

9-12 Origins of Gender Norms

Where do gender norms emerge?



“Venus of Willendorf,” Encyclopædia Britannica, last modified August 16, 2020,
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chopper-chopping-tool-industry#/media/1/439507/36945>.

Supporting Questions

1. What role does biology play in human behavior?
2. What do origin stories say about women?
3. Was there really a Great Goddess?

9-12 Origins of Gender Norms

| Compelling Question? Where do gender norms emerge? | | |
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| Content Angle and Standards | <p>D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.</p> <p>D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.</p> <p>D2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.</p> <p>D3.1.9-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.</p> <p>D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantially from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.</p> <p>D3.4.9-12. Refine claims and counterclaims attending to precision, significance, and knowledge conveyed through the claim while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.</p> <p>D4.1.9-12. Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.</p> <p>D4.2.9-12. Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanation given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical).</p> | |
| Staging the Compelling Question | The teacher will guide students through a think-pair-share and an exploration of student-driven questions. | |
| Supporting Question 1 | Supporting Question 2 | Supporting Question 3 |
| What role does biology play in human behavior? | What do origin stories say about the role of women? | Was there really a Great Goddess? |
| Formative Performance Task | Formative Performance Task | Formative Performance Task |
| Students will compare and contrast Source A and Source B, completing a Venn Diagram. | Students will compare and contrast varying origin stories from cultures around the world in order to answer Supporting Question 2. | Students will compare and contrast Source A and Source B, discussing which they find more reliable in order to answer Supporting Question 3. |
| Featured Sources | Featured Sources | Featured Sources |
| <p>Source A: Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies</p> <p>Source B: Nature, nurture, sex and</p> | <p>Source A: The Origin of Japan and her People</p> <p>Source B: Genesis</p> | <p>Source A: A Woman's History of the World</p> <p>Source B: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory</p> |

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| <p>gender</p> | <p>Source C: The Enuma Elish and the Astrahasis Source D: Upanishad Source E: Theogony and Metamorphoses</p> | |
| <p>Summative Performance Task</p> | <p>ARGUMENT: [<i>Where do gender norms emerge?</i>] Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that evaluates the need to study, remember, and/or celebrate this expedition using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.</p> <p>EXTENSION. After the above lessons, consider one of the following extensions to the learning.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: Consider facilitating a discussion of the analysis questions. Ask students to share their response with someone, or if they already worked in a group, ask them to nominate someone to represent their group to the class as a whole. Capitalize on differences between group responses. Why did one group answer differently than another? What impacted them or stood out more? Four Corner Debate: Consider a "four-corner debate." In the corners of the room tack up a piece of paper with four differing and possible answers to the inquiry question. After students complete the lesson packet, pose the question to the room at large and ask students to move to the corner of the room (or in between locations) that represent their answer. Then, ask students to explain their choice. As students discuss they are allowed to move closer or further from ideas. This is a great strategy for kinesthetic learning. Socratic Seminar: Consider doing a "Socratic seminar" to extend the learning and get students to question what they still don't know or understand. Start with the inquiry's question. Students should be encouraged to answer one another's question directly, but also to answer the question with another question. This continues the conversation and gets at more rich ideas. The teacher should try to say as little as possible and let the students lead the dialog. One strategy for this is to seat students in a circle. Give each of them a cup and 2-3 tokens. When a student makes a substantive contribution to the discussion the teacher will walk over and place a token in the cup signaling that they have contributed. Students will become aware of who has spoken and who has not, and leave space for one another. Structured Academic Controversy: Consider turning the lesson into a "structured academic controversy." Take the overarching question and turn it into a "debate." Students can choose or be assigned a side in the debate and use the documents provided to argue their "answer" to the overarching question. They can argue over interpretations and credibility of some documents. Reacting to the Past: Consider doing some role play with your class. Reacting to the Past is an active learning pedagogy of role-playing games designed by Barnard University. In Reacting to the Past games, students are assigned character roles with specific goals and must communicate, collaborate, and compete effectively to advance their objectives. Reacting promotes engagement with big ideas, and improves intellectual and academic skills. Provide students with a set of rules about staying in character and what types of things they must know about their character. Students should be provided with a packet of role sheets with instructions on their individual goals and strategies for game play. Students can use sources and information from these activities, and can search for more details online about their individual character. Reacting roles and games do not have a fixed script or outcome. While students are obliged to adhere to the philosophical and intellectual beliefs of the historical figures they have been assigned to play, they must devise their own means of expressing those ideas persuasively in papers, speeches, or other public presentations. | |
| <p>Taking Informed Action</p> | <p>UNDERSTAND The way women were treated in the past often times persists into the present in how we teach about it or in societal norms that have not changed. Students can examine the way that this issue is addressed in textbooks and standards, as well as exploring the ways that the issues at play are still relevant.</p> | |

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| | <p>ASSESS Students should consider <i>what should be done</i> today to correct either the portrayal of women from this period in history or the issues at play?</p> <p>ACT Students could take informed action in one of the following ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Find an article or book about history that misrepresents women and gender in history and write to the author or editor.2. Write a letter to the Secretary of Education for your state about the teaching of women and gender history.3. Investigate women and gender rights issues that persist and engage with the movement by attending a protest, signing a petition, or donating to the cause.4. Make a PSA video, blog, or social media post with the intent to persuade the audience to better understand women from history or a persistent gender rights from this inquiry. |
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**Featured sources are suggested and links are provided. It may be that these links are broken and we apologize in advance for the inconvenience.*



Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of the origins of gender norms in all its complexity with consideration of race and class to explore the accuracy of some of the claims about women's revolutionary role in this period.

This inquiry highlights the following additional thematic standards from NCSS:

- **POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE:** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- **TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE:** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.
- **CULTURE:** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

This inquiry also highlights the following additional thematic standards from the Common Core:

- **Key Ideas and Details 1.** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- **Key Ideas and Details 3.** Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- **Key Ideas and Details 7.** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., quantitative data, video, multimedia) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- **Key Ideas and Details 8.** Evaluate the hypotheses, data, analysis, and conclusions in a science or technical text, verifying the data when possible and corroborating or challenging conclusions with other sources of information.
- **Key Ideas and Details 9.** Synthesize information from a range of sources (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) into a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon, or concept, resolving conflicting information when possible.
- **Text Types and Purposes 8.** Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

It is important to note that this inquiry requires prerequisite knowledge of some key terms, which are defined and



provided to students in the inquiries where relevant.

In addressing the compelling question, “Where do gender norms emerge?” students will need to weigh conflicting evidence from a variety of sources and should be sensitive to how the ideas in these documents impact their peers who may represent people of varying genders and sexualities. It might be a wise idea to set some ground rules and common language that demonstrates respect while still maintaining the freedom of academic inquiry. Encourage students to use phrases like “it seems Source A is suggesting...” and “I’m not sure, but I’m beginning to wonder if...” and “is it possible that...” or “In my experience, X has been true.”

