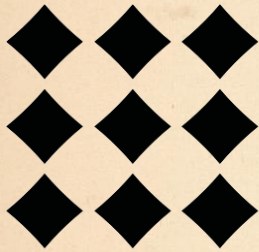


CLASSROOM CONVERSATION KIT


Facilitation Strategies for Educators

Calling all educators! This conversation kit is a resource for incorporating the museum's first digital exhibition, *Becoming Visible: Bringing American Women's History into Focus*, into your curricula. Use these classroom facilitation strategies to dig deeper and expand upon key themes and topics.

Best for grades 6-12.



SMITHSONIAN
AMERICAN
WOMEN'S HISTORY
MUSEUM

 Smithsonian



ELIZABETH KECKLEY.

Purpose

This conversation kit was designed for use with the digital exhibition, *Becoming Visible: Bringing American Women's History into Focus*, by the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum (becomingvisible.si.edu). This resource suggests facilitation strategies for teaching the exhibition in a classroom setting for grades 6-12.

The exhibition will prompt students to question why women's history seems to be missing from common narratives of U.S. history, even though women have been making history for centuries. The exhibition explores this question through the stories of five American women: Elizabeth Keckly, Margaret E. Knight, Hisako Hibi, Hazel Fellows, and Dr. Isabel Morgan. Through these stories, students will consider how and why historical narratives do not always include women and consider what might need to change to correct that absence.

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Learning Objectives and Approaches

The Big Idea

Students will understand how our choices decide whose histories are preserved in history books, museums, monuments, and more.

Driving Questions

- Why aren't the stories of women central to how we learn U.S. history?
- How have these histories been excluded and why?
- How are people working to recover these histories?
- How can we avoid erasing these histories in the future?

Grades

6 to 12; This conversation kit may be most appropriate for middle and high school students. Educators can adapt the content to meet the needs of any learner.

Learning Themes

Civic learning themes include Civic Disposition and Values, Community Participation, Democratic Principles, Equity, and Rights and Responsibilities. Profiles and facilitation strategies cover History, Social Studies, STEM, and Integrated Arts. Supplemental resources give educators additional background information on the women and topics featured.

Facilitation Strategies

This conversation kit includes activities found in Project Zero's [Thinking Routine Toolbox](#). Project Zero provides resources for learning at home, remotely, and in the classroom. The arts and humanities ground Project Zero's Thinking Routines. They blend theory and practice to support learners. The activities highlighted are available in English and Spanish. Learn more about the [Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero](#).

Digital Exhibition Overview

American women's stories have been in a constant state of becoming invisible. Historians have long documented the lives and work of women. But women's experiences vanish from most popular and influential U.S. history narratives. It is as though women's history has been written in disappearing ink.

Confronting this contradiction is at the heart of the new Smithsonian American Women's History Museum. *Becoming Visible* invites audiences into the museum's work to expand the story of America. The exhibition explores how the achievements of American women have been excluded, forgotten, erased, obscured, and almost lost. By holding the disappearing ink of women's history up in a new light, the exhibition will illuminate women's stories. The aim is to transform what we know about the past and our hopes for the future.

This digital exhibition features:

- 10-minute runtime
- 5 Smithsonian curator interviews
- 5 historical profiles
- Major themes and questions
- Museum objects, archival records, and illustrations

Explore the digital exhibition at becomingvisible.si.edu.

Getting Started

Take time to review the digital exhibition at becomingvisible.si.edu.

Develop a lesson plan, drawing inspiration from the materials in this conversation kit. This conversation kit is designed to be flexible and adaptable, so educators can align materials with their own approaches and teaching styles.

This document includes five **story kits** which offer:

- A background paragraph summarizing the story told in the exhibition, including a link to a longer biography about the woman featured
- One sample activity or facilitation strategy, inspired by Project Zero's Thinking Routine Toolbox
- Supplemental resources for teaching this story

The conversation kit also includes a list of broader **discussion prompts** to help students zoom out and consider the stories in relation to the broader thematic questions raised by the exhibition.

Story #1

Excluded – Elizabeth Keckly’s Memoir

Background

Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly (also spelled Keckley, 1818–1907) was the dressmaker to First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln. Born into slavery, Keckly learned to sew from her mother and women in her community. After moving to Washington, D.C., she opened a dressmaking shop. Keckly’s memoir told the story of her enslavement and provided a glimpse into the lives of the Lincolns.

