

## Arguments for educating women, 1735

### Introduction

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On May 19, 1735, John Peter Zenger republished this essay in the *New-York Weekly Journal*. Originally printed in the *Guardian*, a British periodical, the two-page essay supports the education of women “of Quality or Fortune.” The author, probably Joseph Addison, one of the founders of the *Guardian*, argued that women should be educated because they had more spare time than men, they had a natural gift for speech, they were responsible for educating their children, and they needed to keep busy. In addition, the article suggests that educated women were seen to be more suitable as “marriage material” by socially prominent men.

More importantly, the article declares that:

Learning and Knowledge are Perfections in us, not as we are Men, but as we are reasonable Creatures, in which Order, of Beings the Female World is upon the same level with the Male. We ought to consider in this Particular, not what is the Sex, but what is the Species to which they belong.

### Questions for Discussion

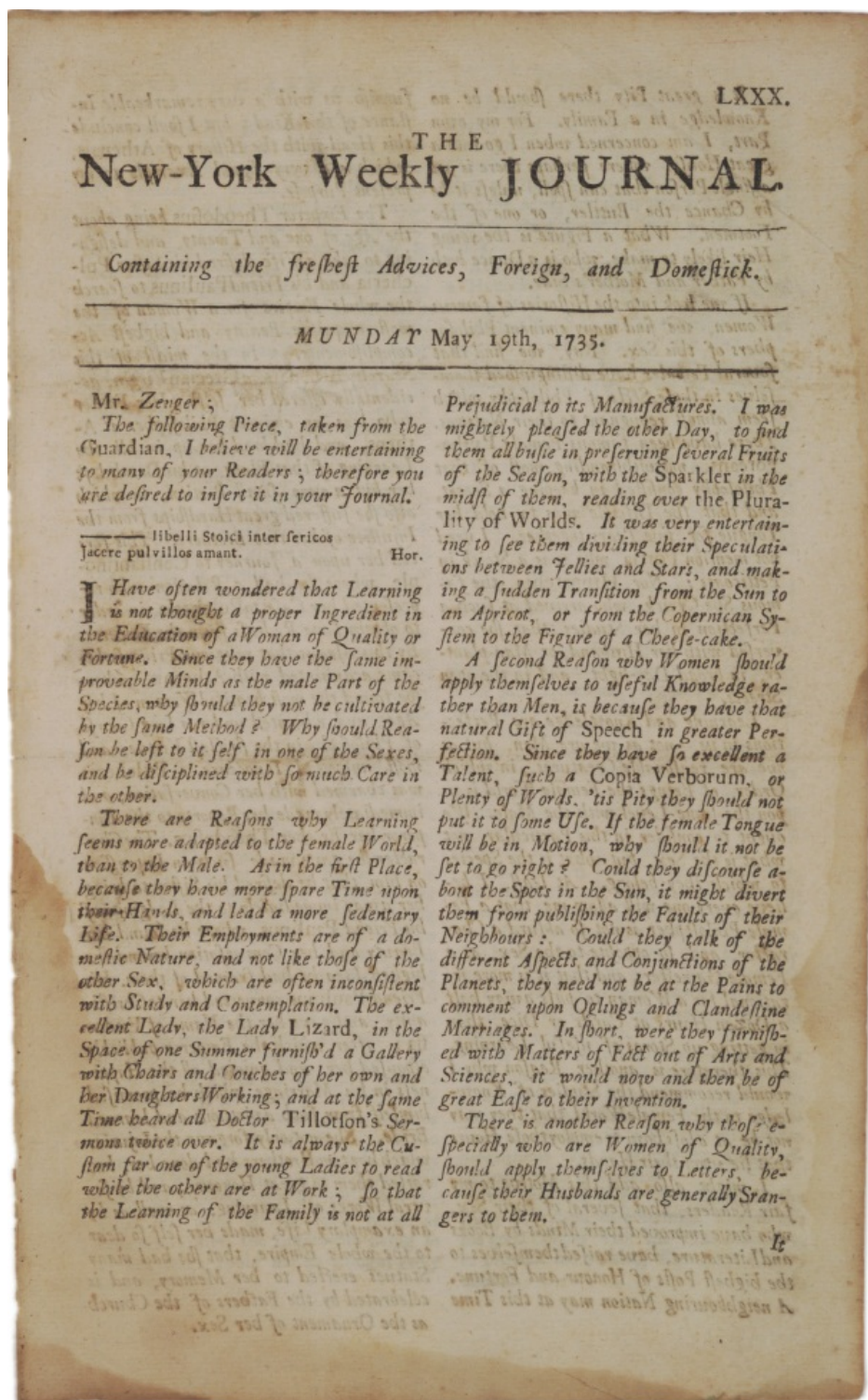
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Read the document introduction, view the image, and read the transcript of the newspaper article. Then apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the following questions.

1. From your knowledge of the period during which this article appeared, describe the social / political / economic condition of women in colonial America.
2. Who was John Peter Zenger? Why do you think he was interested in republishing this article?
3. Explain the four arguments presented in the article for educating women.
4. Carefully locate each of the four arguments in the transcript. To what extent would women in America today agree with the reasons supporting each argument? Explain your answers.

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Image

John Peter Zenger, *New-York Weekly Journal*, May 19, 1735, page 1. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07336)

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It is great Pity there should be no Knowledge in a Family. For my own Part, I am concerned when I go into a great House, where perhaps there is not a single Person that can spell, unless it be by Chance the Butler, or one of the Footmen. What a Figure is the young Heir likely to make, who is a Dunce both by Father and Mother's Side.