Note: This inquiry is expected to take 4 class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, featured sources, writing). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiry to meet the needs and interests of their students. This inquiry lends itself to differentiation and modeling of historical thinking skills while assisting students in reading the variety of sources.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question students will do three performance tasks building to a Summative Performance Task that draws on student learning throughout the full inquiry. Throughout the inquiry, students are asked to do increasingly more challenging assignments and consider contrasting sources. This will help students develop their cognitive capacity to grapple with contradictory information and rise to the challenge of the Summative Performance Task. First, students are asked to analyze two sources discussing the nature nurture debate to draw an introductory conclusion about the role of nature in creating gender norms (using and interpreting evidence). In the second task, students will compare and contrast origin stories from varying cultures around the world. In the third task they will compare only two sources, two scholars discussing the possibility that there was once worshiped an all powerful female Goddess who has been replaced by a singularly powerful male God around the time of the Agricultural Revolution. Finally, in the Summative Performance Task and the Extension, students need to pull together all of their varying perspectives and develop an argument using evidence and arguments gathered about the sources to defend a position.

Staging the Compelling Question

In staging the compelling question, students need to identify a working definition of “gender norm.” Consider having students do a think-pair-share. On a piece of paper, white board, or device, have students record a working definition and record some synonyms. Then ask students to share their definition and synonyms with a neighbor. What is different about their definitions? What is the same?

After a think-pair-share, ask students to throw out some contemporary examples of gender norms. Ask them why they think those norms exist? As a group, record the examples.

Guide students toward an exploration of questions. Ask them what they want to know about where these norms come from and what questions they want to explore. Some, if not all will be explored in the documents provided.



Supporting Question 1: What role does biology play in human behavior?

The first supporting question—role does biology play in human behavior?—gives students some insights into the debates over nature and nurture when it comes to gender norms. Students will examine the ground breaking arguments by cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead that argue nurture is entirely to blame for gendered behavior, and more contemporary arguments that suggest it is both.

The formative task requires students to examine scholarly articles and compare and contrast their arguments about the origins of human behavior.

Students should work on their own or with a partner to read, annotate, and complete a detailed Venn Diagram for these two sources. What is different about them? What is similar about them? After organizing their ideas into a Venn Diagram, students will respond to the supporting question in writing: What role does biology play in human behavior? As a class, consider facilitating a discussion about what additional information would be helpful in order to more fully answer this question? Are there any theories you've heard about that were not addressed in these scholarly articles?

- **Featured Source A Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies**

Margaret Mead was a cultural anthropologist who transformed the field by comparing gender norms in different primitive societies, finding that there were few similarities and therefore concluding that gender norms come primarily from the culture than one's biology.

We have now considered in detail the approved personalities of each sex among three primitive peoples... The material suggests that we may say that many, if not all, of the personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of head-dress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex. When we consider the behaviour of the typical Arapesh man or woman as contrasted with the behaviour of the typical Mundugumor man or woman, the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the strength of social conditioning. In no other way can we account for the almost complete uniformity with which Arapesh children develop into contented, passive, secure persons, while Mundugumor children develop as characteristically into violent, aggressive, insecure persons. Only to the impact of the whole of the integrated culture upon the growing child can we lay the formation of the contrasting types. There is no other explanation of race, or diet, or selection that can be adduced to explain them. We are forced to conclude that human nature is almost unbelievably malleable, responding accurately and contrastingly to contrasting cultural conditions. The differences between individuals who are members of different cultures, like the differences between individuals within a culture, are almost entirely to be laid to differences in conditioning, especially during early childhood, and the form of this conditioning is culturally determined. Standardized personality differences between the sexes are of this order, cultural creations to which each generation, male and female, is trained to conform.

Mead, Margaret. 1935. Sex and temperament in three primitive societies. New York: W. Morrow & Company.

- **Featured Source B Nature, nurture, sex and gender: Understanding our differences points the way to precision health**



It's a long-standing debate: Are individual differences the result of our genes or our environment? Nature or nurture? For psychologists seeking to understand why we behave as we do, and for scientists and physicians looking for the underlying causes of disease and illness, it's a vitally important question.

In recent years, both sides have capitulated to what seems like an obvious compromise: It's both. Our genes and our environment play leading roles in shaping who we are. But to Siddhartha Mukherjee, physician and author of *The Gene*, this compromise is "an armistice between fools." The answer — nature or nurture — depends on the question.

Take sex and gender. The genes that govern gender identity are hierarchically organized, Mukherjee argues. At the top, nature acts alone. A variation in a single chromosome determines whether our sex is male or female.

Geneticist Nettie Stevens, a Stanford graduate, first came to this conclusion in 1905 based on her pioneering discovery that male mealworms produced sperm with either X or Y chromosomes, while females produced eggs with only X chromosomes. At the time, it was commonly believed that sex was determined by environmental factors, such as maternal nutrition. Stevens showed that sex was determined by nature, and nature alone.

Gender, on the other hand, is determined lower in Mukherjee's hierarchy. There, genes interact continually with the forces of history, society and culture, making gender and gender identity not an either/or, but a spectrum based on an infinite number of influences and interactions.

Consider that women consistently outlive men in developed countries — a robust finding spanning time, place, religion and political regime. Genes and environment each play an important role, but together they cannot explain the gap.

Looking at mortality data for 187 countries over the past five decades, Stanford Medicine's Mark Cullen found that women consistently exhibit a greater survival "resilience" to social and environmental adversity. This lends support to the "socio-biologic" explanation. Women live longer because they are hardwired to demonstrate social behaviors that promote survival, such as nesting and family protection. The female survival advantage is not the result of the simple addition of nature plus nurture, but rather of a complex interaction between the two.

Minor, Lloyd. "Nature, nurture, sex and gender: Understanding our differences points the way to precision health." Stanford Medicine. Spring 2017. SEX, GENDER AND MEDICINE.
<https://stanmed.stanford.edu/2017spring/sex-gender-nature-and-nurture-stanford-school-of-medicine-dean-lloyd-minor.html#>.



Supporting Question 2 : What do origin stories say about the role of women?

The second supporting question— What do origin stories say about the role of women?— really drives at the heart of this inquiry. Where did cultural norms come from? How far back can we trace them? And in what societies? Students will examine the earliest origin stories from cultures around the world.

The formative task asks students to read each of the provided origin stories and look for similarities and differences. Teachers may implement this task with the following procedures:

- Have students read and examine the sources alone or with a partner.
- As they read, ask students to annotate for key ideas and respond to the guiding questions.
- At the end, students review their answers for the guiding questions and summarize their findings by responding to the Questions for Analysis at the end, which lead the student to the Supporting Question.
- Consider extending this exercise by facilitating a discussion about regions and cultures whose origin stories were not included. Do students think they would yield different findings? Why or why not?

The scaffolds and other materials may be used to support students as they work with sources include working with a peer and reading with them to support one another for understanding.

The following sources were selected because they represent diverse cultures from around the world. And yet, as students examine them it becomes increasingly clear how similar they are. How can this be? They show how central the mother or feminine is to the story and yet, she is almost always silenced in some way. Why? Is it possible gender norms emerged far before writing?

Featured Source A: The Origin of Japan and her People

This story is from the Kojiki, the Japanese "Record of Ancient Things". This story was among many that were recorded between 500-700CE to preserve the ancient traditions. The following story is the closest to a creation story there is in this text.

When heaven and earth began, three deities came into being, The Spirit Master of the Center of Heaven, The August Wondrously Producing Spirit, and the Divine Wondrously Producing Ancestor. These three were invisible. The earth was young then, and land floated like oil, and from it reed shoots sprouted. From these reeds came two more deities. After them, five or six pairs of deities came into being, and the last of these were Izanagi and Izanami, whose names mean "The Male Who Invites" and "The Female who Invites".

