth Van Lew and Nellie Bly, **We Can Do It: American Women in History** highlights the lives of American women from 1650 to the present. We think these stories are inspiring for both girls and boys, and we're excited to share them with you today!

About Our Production:

This production is a touring show with Bright Star Theatre. During its run, this production may be seen by audiences in as many as 16 different states across the country. In a typical week, our actors will perform in 10-13 venues for all kinds of audiences. Our actors travel in minivans, averaging 800-1000 miles of driving *per week*, and they have performed for as many as 10,000 people *in one week*! After the show, our actors are available for you to ask questions about this production and their lives as actors - it's one of the most exciting parts of the Bright Star experience - and we hope you'll have a chance to have your question answered!



Words to Know:

Theatre is a form of storytelling that has been entertaining people for thousands of years. Theatre has its own kind of language. Here are some terms that actors, directors, and other “theatre people” use all the time!

Audition: A hopeful actor will either read, sing or dance (or sometimes all three!) in order for the director to decide which actor she wants to cast in a particular role.

Director: The director reads the script, and tells the actors where they should go and what they should do. Each director has a different way of telling a story from every other director, and this means that each play will be unique from every other play!

Set: All of the scenery on the stage is part of what is called the “set.” It helps to paint a picture of where the story takes place, so it is easier for the audience to follow the play. For *We Can Do It!*, our actors use a backdrop, which is the colorful painted background.

Costumes: All of the clothes that are worn on stage by the actors are costumes. The hats, the coats, and even the shirts and shoes are all part of the costumes!

Props: Anything that an actor carries during the show is a prop. Can you remember any of the props used by the actors in this play?

Rehearsal: Once the cast of the play is set, everyone needs to practice to get ready for the show. This can take weeks, and that gives time for the sets and costumes to be built, and for the actors to learn their lines.

Actors: These are the people that you see on stage. They each have a character to play, and they spend a long time rehearsing before they perform. They have to learn where they should walk, when they should talk, and how their characters should act. It’s a lot of work!

and of course -

Audience: Perhaps the most important element in the show! The audience consists of the people who come out to watch the play. You were our audience for *We Can Do It: American Women in History!*

Timeline:

1650: Anne Bradstreet’s book of poems is published in England, making her the first published American woman author.

1773: Phillis Wheatley’s poetry collection is released, making her the first black female American to be published.

1776: Abigail Adams writes the “Remember the Ladies” letter to her husband John Adams as he prepares to draft the Declaration of Independence.

1782: Deborah Sampson enlists in the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment of the Continental Army as a man named Robert Shurtleff.

1805: Sacajawea leaves Fort Mandan, North Dakota as a part of Lewis and Clark’s expedition.

1848: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other suffragettes write the Declaration of Sentiments at the first Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York.

1849: Elizabeth Blackwell is the first American woman to receive her medical degree.

1850: Harriet Tubman begins guiding slaves to freedom.

1851: Sojourner Truth delivers her “Ain’t I a Woman” speech at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio.

1868: Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton begin publishing *The Revolution*.

1881: Clara Barton forms the American Red Cross in Washington, DC.

1890: Nellie Bly completes her journey around the world in 72 days, setting a new record.

1904: Helen Keller graduates from Radcliffe College; her first book had been published in 1903.

1920: The 19th Amendment is passed, which gives women the right to vote.

1932: Congress awards the Distinguished Flying Cross to Amelia Earhart, the first woman to receive this honor.

1932: Laura Ingalls Wilder publishes her first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*.

1946: Eleanor Roosevelt is elected as head of the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

1960: Wilma Rudolph wins 3 gold medals at the Olympics.

1981: Sandra Day O’Connor is sworn in as the first female Supreme Court justice.

1996: Madeleine Albright is appointed the first female Secretary of State.

Classroom Activities:

Scene Study!

This activity incorporates creative thinking, research, writing, and performance!

1. Break students into small groups. Have each group research one of the women who we didn't get a chance to meet in *We Can Do It*. Some examples are: Phillis Wheatley, Jane Addams, Harriet Tubman, Helen Keller, Rachel Carson, Wilma Rudolph, Sally Ride.
2. Turn the research into a presentation. Presentations could take the form of a newscast, an interview, a play, a song - the possibilities are endless! Have each group think about how costumes, props, and the set could help bring their presentation to life. If there's time, try to create some of these props or costume pieces from everyday items!
3. Time for performance! Have each group perform their presentation. Remind the other students about being good audience members while they watch their friends onstage!

Map It!

This activity incorporates social studies and geography!

Find the following places mentioned in the play on a map: Seneca Falls, New York; Washington, DC; Richmond, Virginia; Fort Mandan, North Dakota; Miami, Florida
Can you remember which American woman is associated with which city?

Make Your Own!

This activity incorporates science and creative writing!

Elizabeth Van Lew was a spy during the Civil War who used invisible ink to keep messages secret. Here's how you can make your own!

1. In a small bowl, mix 1 teaspoon of baking soda with 1 teaspoon of water.
2. Dip a cotton swab or a paint brush into the baking soda mixture and use as a pen. Write a message on a sheet of plain, white paper.
3. Let the paper dry completely!
4. Paint over the paper with grape juice. Watch your message appear!

Seeing the Play:

Attending the theatre is very different than going to the movies or watching television. For one thing, the actors are real people who can hear and see everything that's happening in the audience. It's important to know a few rules before seeing a play:

- ★ Please be quiet and respectful during the performance so that those around you can hear what's happening.
- ★ If something's funny, it's okay to laugh!
- ★ If you like the play, be sure to clap at the end.

What else can you add to the list?

Questions for Discussion:

1. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote that "all men and women are created equal." What do you think she meant by that? What are some of the things that women were not allowed to do at that time?
2. Women have been brave, smart, and creative to achieve their goals. What did Deborah Sampson do that was brave? Smart? Creative? What about Sacajawea? What about Nellie Bly?
3. Though the play talked about 30 American women, who are others that the play didn't cover who have been important in our history?
4. What new information did you learn from watching the play that you didn't know before?