Unfortunately, this type of firsthand narrative is often excluded from American historical resources. Keckly wrote *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* in 1868. The memoir describes the brutalities she experienced under slavery. Keckly also illustrates her ability to prevail in the face of obstacles. Keckly’s descriptions of Mary Todd Lincoln as a wife and mother were especially insightful.

[Read Elizabeth Keckley’s biography.](#)

Facilitation Strategy – Here Now/There Then (comparing historical context & controversial issues)

There was a strong notion of racial hierarchy in 19th-century America. Many whites considered it scandalous for the mixed-race Keckly to write about her personal relationship with first lady Mary Todd Lincoln. [Here Now / There Then](#) helps students compare current and past attitudes. Students examine present stances, values, and judgements. These are then compared to 19th century American attitudes.

Exhibition Connection: What roles did race, class, and gender play in the historical exclusion of Keckley’s memoir? How was the labor of domestic workers and tradespeople overlooked? Are they still overlooked today?

Facilitation Tips:

- Discuss issues that were once considered controversial (in a different time or culture)
- Create a visual, side-by-side comparison of attitudes
- Use as a whole class discussion

Key Takeaway: Students consider how perspectives change over time.

Supplemental Resources

- [Slippers Attributed to Elizabeth Keckly \(3D Object\)](#), National Museum of African American History and Culture
- [Elizabeth Keckly: Businesswoman and Philanthropist](#), National Museum of American History
- [The Story of Elizabeth Keckley, Former-Slave-Turned-Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker](#), Smithsonian Magazine



[Behind the Scenes, Elizabeth Keckly, 1868.](#)

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Story #2

Forgotten – Margaret Knight’s Invention of Flat-bottomed Paper Bags

Background

Margaret Eloise Knight (1838–1914) was born into a working-class family and began work in a cotton mill at age 12. She was a tinkerer and serial inventor. In her lifetime, she was granted nearly 30 patents. Her first patent was for a flat-bottomed paper bag machine. As an employee at a Massachusetts paper bag company, Knight wanted to automate production methods. Her invention sped up manufacturing and supported mass production of paper bags like those we use today. But before Knight could build an iron model of the machine to apply for a patent, her idea was stolen by a man. Knight discovered her design was stolen only when she attempted to patent her own work. After a lengthy and expensive trial, Knight proved she was the inventor of the machine and was granted the patent in 1871.

[Read Margaret E. Knight’s biography.](#)

Facilitation Strategy – The 3 Whys (discerning the significance of a topic)

What might have happened if Margaret Knight chose not to fight back in court? The machinist who stole Knight’s design argued she could not have understood the mechanics of such a machine. This view may have demonstrated his prejudice against women. Unfortunately, many at the time held similar views. Historically many contributions of women were forgotten due to prejudice and bias. [The 3 Whys](#) helps students consider the importance of Margaret Knight’s erasure.

Exhibition Connection: Why does Margaret Knight’s story matter? Why might her story matter to others? Why might this and similar stories of erasure matter to the world?



Facilitation Tips:

- Use to ground students' thinking on the topic
- Broaden by considering impact and consequences; narrow by identifying personal connections
- Choose an accessible entry point based on student need

Key Takeaway: Students ask and answer questions to decide why a topic is important.

Supplemental Resources

- [Margaret Knight Biography](#), Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention & Innovation
- [Meet the Female Inventor Behind Mass-Market Paper Bags](#), Smithsonian Magazine
- [Patent Drawings for Bag Machine](#), U.S. National Archives



[Patent Model for a Paper Bag Machine, 1879.](#)

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Story #3

Almost Lost – Hisako Hibi’s Paintings

Background

Hisako Shimizu Hibi (1907–1991) was a Japanese American painter and printmaker. In San Francisco she studied and began her career as an artist. During World War II, Hibi, her husband, and their two children were forcibly relocated to Topaz, Utah and incarcerated in camps. The family had little time to prepare. While incarcerated, Hibi continued to paint. These paintings captured the experiences of her family and other incarcerated Japanese Americans. Hisako Hibi and her family were incarcerated in the Utah desert from 1942 to 1945. During this time, she made 72 paintings and taught art classes. Though examples of Hibi’s artwork still exist, many were lost or displaced due to her incarceration.

[Read Hisako Hibi’s biography.](#)

Facilitation Strategy – Beginning, Middle, End (harnessing narrative to observe connections)

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order. As a result, authorities removed thousands of Japanese Americans from their homes. Hibi and her husband entrusted a friend to store their paintings, but the friend's death led to the loss of the paintings. Students can explore artworks created during Hibi’s incarceration. Students observe connections, patterns, and meanings with the [Beginning, Middle, End](#) thinking routine. This routine encourages discussion and storytelling. Students also consider the fragility of material artworks and immaterial narratives.

