1848—WOMEN'S STATUS

MODEST
Respectable women were covered from head to toe. Layers of clothing that weighed 12 to 15 pounds interfered with movement, and corsets exerted up to 80 pounds of pressure caused internal injuries.

WEAK
Nineteenth century chivalry idealized female weakness, causing women to cultivate helplessness.

DELICATE
Sports were too dangerous for weak women, and it was feared that calistenics would masculinize women and give them a "gymnasium face." Most doctors recommended housework as the only safe exercise for women.

PHYSICAL

PRACTICAL
Dress reform came first. In 1850 Elizabeth Miller, Stanton's cousin, designed a comfortable outfit freeing women from corsets and heavy skirts. It was called the Bloomer after Amelia Bloomer who popularized it.

By 1854 ridicule from the press, accusations of immorality from the pulpit, and pleas from embarrassed children forced feminists to give up the Bloomer in order; not to jeopardize reforms such as the vote.

STRONG—Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) reminded women that weakness could be an invitation to male aggression as well as protection. And Sojourner Truth noted the irony of "weaker vessels" working the fields.

FIT
Invention of the bicycle proved a breakthrough; finally an activity considered safe for women. But they were encouraged to get a thoracic exam first.

The Washington D.C. Bicyle Society, and others like it, protested women's new mobility, saying it would break up the American home.
"A man asks not 'Is she clever?' but 'Is she pretty?'"—Anonymous
the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can." Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey

1848—Women's Status

No College: Domestic Subjects—Intellect was considered a
male possession; therefore, "feminine girls" had little interest or
need for education. Smart girls learned to conceal their knowledge.

Higher Education—While Harvard College was built for men
six years after the Puritans arrived in Massachusetts (1636),
women were denied access to college for 201 years.
In 1837 Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke and Oberlin became
the first coeducational college (1837). In the 1830s and 1840s
Catharine Beecher crusaded in the Midwest for teacher-training
colleges. After the Civil War more women's colleges opened:
1865—Vassar
1875—Smith and Wellesley
1885—Bryn Mawr

By 1900 women had access to 80% of
all institutions of higher learning.

Small: Inferior Capacity—Doctors warned girls and
women against difficult subjects for fear of brain fever.

Jax, I don't see any brain
fever symptoms.

But doc, she's studying
math.

This is
a snap.

Normal

Women's success in the
new colleges offered proof
their brains could handle
difficult subjects.

In 1915 Bryn Mawr President M. Carey Thomas wrote:
"We did not really know anything about...the intellectual
capacity of women when we began to educate them...We
were told that their brains were too light, their foreheads
too small, their reasoning powers too defective, their
emotions too easily worked upon to make good students.
None of these things has proved to be true. Women have
proved themselves equal to men, even slightly superior."

Independent

Feminists such as Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton took
the word "obey" out of their marriage vows. They urged other
women to do the same and to think for themselves.
Susan B. Anthony encouraged women to be independent
and autonomous (self-governing).

Abraham Lincoln said "No man
is good enough to govern another
man without his consent." Now
I say, no man is good enough to
govern any woman without
her consent.
Among the first organizations for women, these societies gave women the experience of speaking in groups.

In 1853 Antoinette Brown became the first ordained woman minister of a major U.S. religion (Congregational).

"WIVES, SUBMIT YOURSELVES UNTO YOUR HUSBANDS...."

"LET WOMEN SUFFER IN SILENCE."

"WIVES, OBEY YOUR HUSBANDS, AS UNTO THE LORD."

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS I DEVOTED MYSELF TO BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND [church] HISTORY, AND FOUND NO EXPLANATION FOR THE DEGRADATION OF WOMEN UNDER ALL RELIGIONS, AND IN THE SO-CALLED "HOLY BOOKS."

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON
COULD NOT OWN PROPERTY OR WAGES

Remember, dear—when we marry, what's yours is mine. I'm so lucky. We need a married women's property law!

MARRIED WOMAN'S PROPERTY ACTS

Sunny View Farm
Mrs. Smith Proprietess

NO LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP OF CHILDREN

My husband left me and took the kids—and I can't do a thing about it.

LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP OF CHILDREN

Lucky me—I've got custody.

UNEQUAL PAY AND EMPLOYMENT

Women's pay averaged 25 percent of men's in the same job with the same credentials.

PAYDAY AT LAST!
I'm buying a new suit, how about you, Mary?

EMPLOYMENT IN THE TRADES AND PROFESSIONS

In 1990 women's pay averaged 70 percent of men's in the same job with the same credentials.

In 1849 Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman to earn a medical degree. She was ostracized as odd and immoral.

COULD NOT VOTE, HOLD PUBLIC OFFICE, SIGN CONTRACTS, SERVE ON JURIES, TESTIFY IN COURT, SUE OR BE SUED

In 1872 Susan B. Anthony was arrested and fined for trying to vote.

LEGAL

WOMEN HAVE NO LEGAL RIGHT TO VOTE, YOU'RE UNDER ARREST.

SUFFRAGE

In 1920 women won the right to vote with the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. (Earlier they had had won other legal rights.)

I had this awful nightmare, women were voting.

Well, dear, I have some news for you.
Please answer the questions below based on the handout. Answer questions in complete sentences where appropriate.

**PHYSICAL**

1) Why did corsets bother women?

2) What was the Bloomer?

3) Most doctors recommended what as the only safe exercise for women?

4) The invention of the bicycle proved to be a breakthrough. Why?

**INTELLECTUAL**

5) Before women gained much status in the United States, what did smart girls learn to do?

6) ____________ and ____________ became the first coeducational college. By 1900 women had access to _____ of all institutions of higher learning (Colleges).

7) Why did doctors warn girls not to study difficult subjects?

8) What “proof” was there, that a woman’s brain could handle difficult subjects?

9) Before the women’s rights movement women would be submissive. What does submissive mean?
SPIRITUAL
10) What type of spiritual/prayer groups did women have before the reform movement?

11) In 1853 Antoinette Brown became the first what?

12) Look at the three quotes on the bottom of page 3. Explain one quote in your own words.

SOCIAL
13) Before the women's rights movement, what type of property could women own?

14) If a husband left his wife before the women's rights movement who was allowed to have the children?

15) Women's pay averaged ____% of men's pay in the same job with the same credentials.

16) Before the women's rights movement, women could not do the following:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________