The first five deities commanded Izanagi and Izanami to make and solidify the land of Japan, and they gave the young pair a jeweled spear. Standing on the Floating Bridge of Heaven, they dipped it in the ocean brine and stirred. They pulled out the spear, and the brine that dripped of it formed an island to which they descended. On this island they built a palace for their wedding and a great column to the heavens.

Izanami examined her body and found that one place had not grown, and she told this to Izanagi, who replied that his body was well-formed but that one place had grown to excess. He proposed that he place his excess in her place that was not complete and that in doing so they would make new land. They agreed to walk around the pillar and meet behind it to do this. When they arrive behind the pillar, she greeted him by saying "What a fine young man", and he responded by greeting her with "What a fine young woman". They procreated and gave birth to a leech-child, which they put in a basket and let float away. Then they gave birth to a floating island, which likewise they did not recognize as one of their children.



Disappointed by their failures in procreation, they returned to Heaven and consulted the deities there. The deities explained that the cause of their difficulties was that the female had spoken first when they met to procreate. Izanagi and Izanami returned to their island and again met behind the heavenly pillar. When they met, he said, "What a fine young woman," and she said "What a fine young man". They mated and gave birth to the eight main islands of Japan and six minor islands. Then they gave birth to a variety of deities to inhabit those islands, including the sea deity, the deity of the sea-straits, and the deities of the rivers, winds, trees, and mountains. Last, Izanami gave birth to the fire deity, and her genitals were so burned that she died.

Donald L. Philippi, trans., 1969, Kojiki: Princeton, Princeton University Press, 655, and Joseph M. Campbell, 1962, The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology: New York, Viking Press, 561.

1. Is there one god, goddess, or many? Name the characters.
2. Who is responsible for creating humans?
3. Is anyone asked to be silent in this story? Who?
4. What happens to the female characters?

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- **Featured Source B: Genesis**

The following is from the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Old Testament. It is a collection of stories that are the pillar of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in addition to other texts. In Genesis, meaning the beginning, there are two creation stories written by two different authors sometime between 600-900CE. Scholars know that there are two authors because the language shifts from one story to the next. In the English translations this is shown by the shift between the use of the words Lord and God. In the first story, God creates earth in seven days. In the second, ideas about gender play a big role. The author of this story is known as Yahweh, or J. The characters in this story are Adam and Eve. Adam literally means man, and Eve literally means life.

On the day that Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the land was dry and barren until a mist came up from the earth and wetted the land. Then Yahweh took dust from the earth and shaped it into the form of a man, and he breathed life into that form, and it came to life.

Yahweh created a garden in a place called Eden. In this garden Yahweh placed all the trees that bear fruit, including the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden and watered the garden, and there it divided to become four rivers that flow to the four corners of the world. Yahweh put the man there and instructed him to cultivate the garden and to eat of whatever fruit he liked, except for fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Then Yahweh decided that the man should not be alone, and that he should have a helper. Thus Yahweh made the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, and the man gave a name to each of them. However, none were fit to be his helper, so Yahweh made the man fall into a deep sleep and took one of the man's ribs, and he made it into a woman. This man was Adam, and the woman's name was Eve.

In the garden was a snake, and the snake persuaded the woman that she could eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil without dying, and that eating the fruit would give her Yahweh's knowledge of good and evil. She ate the fruit, and she gave some to the man too. For the first time they were ashamed of being naked, and so they made aprons for themselves.

When the man and woman heard Yahweh in the garden, they hid from him, but Yahweh called them out and asked why they had hidden. The man explained that they hid because of their scanty clothing. Yahweh asked the man how they knew to be ashamed of nudity, and if they had eaten the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The man explained that the woman had eaten of the fruit and given him some too. When Yahweh asked the woman, she explained that the snake had beguiled her into eating the fruit.

Yahweh said to the snake, "Because of what you have done, you are cursed more than any other animal, and you will have to crawl on your belly in the dust, and you will be beaten by the offspring of this woman". To the woman Yahweh said, "You will be cursed with great pain in giving birth to children, yet you will have the desire to reproduce, and your husband will rule you." Finally, to the man Yahweh said, "Because of what you have done, the ground is cursed and you will never eat of this fruit again. You will grow plants and fields and eat bread until you die, until you become the dust from which you were made."

Herbert G. May, editor, The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New York, Oxford University Press, 1564.

1. Is there one god, goddess, or many? Name the characters.
2. Who is responsible for creating humans?
3. Is anyone asked to be silent in this story? Who?
4. What happens to the female characters?



- **Featured Source C: The Enuma Elish and the Astrahasis**

This creation story is Babylonian from the Enuma Elish and the Astrahasis, written between 1900-1500 BCE, around the time of King Hammurabi. As with many ancient records, they were written on stone tablets, which are today only partially intact. Scholars compiled this story by combining ideas contained in several newer tablets that seem to be consistent with the older ones. This story has a lot of characters. It might be helpful to keep a family tree.

In the beginning, neither heaven nor earth had names. Apsu, the god of fresh waters, and Tiamat, the goddess of the salt oceans, and Mummu, the god of the mist that rises from both of them, were still mingled as one. There were no mountains, there was no pasture land, and not even a reed-marsh could be found to break the surface of the waters.

It was then that Apsu and Tiamat parented two gods, and then two more who outgrew the first pair. These further parented gods, until Ea, who was the god of rivers and was Tiamat and Apsu's great-grandson, was born. Ea was the cleverest of the gods, and with his magic Ea became the most powerful of the gods, ruling even his forebears.

Apsu and Tiamat's descendants became an unruly crowd. Eventually Apsu, in his frustration and inability to sleep with the clamor, went to Tiamat, and he proposed to her that he slay their noisy offspring. Tiamat was furious at his suggestion to kill their clan, but after leaving her Apsu resolved to proceed with his murderous plan. When the young gods heard of his plot against them, they were silent and fearful, but soon Ea was hatching a scheme. He cast a spell on Apsu, pulled Apsu's crown from his head, and slew him. Ea then built his palace on Apsu's waters, and it was there that, with the goddess Damkina, he fathered Marduk, the four-eared, four-eyed giant who was god of the rains and storms.

The other gods, however, went to Tiamat and complained of how Ea had slain her husband. Aroused, she collected an army of dragons and monsters, and at its head she placed the god Kingu, whom she gave magical powers as well. Even Ea was at a loss how to combat such a host, until he finally called on his son Marduk. Marduk gladly agreed to take on his father's battle, on the condition that he, Marduk, would rule the gods after achieving this victory. The other gods agreed, and at a banquet they gave him his royal robes and scepter.

Marduk armed himself with a bow and arrows, a club, and lightning, and he went in search of Tiamat's monstrous army. Rolling his thunder and storms in front of him, he attacked, and Kingu's battle plan soon disintegrated. Tiamat was left alone to fight Marduk, and she howled as they closed for battle. They struggled as Marduk caught her in his nets. When she opened her mouth to devour him, he filled it with the evil wind that served him. She could not close her mouth with his gale blasting in it, and he shot an arrow down her throat. It split her heart, and she was slain.

Alexander Heidel, 1952, The Babylonian Genesis (2nd edn.): Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 153 p. (BS1236.H4 1963).

Tikva Fryer-Kensky, (trans), Astrahasis, in O'Brien, Joan, and Major, Wilfred, 1982, In the Beginning: Creation Myths from Ancient Mesopotamia, Israel, and Greece: Chico, CA, Scholars Press, 211 p. (BL226.O27 1982).