Exhibition Connection: The paintings lost during Hisako Hibi’s incarceration were from an earlier stage in her career. What parts of her history as an artist, mother, wife, and Japanese American may have been lost?

Facilitation Tips:

- Use to support visual literacy
- Use as a writing activity or oral storytelling
- Questions may be open-ended or linked to a specific topic

Key Takeaway: Students use narrative to discover meaning in artworks and how the art relates to the artist's personal experience in history.

Supplemental Resources

- [Hisako Hibi Artist Biography](#), Smithsonian American Art Museum
- [Scrapbook of Artists' Paintings After WWII](#), Archives of American Art
- [Hisako Hibi Collection](#), Japanese American National Museum



[Hisako Hibi, Floating Clouds, 1944, oil on canvas.](#)

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the American Women's History Initiative Acquisitions Pool, administered by the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative

Story #4

Erased – Hazel Fellows & the ILC Dover Seamstresses

Background

Hazel Fellows and her fellow seamstresses at ILC Dover made an important contribution to American history and the Space Race. Fellows was a skilled seamstress and a member of a team that stitched spacesuits for NASA's Apollo 11 mission. The seamstresses worked with engineers on design and construction. The women were then responsible for sewing the spacesuits. The suits consisted of 21 layers of high-tech materials. Each stitch had to be exact. Their care ensured the safety of astronauts during the spaceflight and moon landing. But most people only remember the names of the astronauts who wore the suits. We don't know most of the seamstresses' names today. Hazel Fellows is one of the few names that was recorded because of a photograph that was taken of her, but we know very little else about her. This is an example of how women's stories are erased from historical narratives.

[Read Hazel Fellows' and the ILC Dover seamstresses' biography.](#)

Facilitation Strategy – Headlines

(capturing the essence of a topic or issue)

Popular culture remembered the male crew and personnel of Apollo 11. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin gained fame for their successful mission. In recent years, women involved with the mission have gained greater attention.

[Headlines](#) helps students capture the essence of a topic or issue. What caption might a student write for the iconic photograph of Hazel Fellows?

Exhibition Connection: The photo of Hazel Fellows was widely circulated. However, most of the attention was given to male contributors of the mission. What role did popular media play in this erasure?

Facilitation Tips:

- Use to support visual literacy
- Encourage students to write memorable captions for social media
- Use at the end of a class discussion to recap themes

Key Takeaway: Students summarize their thoughts and hear different perspectives.

Supplemental Resources

- [Women of Apollo](#), Smithsonian American Women's History Museum
- [Outer Space & Underwear](#), Smithsonian Sidedoor Podcast
- [Pressure Suit, A7-L, Armstrong, Apollo 11, Flown \(3D Object\)](#), National Air and Space Museum



[Hazel Fellows machine-sewing pieces of an Apollo A7L spacesuit from 1968.](#)

Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

Story #5

Obscured – Isabel Morgan’s Contributions to the Polio Vaccine

Background

Dr. Isabel Morgan (1911–1996) was a virologist, a scientist who studied viruses. Her research contributed to the polio vaccine. Morgan, along with David Bodian and Howard Howe, identified the three different virus strains that caused polio. Morgan then created a vaccine using inactivated or killed virus that produced immunity in monkeys. Morgan and her colleagues also determined the number of antibodies needed to create immunity to polio. These discoveries were instrumental to the vaccine later attributed to Jonas Salk. Morgan was well known for her research at the time, but her work has been obscured over time by the emphasis on Salk’s achievements.

[Read Isabel Morgan’s biography.](#)

Facilitation Strategy – Stories (uncovering accounts of complex issues)

Polio was a major health concern during the mid-1900s. It is an infectious disease that destroys the muscles. It took scientists years to determine its cause and develop a vaccine for people. Isabel Morgan and her team contributed important research from 1944 to 1949, but most attention goes to the vaccine developed by Jonas Salk in 1953. However, Salk could not have done his work without Morgan’s findings. [Stories](#) helps students see the obscured history of Isabel Morgan’s research. They investigate and rethink the historical account. Additionally, students express the account they want to hear.

Exhibition Connection: When we learn about the polio vaccine today, attention is generally placed on Jonas Salk. What is untold in this version of the historical account? What accounts do students think should be told?