If we look into the Histories of famous Women, we find many eminent Philosophers of this Sex. Nay, we find that several Females have distinguished themselves in those Sects of Philosophy which seem almost repugnant to their Natures. There have been famous Female Pythagoreans, notwithstanding most of that Philosophy consisted in keeping a Secret, and that the Disciple was to hold her Tongue for five Years together. I need not mention Portia, who was a Stoick in Petticoats: Nor Hipparchia, the famous She Cynick, who arrived at such a Perfection in her Studies, that she conversed with her Husband, or Man-plant, in broad Day-light, and in the open Streets.

Learning and Knowledge are Perfections in us, not as we are Men, but as we are reasonable Creatures, in which Order, of Beings the Female World is upon the same Level with the Male. We ought to consider in this Particular, not what is the Sex, but what is the Species to which they belong. At least, I believe every one will allow me, that a Female Philosopher is not so absurd a Character, and so opposite to the Sex, as a Female Gamester; and that it is more irrational for a Woman to pass away half a Dozen Hours at Cards or Dice, than in getting up Stores of useful Learning. This therefore is another Reason why I would recommend the Studies of Knowledge to the Female World, that they may not be at a loss how to employ those Hours that lie upon their Hands.

I might also add this Motive to my fair Readers, that several of their Sex, who have improved their Minds by Books and Literature, have raised themselves to the highest Posts of Honour and Fortune. A neighbouring Nation may at this Time

furnish us with a very remarkable Instance of this Kind; but I shall conclude this Head with the History of Athenais, which is a very signal Example to my present Purpose.

The Emperor Theodosius being about the Age of one and Twenty, and designing to take a Wife, desired his Sister Pulcheria and his Friend Paulinus to search the whole Empire for a Woman of the most exquisite Beauty and highest Accomplishments. In the midst of this Search, Athenais, a Grecian Virgin, accidentally offered her self. Her Father who was an eminent Philosopher at Athens, and had bred her up in all the Learning of that Place, at his Death left her but a very small Portion, in which also she suffered great Hardships from the Injustice of her two Brothers. This forced her upon a Journey to Constantino-ple, where she had a Relation who represented her Case to Pulcheria, in order to obtain some Redress from the Emperor. By this Means that religious Princess became acquainted with Athenais, whom she found the most beautiful Woman of her Age, and educated under a long Course of Philosophy in the strictest Virtue, and most unspotted Innocence. Pulcheria was charmed with her Conversation, and immediately made her Reports to the Emperor her Brother Theodosius. The Character she gave made such an Impression on him, that he desired his Sister to bring her away immediately to the Lodgings of his Friend Paulinus, where he found her Beauty and her Conversation beyond the highest Idea he had framed of them. His Friend Paulinus converted her to Christianity, and gave her the Name of Eudocia; after which the Emperor publicly espoused her, and enjoyed all the Happiness in his Marriage which he promised himself from such a virtuous and learned Bride. She not only forgave the Injuries which her two Brothers had done her, but raised them to great Honours; and by several Works of Learning, as well as by an exemplary Life, made her self so dear to the whole Empire, that she had many Statues erected to her Memory, and is celebrated by the Fathers of the Church as the Ornament of her Sex.

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### Transcript

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[*New-York Weekly Journal*] May 19, 1735. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC07336)

I Have often wondered that Learning is not thought a proper Ingredient in the Education of a Woman of Quality or Fortune. Since they have the same improvable Minds as the male Part of the Species, why should they not be cultivated by the same Method? Why should Reason be left to it self in one of the Sexes, and be disciplined with so much Care in the other.

There are Reasons why Learning seems more adapted to the female World, than to the Male. As in the first Place, because they have more spare Time upon their Hands, and lead a more sedentary Life. Their Employments are of a domestic Nature, and not like those of the other Sex, which are often inconsistent with Study and Contemplation. The excellent Lady, the Lady Lizard, in the Space of one Summer furnish'd a Gallery with Chairs and Couches of her own and her Daughter's Working; and at the same Time heard all Doctor Tillonson's Sermons twice over. It is always the Custom for one of the young Ladies to read while the others are at Work; so that the Learning of the Family is not at all Prejudicial to its Manufacturers. I was mightily pleased the other Day, to find them all busie in preserving several Fruits of the Season, with the Sparkler in the midst of them, reading over the Plurality of Worlds. It was very entertaining to see them dividing their Speculations between Jellies and Stars, and making a sudden Transition from the Sun to an Apricot, or from the Copernican System to the Figure of a Cheese-cake.

A Second Reason why Women should apply themselves to useful Knowledge rather than Men, is because they have that natural Gift of Speech in greater Perfection. Since they have so excellent a Talent, such a Copia Verborum, or Plenty of Words, 'tis Pity they should not put it to some Use. If the female Tongue will be in Motion, why should it not be set to go right? Could they discourse about the Spots in the Sun, it might divert them from publishing the Faults of their Neighbours: Could they talk of the different Aspects and Conjunctions of the Planets, they need not be at the Pains to comment upon Oglings and Clandestine Marriages. In short, were they furnished with Matters of Fact out of Arts and Sciences, it would now and then be of great Ease to their Invention.

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There is another Reason why those especially who are Women of Quality, should apply themselves to Letters, because their Husbands are generally Strangers to them.

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