1. Is there one god, goddess, or many? Name the characters.
2. Who is responsible for creating humans?
3. Is anyone asked to be silent in this story? Who?
4. What happens to the female characters?



- **Featured Source D: Upanishad**

This creation story comes from the second and fourth Brahmanas of the Brhad-arayaka Upanishad, recorded in India in the 700-600BCE. Praja-pati, is the Lord of Creation, referred to as "he" in this story. In this creation story, the female goddess is trying to evade the male and in each case he rapes her. This is canonized rape.

In the beginning there was absolutely nothing, and what existed was covered by death and hunger. He thought, "Let me have a self", and he created the mind. As he moved about in worship, water was generated. Froth formed on the water, and the froth eventually solidified to become earth. He rested on the earth, and from his luminance came fire. After resting, he divided himself in three parts, and one is fire, one is the sun, and one is the air.

Thus in the beginning the world was only his self, his being or essence, which then took the shape of a person. At first he was afraid, but realizing that he was alone and had nothing of which to be afraid, his fear ceased. However, he had no happiness because he was alone, and he longed for another. He grew as large as two persons embracing, and he caused his self to split into two matching parts, like two halves of a split pea, and from them arose husband and wife.

They mated, and from their union arose the human beings of the earth. The female reflected on having mated with someone of whom she was once a part, and she resolved that she should hide so that it would not happen again. She changed to a cow to disguise herself, but he changed to a bull and mated with her, and from their union cows arose. She changed to the form of a mare, but he changed to that of a stallion and mated with her, and from that union came horses. She changed to the form of a donkey, but he did likewise, and from them arose the single-hoofed animals. She became a ewe, but he became a ram, and from their union came the sheep and goats. It continued thus, with her changing form to elude him but he finding her and mating with her, until they had created all the animals that live in pairs, from humans and horses to ants.

After all this work, he reflected that he was indeed Creation personified, for he had created all this. Rubbing back and forth, he made Fire, the god of fire, from his hands, and from his semen he made Soma, the god of the moon. This was his highest creation because, although mortal himself, he had created immortal gods.

S. Radhakrishnan, (editor and translator), 1953, The Principal Upanisads: New York, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 958 p. (BL1120.E5 R2)

1. *Is there one god, goddess, or many? Name the characters.*
2. *Who is responsible for creating humans?*
3. *Is anyone asked to be silent in this story? Who?*
4. *What happens to the female characters?*



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- **Featured Source E: Theogony and Metamorphoses**

*This portion of a creation story was written by Hesiod in *The Theogony* around 700 BCE. *The Theogony* considers the origin of the Greek gods and goes on to describe their relationships. The latter portion of this passage is from *Book I of Metamorphoses of Ovid*. Gaia is the goddess of earth. Interestingly, her name, also spelt Ge, is the root of the word geology, or the study of the earth.*

In the beginning, there was Chaos, the abyss. Out of it first emerged Gaia, the earth, which is the foundation of all. Next came Tartaros, the depth in the Earth where condemned dead souls go to their punishment, and Eros, the love that overwhelms bodies and minds, and Erebos, the darkness, and Nyx, the night. Erebos and Nyx made love and from their union came Aether, the air, and Hemera, the day.

Gaia, the divine personification of the earth, gave birth to three offspring without any sexual concourse. Gaia's first such child was Uranus, the starry heavens that fit around her perfectly and that provide a home for the immortals... Then Gaia lay with Uranus, the heavens, and she gave birth... Thus in three generations, from Chaos in the first, to Gaia, Tartaros, Eros, Erebos, and Nyx in the second, and to Aether, Hemera, Uranus, Pontos, and Okeanos in the third, the entire world as we know it came to be.

Gaia and Uranus went on to have twelve children, known as the Titans, and Gaia gave rise to many others as well. Uranus, loathing all these children, would push them back into Gaia, who suffered horribly with the pressure. Gaia created flint, and from it she made a sickle, and she urged her sons to use the sickle on their father. The youngest of the twelve Titans, Kronos, took the sickle and, when Uranus came to lie down with Gaia, Kronos cut off his father's genitals and threw them in the sea. From the resulting sea foam came Aphrodite, the goddess of love and the only Olympian god not descended from a Titan.

...Kronos, who had emasculated his father Uranus, became the ruler and mated with his sister Rhea. Because Gaia and Uranus had prophesied that Kronos would be unseated by one of his children, Kronos swallowed the children that Rhea bore, who were Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, Demeter, and Hera. To foil Kronos, Rhea give birth to her next child, Zeus, in secret and kept him hidden. She bound up a stone in a cloth and gave it to Kronos, who swallowed the stone thinking it was the next of the children that he sought to contain. When Zeus was grown, he and Gaia conspired to make Kronos vomit up the five elder siblings of Zeus.

Zeus, son of Kronos, went on to lead his siblings in a great struggle against the Titans, in a war that lasted ten years, until finally the twelve Titans were defeated and confined to Tartaros. Zeus and his siblings and their offspring went on to be the Olympian gods who rule the world today from Mount Olympus...

Prometheus, one of the Titans, made the first humans from clay, and he brought them fire from Mt. Olympus. However, Zeus, as king of the gods and no friend of Prometheus, became disgusted with the behavior of humans. He and his brother, Poseidon, caused rains to fall and rivers to flood, so that all of the humans would be drowned. However, Zeus finally saw one blameless couple huddled in a boat, trying to ride out the flood, and eventually he decided that they could survive.

These two survivors were Deucalion... and Pyrrha... Themis told them, "Go forth from my temple, cover your heads, and throw your mother's bones over your shoulders." Pyrrha was horrified at the idea of the committing this sacrilege to the spirit of her mother. Deucalion, similarly horrified and perplexed, pondered the words of the oracle and finally said, "Perhaps the oracle means our mother Gaia, the Earth, and the bones of which she speaks are the stones of the Earth". Neither Deucalion nor Pyrrha was sure that this was right, but they pulled their robes over their heads, picked up stones, and threw them over their shoulders. After a bit, the stones slowly softened, and they began to change shape, and eventually they took the form of humans and became human. Those transformed stones are the ancestors of the humans of today, and that is why we have the hardness and endurance that we possess, having come from the stones of our Mother Earth.

Hesiod, Works and Days and Theogony and The Shield of Herakles, translated by Richmond Lattimore. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1959.

Hesiod, Works and Days and Theogony, translated by Stanley Lombardo with introduction, notes, and glossary by Robert Lamberton. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.

Ovid, Metamorphoses, translated by Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1955.

Smith, W., Smaller Classical Dictionary. New York, E.P. Dutton, 1958.

Zimmerman, J.E., *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*. New York, Bantaam Books, 1964.

1. *Is there one god, goddess, or many? Name the characters.*
2. *Who is responsible for creating humans?*
3. *What is significant about Gaia giving birth “without sexual intercourse” and later giving birth to children after “laying” with her son, Uranus?*
4. *How is Gaia treated in this story?*



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- **Featured Source F: Mossi Oral History**

This creation story comes from the Mossi people in the Mogho kingdom, in west Africa. Frederic Guirma was taught this story by his ancestors as part of an oral tradition. He recorded the story in 1971, much later than other creation stories, and after colonialism. This is one of the only stories to mention race.