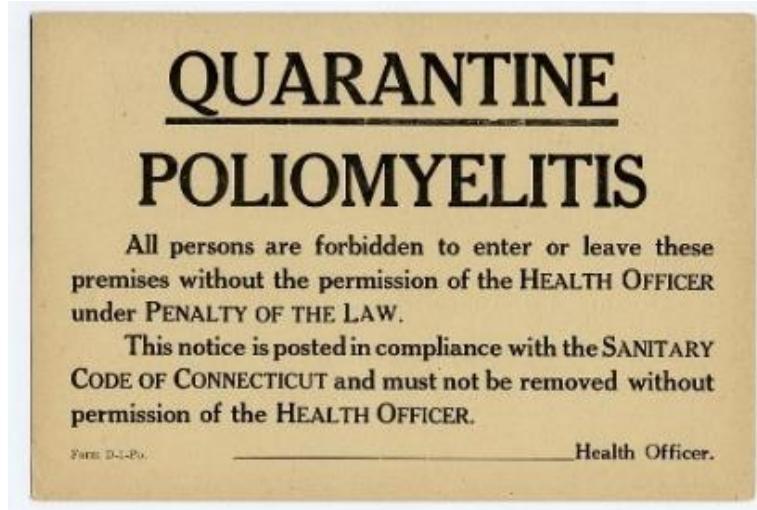
Facilitation Tips:

- Prompts asks students to, 1) explore a topic, 2) assess accounts, 3) identify missing accounts, and 4) champion the account meaningful to them
- Use prompts to help students understand the sequence of narratives

Key Takeaway: Students assess and rearticulate historical accounts.

Supplemental Resources

- [Unveiling Ceremony for the Polio Wall of Fame](#), Archives of American Art
- [Isabel Morgan](#), PBS American Experience
- [Searching for Isabel Morgan](#), Distillations Magazine



[Quarantine – Poliomyelitis – All persons are forbidden to enter or leave these premises without the permission of the Health Officer under Penalty of the Law, ca. 1920.](#)

National Museum of American History

Discussion Prompts – The Bigger Picture

Educators can reinforce the key themes from the featured stories by zooming out and asking the larger framing questions below, touching on the key themes of the exhibition.

1. This exhibition uses the metaphor of “disappearing ink” to show how, even when women’s work and lives have been written down, their stories don’t make it into the histories we are taught in school, or see in monuments, museums, or popular media. Can you think of another woman whose story disappeared in this way? What are some books, movies, TV shows or video games that try to recapture those stories?
2. Think about a time when you made choices about what to keep and what to throw away—for example, when you moved homes, or had to clean your room. Perhaps you set aside certain objects or papers that held meaning for you and tossed others. How did you make your choices? What guided your thinking? What was fun about it, and what was difficult? How does this give you insight into what historical records we keep and which ones we don’t?
3. What ends up in our archives, museums and history books is, in large part, due to a series of choices that people make about who and what is important. How does decision-making by historians, archivists, and curators shape what we learn in school, in libraries, and in museums?
4. How much influence does the way we learn about the past have on how we think about our own present and our own future? How might the fact that so much women’s history has disappeared shape our ideas about women in the world today?
5. Although it’s still a long time off, imagine what it might be like to walk into a new Smithsonian American Women’s History Museum in Washington, D.C. What do you think it would feel like? What do you hope it will do? What kinds of choices would you make for which stories should get told? What do you hope future generations will learn about women’s history, and how can we help make sure that happens?



Additional Resources

The Smithsonian American Women's History Museum created this conversation kit to shine a light on women's lives. An activity guide for all ages and book club questions for adult learners further explore the idea of disappearing ink. Find these resources and more on the digital exhibition webpage below.

Becoming Visible Resources

- [Becoming Visible Exhibition](#)
- [Becoming Visible webpage](#), for all resources and programming related to the web exhibition

Smithsonian American Women's History Resources

- [Explore women's stories](#), for blog posts, topics, and collections sets
- [Learning Resources](#), for resources for students, educators, and lifelong learners
- [Smithsonian American Women's History Museum on the Learning Lab](#)
- [Follow the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum on Instagram](#)

Using Primary Sources

- [Teaching with Primary Sources](#), Smithsonian Learning Lab
- [Cultivating Learning: Critical Questions to Build Primary Source Literacy](#), Smithsonian Education
- [Engaging Students with Primary Sources](#), Smithsonian's History Explorer

Transforming Our Hopes for the Future

- [What Can Be](#) – a thinking routine for considering possibilities.
- [Conducting an Oral History: Tips from Across the Smithsonian](#), Learning Lab Collection