In the beginning there was no earth, no day or night, and not even time itself. All that existed was the Kingdom of Everlasting Truth, which was ruled by the Naba Zid-Wendé (the higher being). The Naba Zid-Wendé made the earth, and then they made the day and the night. To make the day a time to be busy, they made the sun, and to make the night a time of rest, they made the moon. In doing so, they made time itself.

At first the earth was covered with fire, but the Naba Zid-Wendé blew on the earth to cool the fire. They ordered the fire to live inside the earth, so that the surface would be safe for the humans they were going to make. Only very resentfully did the fire go into the earth.

First the Naba Zid-Wendé made...animals...The crust was strong enough to hold up even them, and so the crust was solid and cool.

Finally the Naba Zid-Wendé were ready to create humans. They made them very black, because black is a strong color, and to make them different from the sun, which is red, and from the moon, which is white. The Naba Zid-Wendé used their breath to blow a soul into the humans that they had made.

The smile of the Naba Zid-Wendé at their human creations became the sky, and they hung the sky so low that humans could reach it and eat it for their food. They made stars out beyond the sky, and they made many other wonderful things for their humans. The humans nonetheless became arrogant and suspicious, and the humans began to claim that the Naba Zid-Wendé had hidden something valuable from them under the mountains. The humans dug under the mountains, but they only found a leper living there, and they let the leper go free from his subterranean prison.

This leper, however, was really the fire, and he soon burst into flames. Still angry at the Naba Zid-Wendé and jealous of the humans, the fire was evil, and it burned the sky. The sky withdrew in pain, and withdrew all the way beyond the stars, back to the Kingdom of Everlasting Truth.

No longer could the humans get their food from the sky, their arrogance had ended that. The Naba Zid-Wendé nonetheless made clouds and rivers and streams to keep the earth wet, and they made plants for humans to have food and trees that produce fruit for them. They made flowers to make the earth beautiful, and made the scents of the flowers to provide the smell of life.

The humans, however, multiplied and became more and more arrogant. To wash away the arrogance, the Naba Zid-Wendé made a big blue lake in which the humans should bathe. The humans were too busy to come to the lake, however, and that gave the evil fire time to throw hatred and envy in the lake. Only when the Naba Zid-Wendé sent the sun to dry up the lake did the humans finally go there to bathe. The first group that went in bathed in the waters of hatred and division, and they came out white from head to toe. The second group that went in come out yellow from head to toe. The same happened to third group that went in, except that they came out copper-red. By the time the last group went in, only a little water was left from the sun's efforts to dry up the lake, and the last group could only wash their hands and feet. They came out with soles and palms of white, yellow, or red, but the rest of their bodies were still black.

The Naba Zid-Wendé came to earth later to see what they had created... but the human races were too busy dividing up the land and enslaving each other to notice. The Naba Zid-Wendé were so sad to see what the humans were doing.

Frederic Guirma, 1971, Tales of Mogho: New York, Macmillan, 113 p.

1. *Is there one god, goddess, or many? Name the characters.*
2. *Who is responsible for creating humans?*
3. *How is this story different than other creation stories?*



4. *Why do you think race is an important part of this story?*

Questions for Analysis

1. *What consistent patterns do you note between all creation stories?*
2. *What is the relationship between male and female at the beginning and again at the end of the stories?*
3. *What do these stories tell us about the gender roles in society around the time the stories were recorded?*



Supporting Question 3: Was there really a Great Goddess?

The third supporting question—Was there really a Great Goddess?-- dives into the evidence for and against the theory of a Great Goddess from the prehistoric period who was dethroned by an all-powerful Male God. This theory has had different versions and has been propagated by people from different persuasions. In this supporting questions, students will explore the theories and use sourcing and weight of evidence to decide which is most true.

The performance task requires that students examine two contrasting secondary sources, both written by women who claim to be feminists and yet prescribe vastly different visions for the prehistoric world.

Teachers may implement this task with the following procedures

- Share the historical context with students.
- Students can work alone or with a peer. As they read the sources, ask students to annotate for evidence of a female goddess.
- Students can record the claims they identify in the organizer provided.
- Students respond to the overarching question.

The scaffolds and other materials may be used to support students as they work with sources include working with a peer and reading with them to support one another for understanding. The organizer below is also a great tool to help students hone in on key ideas and delineate the arguments made by the historians.

| Source A | Source B |
|--|---|
| <i>In what context was this source written?</i> | <i>In what context was this source written?</i> |
| <i>What evidence supports the argument that there was a Great Goddess?</i> | <i>What evidence refutes the idea that there was a Great Goddess?</i> |

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
| <p><i>Which source do you believe more? Why?</i></p> | |

The following sources were selected because they directly contradict each other. In fact Source B was written in response to Source A and says so.

- **Historical Context**

Religions of the Paleolithic era were distinctly different from modern religions in that there were heavily influenced by nature, usually polytheistic, and, importantly, honored female goddesses relatively equally to male gods. These goddesses and gods had power over certain aspects of human life and the worshipers would pray to the particular god to address their need. Worship was ritual, spiritual, and varied from tribe to tribe, region to region. Sexuality was evidently important as gods and goddesses had extenuated genitalia and many of the early myths included details of procreation.

And, “The prevalence of the Venus figurines and other symbols all across Europe has convinced some, but not all, scholars the Paleolithic religious thought had a strongly feminine dimension, embodied in a great goddess and concerned with the regeneration and renewal of life.” Was it possible there was a time when a goddess reigned supreme? Was there a Great Goddess?



Figure 1: Venus Figurine with exaggerated breasts, hair, and genitalia.

Key Terms:



Patriarchy: a system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is traced through the male line.

Matriarchy: a form of society or government in which descent and relationship are reckoned through the female line.

Ethnographic: relating to the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences.

Paleolithic: relating to or denoting the early phase of the Stone Age, lasting about 2.5 million years, when primitive stone implements were used.

- **Featured Source A: A Woman's History of the World**

In the beginning, as humankind emerged from the darkness of pre-history, God was a woman. And what a woman! The Samarian inhabitants of what is now Iraq worshiped her in hymns a fearless eroticism, giving things for her tangled blocks, her 'lap of honey', her rich [vagina] 'like a boat of heaven' - as well as for the natural bounty that she 'pours forth from her womb.'... but the supreme being as more than a provider of caramel delights. Equally relished and revered or her war-like rages - to her first priest-poet Enheduanna she was 'a dragon, destroying by fire and flood' and 'filling rivers with blood'. Enheduanna herself enjoyed temporal power... in her role as chief 'moon-minister' to the Most High'... for as poet, priest and prophet of Inanna, Enheduanna was the voice of a deity who's power and worship span to the whole world and was as old as time itself, the first divinity, the Great Mother.

The power and centrality of the first woman— God is one of the best-kept secrets of history. We think today of a number of goddesses, all with different names – Isis, Juno, Demeter – and have forgotten what, 5000 years ago, every school girl knew; no matter what name or guys she took, there was only one God and her name was a woman. The Roman lawyer Lucius a police was skillfully recycling the whole compendium of contemporary clichés and his portrait of 'the Goddess' as she spoke to him in a vision:

I am nature, the universal mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead... though I am worshiped in many aspects known by countless names, and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole round earth venerates me.

Later ages dismiss accounts of Goddess-worship as 'myths' or 'cults'. But since Sir Arthur Evans, discover of the lost Minoans civilization at the turn of the century, stated that all the innumerable goddess-figures he had discovered represented the 'same Great Mother... Who is worship under various names and titles extended over a large part of Asia minor in the regions beyond', modern scholarship has excepted that 'the Great Goddess, the "original mother without a spouse", was full of control of all the mythologies' as 'a worldwide fact'.

Nor was this an isolated or temporary phenomenon. Commentators stress the prominence and prevalence of the Great Mother Goddess as an essential element from the dawn of human life. From its emergence in the cradle land of the steppes of southern Russia her worship ranged geographically throughout the Mediterranean, the Indus Valley, and Asia as far as China, to Africa and Australia. Historically the span is even more startling:

-25,000–15,000 B.C. - with a so-called 'Venus-figurines' of stone and ivory in Europe, of Nile mud in Egypt, 'the great mother... first on the world of men in overwhelming wholeness and perfection'.

-12,000-9000 B.C. - in Dolni Vestonice, Czechoslovakia, and Shanidar, Iraq, ceremonial burials of bodies coded in red Oak or, commonly associated with Goddess worship.

-7000 B.C. - in Jericho, the first shrines to the Mother Goddess.

-6000 B.C. - The village settlement of Huyuk in Turkey, a site of only thirty-two acres, contain no less than forty shrines to the Goddess, and three incarnations as maiden, mother and crone.

-5000 B.C. - a statuette from Hacilar in turkey shows the Goddess in the act of making love.

-4000 B.C. - the first written language appears on the temple of the Goddess under her title Queen of Heaven at Erech (modern Uruk) in Sumeria.

-3000 B.C. - she now appears everywhere in the known world, in statues, shrines and Britain records.

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-200 B.C. - tribal Celts sent their own priests of the Goddess to the great sacred festival of Cybele in Anatolia.

-A.D. 200 - at Tralles, in western Anatolia, a woman called Aurelia Aemiliana erected a carving at the temple of the Goddess, recording that she had duly performed her sexual service (sacred intercourse in honor of the Goddess) as her mother and all her female ancestors had done before her.

-A.D. 500 - Christian emperors forcibly suppressed the worship of the Goddess and closed down the last of her temples.

As this shows, the secret status of womanhood lasted for at least 25,000 years – some commentators would push it back further still, to 40,000 or even 50,000. In fact there was never a time at this stage of human history when woman was not special and magical...

How did women assume from the first the special status? One source of it was undoubtedly her moon-linked menstruation and the mystery of her non-fatal yet incurable admission of blood. Another was her close and unique relation to nature, for us gathering gateway to plant horticulture, women consolidated their central importance as the principal food producers. But the real key lies were the exaggerated breasts and belly of the earliest images of women direct us to look, in the miracle of birth. Before the process of reproduction was understood, babies were simply born to women. No connection was made with intercourse... men, so it seemed therefore had no part in the chain generation. Only women could produce new life, and they were revered accordingly: all the power of nature, and over nature, was theirs.

So arose the belief that woman was divine, not human, gifted with the most sacred and significant power in the world; and so was born the worship of the Great Mother... The most ancient incarnation of the Goddess was a mother - But the number of local and national variations on this apparently Street – forward I can type in itself testifies to the Maverick vicar of 'the God-Mother of the country' as Tibetans called her, and her refusal to submit to stereotypical sentimentalization. So in India, mother Debbie is the traditional mother, to pick it as squeezing milk for humankind from her ample breasts. But the other creation miss as far apart as Syria and Polynesia have the great mother delivering not a race of men and women, but in one mighty once – and-for-all 'world egg'. And in Greece at the most sacred climax of the most secret mysteries of Eleusis the Goddess (or her earthly representative) yearly 'gave birth' to a sheaf of corn, in an explicit link between woman's fertility and nature's, as the archetypal 'Mother Earth'.

... Gaea, The Roman mother earth, emerges from a primal vagina, the abyss of all-feeling all-knowing, while Ishtar of the Babylonians is the cosmic uterus, the stars of the zodiac her raiment... Ymir, the wind god of Norse legend... comes 'out of the [vagina] of the All-Mother Ginnungagab'. ... The proclamation carved on the temple of 'the Holy One,' Nut of Egypt, makes an even stronger claim: *I am what is, what will be, and what has been. No man has uncovered my nakedness, and the fruit of my birthing was the sun.*

...In her darkest incarnation the bad mother did not simply wait for people to die, but demanded their deaths. The Persian and Poussin, her worshipers believed, cruised about the world in a blood bubble looking for something to kill...In the Ireland of 1000 B.C. A sinister tree out of goddesses, the Morgan, hunted battlefields, collecting severed heads and showing themselves to those about to die. In other cultures the Goddess rounds up the dead rather like a sheep dog, and takes them below...

Wedded as we are to an all-loving, all-forgiving stereotype of motherhood, it is at first sight difficult to reconcile this terrifying image of the bad mother with the good. But both 'life' and 'death' sides of the Goddess came together without strain in her primary aspect, which is in fact not motherhood pure and simple, but her sexuality. As her primary sexual activity she created life; but in sex she demanded a man's essence, his self, even his death. Here again the true nature of the Goddess and her activities have fallen victim to the mealy-mouthed prudery of leader ages. Where referred to at all, they were clearly labeled 'fertility' rituals, beliefs or totems, as if the Greek Goddess self loosely performed her sexual obligations solely in order to ensure that the earth would be fruitful. It is time to set the historical record straight. The fruitfulness of crops and animals was only ever a byproduct of the Goddesses own personal sexual activity. Her sex was hers, the enjoyment of it hers, and all these early accounts of her emphasize, when she had sex, like any other sensible female, she had it for herself.

But not by herself. In every culture, the Goddess has many lovers. This exposes another weakness in our later understanding of her role as the great mother. To the children of the patriarchy, 'mother' always includes 'wife'; mother is the woman who is married to father. That puts further constraint on the idea of the good mother.

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The good mother does not [sleep] around. She does not even choose the one man she does have, but is chosen by father. Hence the insoluble paradox of the goddess for this custodians of succeeding morality's end she was always unmarried and never chased. Among Eskimos, her title was 'she will not have a husband'. But there was more to her sexual freedom than this. As a source and force of life, she was timeless and endless. In contrast maleness came and went, for their only function the service of the divine 'womb'...

Yet the lover of the Goddess did not simply have the kind of crudely functional experience that this might suggest. Some representations of her sexuality stress its power and terror: on seal engravings from Babylon she puts scorpions to flight with the ritual display of her awe-inspiring pudenda, while the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh from before 2000 B.C., the Goddess Ishtar, sordid in her unbridled sensuality, threatens to burst gates, tear down houses and then make the dead rise and overwhelm the living'. Far more common, however, are the tender almost girlish poetic tribute to the silk of the liver and the delights of his body, like this song of Inanna, over 4000 years old, yet as fresh as this mornings living:

My brother brought me to his house, laid me down on a fragment of honey bed, my precious sweet, lying on my heart, my brother did it 50 times, one by one, tongue making.

... The rampant sensuality of the great Goddess and her taste for blood unite in the archaic the undisputed practice of the killing of the king. King' is in fact an honorary title for a male chosen to [sex] the Queen-Goddess... in these the immortal mother always take some mortal leather, not to father her child (though children often result) but essentially in exercise in celebration of her womanhood. The clear pattern is of an older woman with a beautiful but expendable use – Ishtar and Tammuz, Venus and Adonis, Cybele and Attis, Isis and Osiris. In the story of Demeter, the functional motif of the story is even clearer: the bold Iasion 'lies with' The corn Goddess in the fruit of a cornfield, and dies by thunderbolt immediately afterward. The lover is always inferior to the Goddess, mortal where she is immortal, young where she is ageless and eternal, powerless where she is all – powerful, and even physically smaller – all these elements combined in the frequent representation of the lover as the Goddess is younger brother or son. And always, always, he dies. The fate of the lovers of the Greek Goddess was well-known when Gilgamesh resisted the command of the glorious Ishtar with the reproach, 'Which of your lovers did you love for ever? What shepherd of yours pleased you for all time? ... And if you and I should be lovers, should not I be served in the same fashion as all the others whom you loved ones?'

... The special magic of women sexuality, from her mysterious menstruation to her gift of producing new life, is expressed in the widespread practice throughout the period of Goddess – worship of treating certain sacred grave-burials with red ochre. Strong or bright red is associated in many religions with female genital blood... The literal as well as symbolic value of women's menstrual blood, their 'moon-gift from the Goddess' is Demonstrated in the ancient Greek custom of mixing it with seed-corn for the annual sewing, to provide the best possible 'fertilizer'.

This open veneration of women's natural rhythms and monthly flow contrasts strangely with the secret shame and cursed they later became. But when God was a woman, all women and all things feminine enjoy the higher status than it has ever been since in most countries of the world.

Miles, Rosalind. *The Women's History of the World*. London, UK: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988, p.36-45.

- **Featured Source B: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory**

My first encounter with the theory that pre-history was matriarchal came in 1979 a class titled "Minoan and Mycenaean Greece." While on site at Knossos, our professor – an archaeologist with the American School of Classical Studies in Athens – noted that the artifactual evidence on the island of Crete pointed toward Minoan society being matriarchal. I don't remember much of what he said in defense of this assertion or what he meant by "matriarchal." All of this is overshadowed in my memory by the reaction of the other members of the class to the professors statement: they laughed... as my classmates gleefully noted, men did put an end to it, for it was a matter of historical record, they said, that civilization of Minoan Crete was displaced by the apparently patriarchal Mycenaean...¹

¹ 3-4

If I was intrigued with the newness and power of the myth, and with its bold gender reversals, I was at least as impressed by the fact that anyone took it seriously as history. Poking holes in the “evidence” for this myth was, to rely on cliché, like shooting fish in a barrel...²

However a myth does not need to be true – or even necessarily be believed to be true – to be powerful, to make a difference in how people think and live, and what people value... I have been a close observer of the myth of matriarchal pre-history for fifteen years now and have watched as it has moved from its somewhat patriarchal home in the feminist spirituality movement out into the feminist and cultural mainstream. But I haven’t been able to cheer at the myths increasing acceptance. My irritation with historical claims made by the myths partisans masks a deep discontent with the myths assumptions. There is a theory of sex and gender embedded in the myth of matriarchal prehistory, and it is neither original nor revolutionary. Women are defined quite nearly as those who give birth and nurture, who identify themselves in terms of their relationships, and who are closely allied with the body, nature, and sex – usually for unavoidable reasons of their biological make up...³

The myth of matriarchal pre-history is not a feminist creation, in spite of the aggressively feminist spin it has carried over the past 25 years. Since the myth was revived from classical Greek sources in 1861 by Johan Jacob baclofen, it has had end at best – a very mixed record with feminism is concerned. The majority of men who champions the myth of matriarchal pre-history during its first century (and have mostly been men) have regarded patriarchy as an evolutionary advance over prehistoric matriarchy’s, in spite of some lingering nostalgia for women’s equality or beneficent rule. Feminists of the latter half of the 20th century or not the first to find in the myth of matriarchal pre-history a manifesto for feminist social change, but this has not been the dominant meaning attached to the myth of matriarchal pre-history, only the most recent... if the myth now functions in a feminist way, its anti-feminist past can become merely a curious historical footnote...⁴

The enemies of feminism have long posed issues of patriarchy and sexism in pseudoscientific and historical terms. It is not in the feminist interest to join them at this game, especially when it is so relatively easy to undermined the ground rules. We know enough about biological sex differences to know that they are neither so striking nor uniform that we either need to or ought to make our policy decisions in reference to them. And we know that cultures worldwide have demonstrated tremendous variability in constructing and regulating gender indicating that we have significant freedom in making our own choices about what gender will mean for us.⁵

As presidents go, the one offered by the myth of matriarchal pre-history is remarkable. It does not say that in the very distant past, there was a small group of people who were able for a short time to construct a society that gave women status in freedom and did not make war on other people or the natural world. Quite the contrary: according to feminist matriarchal math, matriarchy was universal, endured for all the millennia in which we were human, it was only supplanted very recently. Positively dwarfs the patriarchy, which is in contrast, a “relatively short, I’ll be at melodramatic, period.”⁶

Mini assume the males were always dominant, for closing in advance the possibility of discovering less obvious forms of women social power... if we are unable to come up with any standard to evaluate women’s status at home, what makes us think we can do so abroad, or in the past?... to ethnographer’s recording on the same group can end and sometimes have patients come back saying opposites things. Often it seems to come down to the attitude of the observer: does she want the glass to be half full, or half empty? ⁷

The greatest divide in ethnographies of gender seems to be between those anthropologists who focus on official ideology and those who are more attuned to behavioral variation and face-to-face interactions. Those anthropologists who have come to the conclusion that women are everywhere subordinate to men are usually looking at ideology, while those who see women as at times equal or dominant are generally drawing their conclusions from behavior... presumably women’s power is always there, if you trouble yourself to look for it and aren’t too picky about what form it takes... Whether out of... fear of ethnocentrism, many feminists are loathe to

² 5

³ 6-7

⁴ 7

⁵ 8

⁶ 19

⁷ 85



see and name sexism in other cultures in places where they would find it in their own. Or, conversely, they emphasize women's status and autonomy in other cultures in forms they would not recognize as such on their own turf... we should regard with suspicion women's statements from ethnographic contexts that appearances of sexism notwithstanding, they find their lives to their liking... individuals can enjoy and appreciate their lives while still being in structurally disadvantaged positions relative to others.

Given the frustrations inherent in trying to pin down the status of women, many feminist anthropologists have abandoned the task as such. Some go so far as to argue that women and men do not exist anywhere except as cultures create these categories.⁸

This has not stopped archaeologists from reading gender into material evidence from the past, however. Particularly over past 15 years, archaeologists seem to be eagerly playing catch-up, bringing 30 years of academic and political debate on the topics of sex and gender into their discipline. For a variety of reasons archaeologists came late to this debate... The most everyone seems game to find gender in the archaeological record, no one is quite sure how it should be done, or even if it can be done. Skeletons can be sexed as male or female (within a margin of error), and then examined in order to draw tentative conclusion about women's and men's diets, life expectancy, and patterns of work based on bone density, tooth wear, and mineral content in the bones themselves. Grave goods, if they differ between female and male skeletons, may also offer clues to prehistoric gender, and some paintings and sculptures give clear evidence of sex. But beyond this it is impossible at least without historical or ethnohistorical support to know which artifacts go with which sexes. Even the most basic questions-- Who makes those weapons? Who uses those grinding stones?-- cannot be answered definitively through pre-literate material record alone. And so archaeologists typically rely on ethnographic analogies to other cultures to help them interpret the gendered significance of their material finds. For example, spear points are generally attributed to men, since in most human societies we know of, men are responsible for hunting.

Attributions like this are inevitably controversial. Recently it is even become difficult to make arguments about prehistoric gender based on sex skeletons, for there is concern that a biological female may have been a social man (or vice versa), or that other gendered categories beyond the standard two existed.⁹

According to feminist matriarchalists, the miracle of childbirth -- especially miraculous when no male role in conception was recognized-- caused all women to be viewed with respect and honor... The idea that prehistoric peoples might not have recognized paternity was first proposed in the 19th century... this speculation received some grounding and ethnographic evidence when reports filtered back from Australia and Melanesia that certain aboriginal peoples denied sexual intercourse had anything to do with pregnancy... these "proof" of the ignorance of paternity were actually errors and ethnography.¹⁰

Evidence from the material record suggests that prehistoric peoples were aware of the relationship between sexual intercourse and conception. Paleolithic cave paintings to picked animals mating, pregnant, and giving birth in such a way that these events seem connected. A plaque from Catalhoyuk carved in gray schist shows "two figures in an embrace on the left and a mother and child on the right," and artifact which some end including some feminist matriarchalists -- read as visual texts on the results of copulation.¹¹

Another troubling fact about goddesses as we know them ethnographically and historically is that they do not always resemble the image that feminist matriarch list stipulate for prehistoric cultures: the loving mother, the giver and taker of life, the embodiment of the natural world. Some goddesses are incredibly violent -- and not in a way that suggests the benevolent function of watching over natural cycles of death and rebirth. For example, a Ugaritic text from 1400 BCE Canaan says of the goddess Anat: "She is filled with joy as she plunge is her knees into the blood of heroes." The Sumarian Inanna is also a goddess of war, and significantly, neither she nor Anat is portrayed as a mother. Shitala, worshiped today in Bengal, "tempts feeble persons, and especially mischievous children, with irresistible delicacies, which then break out on their bodies as horrifying and fatal foxes."

More troublesome than these deviations from the feminist meant matriarchal list ideal is the fact that goddesses are often known to support patriarchal social customs. Goddesses may have nothing whatsoever to do

⁸ 86-87

⁹ 88

¹⁰ 93-94

¹¹ 96



with Romans religious needs, representing instead of men's fantasies of "the eternal mother, the devoted mate, The loving mistress, "or even the fearful nature of women's power (should it be allowed to wriggle out from under the strict male control). Goddesses may be strongly, if ambivalently, distinguish from human women, and the differences between these two repeatedly emphasized: that is goddesses "accentuate womanhood is not" as often as they reflect a cultures notion of what women are.¹²

Eller, Cynthia. *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future*. Beacon Press: Boston, 2000, p.3-104.

¹² 103-104



Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the earliest primary sources and highly relevant secondary sources that display potential causes for gender norms and historical evidence of gender norms at the earliest known points.

Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understanding and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students will stretch their learning to determine the origins of gender norms, how far back, and where they emerge, responding directly to the Compelling Question.

Students' arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- Gender norms are engrained and biological.
- Gender norms have cultural variations and some similarities, showing some environmental flexibility.
- Gender norms have been pretty engrained, but do not have to remain so as we begin to see it as more of a spectrum.

To support students in their writing they can use this provided organizer for a body paragraph. The organizer refers to the HAPPY acronym: Historical Context, Audience, Point of View, Purpose and whY is this significant?

| | |
|--|---|
| First Argument | |
| Write a topic sentence that summarizes the paragraph and tells how this proves the thesis | <i>(Repeat the first part of your thesis)</i> |
| Provide background information here. Cite anyone you paraphrase or quote! | <i>When...</i> |
| What textual evidence proves this? Describe 1 or 2 HAPP elements about the source of your evidence. | |
| What textual evidence proves this? Insert a short quote here. | |



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The New Hampshire Council for the Social Studies

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>What makes this quote credible, valid, or helpful in providing insights to this issue?</p> | <p><i>The quote revealed...</i></p> |
| <p>Who disagrees or disputes a piece of your argument? Describe 1 or 2 HAPP elements about the source of your evidence.</p> | <p><i>Others claimed that...</i></p> |
| <p>What textual evidence do you have? Insert a short quote here.</p> | |
| <p>What makes this quote seem untrue, inaccurate, or only partly true?</p> | <p><i>While it may be true that _____, it was clear that...</i></p> |

To extend their arguments, once students have written or formed an argument, consider doing one of the following extension activities:

1. **Discussion:** Consider facilitating a discussion of the analysis questions. Ask students to share their response with someone, or if they already worked in a group, ask them to nominate someone to represent their group to the class as a whole. Capitalize on differences between group responses. Why did one group answer differently than another? What impacted them or stood out more?
2. **Four Corner Debate:** Consider a "four-corner debate." In the corners of the room tack up a piece of paper with four differing and possible answers to the inquiry question. After students complete the lesson packet, pose the question to the room at large and ask students to move to the corner of the room (or in between locations) that represent their answer. Then, ask students to explain their choice. As students discuss they are allowed to move closer or further from ideas. This is a great strategy for kinesthetic learning.
3. **Socratic Seminar:** Consider doing a "Socratic seminar" to extend the learning and get students to question what they still don't know or understand. Start with the inquiry's question. Students should be encouraged to answer one another's question directly, but also to answer the question with another question. This continues the conversation and gets at more rich ideas. The teacher should try to say as little as possible and let the students lead the dialog. One strategy for this is to seat students in a circle. Give each of them a cup and 2-3 tokens. When a student makes a substantive contribution to the discussion the teacher will walk over and place a token in the cup signaling that they have contributed. Students will become aware of who has spoken and who has not, and leave space for one another.
4. **Structured Academic Controversy:** Consider turning the lesson into a "structured academic controversy." Take the overarching question and turn it into a "debate." Students can choose or be assigned a side in the debate and use the documents provided to argue their "answer" to the overarching question. They can argue over interpretations and credibility of some documents.
5. **Reacting to the Past:** Consider doing some role play with your class. Reacting to the Past is an active learning pedagogy of role-playing games designed by Barnard University. In Reacting to the Past games, students are assigned character roles with specific goals and must communicate, collaborate, and compete effectively to advance their objectives. Reacting promotes engagement with big ideas, and improves intellectual and academic skills. Provide



students with a set of rules about staying in character and what types of things they must know about their character. Students should be provided with a packet of role sheets with instructions on their individual goals and strategies for game play. Students can use sources and information from these activities, and can search for more details online about their individual character. Reacting roles and games do not have a fixed script or outcome. While students are obliged to adhere to the philosophical and intellectual beliefs of the historical figures they have been assigned to play, they must devise their own means of expressing those ideas persuasively in papers, speeches, or other public presentations.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by doing one of the following suggested action activities:

1. Find an article or book about history that misrepresents women and gender in history and write to the author or editor.
2. Write a letter to the Secretary of Education for your state about the teaching of women and gender history.
3. Investigate women and gender rights issues that persist and engage with the movement by attending a protest, signing a petition, or donating to the cause.
4. Make a PSA video, blog, or social media post with the intent to persuade the audience to better understand women from history or a persistent gender rights from this inquiry.