The First U.S. Women's Rights Movement (1800's)
By Sharon Fabian

1 In the 1800's the pioneer days of our country were about over, and things began to settle into a routine. People were not struggling to survive in the same way that they had been years before, and they had time to think about other things that were on their minds. This was the time when women began to think seriously about their rights. Women did not have the same rights as men, and many women began to think that it was time to do something about it.

2 Women's rights was not a totally new idea. As far back as the American Revolution, when Americans fought for freedom and democracy, some people hoped that this would include democracy for women too, but it didn't happen. Women who worked as nurses in the Revolution and other wars had important work to do, but only unofficial jobs. Women had worked as teachers, but often were denied higher education themselves. In the 1800's when people began to live in cities and work in factories, the inequalities between men and women became more obvious. Many women felt that they needed to claim their rights. Mary Wollstonecraft, a writer from England, wrote what many women were feeling, that women were equal to men and so should have equal rights.

3 Women's groups were already active in America, working for changes that they felt were important to our whole society. There were temperance societies that worked to end alcohol use. Missionary societies worked to spread the Christian faith, and other women's groups worked to aid the poor. Soon, a new type of women's group appeared. These groups of women worked to gain equal rights for women. Sometimes called feminist groups, these women worked for higher education, property rights, custody rights, and voting rights for women.

4 The women argued that these rights were needed to bring equality between men and women. They argued that the property rights were especially needed by widowed and abandoned women who often had an especially difficult life. They argued that voting rights were most important so that women could participate in American democracy.

5 People who opposed them argued that women were less intelligent than men were, and that men could make better decisions for their wives than the wives could make for themselves. They argued that giving women too many rights would take them away from their families.

6 A turning point in this early women's rights movement was the convention organized in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. At that convention the women wrote an important document, called the Declaration of Sentiments. It was modeled after our country's Declaration of Independence, and it said that women were entitled to "all rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States." After that year, women met nearly every year until the Civil War began to continue to work for their rights. Continuing their tradition of looking out for others, many of the reformers in the women's movement were also active in the anti-slavery movement as well.

7 During the Civil War years, women's rights seemed less important for a while. Many women who had worked hard in the women's rights movement now put all of their hard work into the war effort, some for the North, and some for the South.

8 After the war, the women's rights movement continued. Two groups, the NWSA and the AWSA, formed to campaign for women's rights. The NWSA, the National Woman Suffrage Association, was led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. They campaigned for equal education, equal employment, and the right to vote. The AWSA, the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Lucy Stone and others, believed in more gradual change. They suggested that women first be allowed to vote only in small local elections. In 1890, the two groups combined to form the NAWSA and continued their work. They got people interested in
their cause by printing pamphlets, making speeches, and having parades. But they had a long fight ahead of them. In the 1900's, women would still be fighting for their rights.

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1. In the United States, women began to speak out about their rights in the_____.
   - A) 1700's
   - B) 1800's
   - C) 1900's
   - D) 1600's

2. Women did not organize to fight for their rights before the 1800's, maybe because_____.
   - A) They were too busy surviving in a new country
   - B) Women did not live in the US before 1800
   - C) They had more rights than men
   - D) They already had equal rights

3. From the information in the article, you can infer that women teachers in the early days of our country_____.
   - A) All went to Europe to study
   - B) Had little education
   - C) All had college degrees
   - D) All went to special teacher's colleges

4. _____ was an English writer, who wrote about the need for equal rights for women.
   - A) Lucretia Mott
   - B) Lucy Stone
   - C) Mary Wollstonecraft
   - D) Elizabeth Cady Stanton

5. NAWSA stands for_____.
   - A) National American Woman Suffrage Association
   - B) North American Woman Suffrage Association
   - C) National Woman Suffrage Association
   - D) American Woman Suffrage Association

6. Use a dictionary if necessary. Suffrage means_____.
   - A) The right to play school sports
   - B) Equal pay for equal work
   - C) The right to a free public education
   - D) The right to vote

7. The Declaration of Sentiments was modeled after the Constitution of the United States.
   - A) False
   - B) True

8. Women finally won the right to vote in 1890.
   - A) False
   - B) True

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Directions: Fill in each blank with the word that best completes the reading comprehension.
In the 1800's the (1) ____________________ days of our country were about over, and things began to settle into a routine. People were not struggling to survive in the same way that they had been years before, and they had time to think about other things that were on their minds. This was the time when women began to think seriously about their rights. Women did not have the same rights as men, and many women began to think that it was time to do something about it.

Women's rights was not a (2) ____________________ new idea. As far back as the American Revolution, when Americans fought for freedom and democracy, some people hoped that this would include democracy for women too, but it didn't happen. Women who worked as nurses in the Revolution and other wars had important work to do, but only (3) ____________________ (4) ____________________ . Women had worked as teachers, but often were denied higher education themselves. In the 1800's when people began to live in cities and work in factories, the inequalities between men and women became more obvious. Many women felt that they needed to claim their rights. Mary Wollstonecraft, a writer from England, wrote what many women were feeling, that women were equal to men and so should have (5) ____________________ rights.

Women's groups were already active in America, working for changes that they felt were important to our whole (6) ____________________ . There were (7) ____________________ (8) ____________________ that worked to end alcohol use. Missionary societies worked to spread the Christian faith, and other women's groups worked to aid the poor. Soon, a new type of women's group appeared. These groups of women worked to gain equal rights for women. Sometimes called feminist groups, these women worked for higher (9) ____________________ , property rights, (10) ____________________ rights, and voting rights for women.

The women argued that these rights were needed to bring (11) ____________________ between men and women. They argued that the property rights were especially needed by widowed and abandoned women who often had an especially difficult life. They argued that (12) ____________________ rights were most important so that women could participate in American (13) ____________________ .

People who opposed them argued that women were less intelligent than men were, and that men could make (14) ____________________ decisions for their wives than the wives could make for themselves. They argued that giving women too many rights would take them away from their families.

A turning point in this early women's rights movement was the (15) ____________________ organized in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. At that convention the women wrote an important document, called the Declaration of Sentiments. It was modeled after our country's Declaration of Independence, and it said that women were entitled to "all rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States." After that year, women met nearly every year until the Civil War began to continue to work for their rights. Continuing their tradition of looking out for others, many of the reformers in the women's movement were also active in the anti-slavery movement as well.

During the Civil War years, women's rights seemed less important for a while. Many women who had worked hard in the women's rights movement now put all of their hard work into the war effort, some for the North, and some for the South.

After the war, the women's rights movement continued. Two groups, the NWSA and the AWSA, formed to (16) ____________________ for women's rights. The NWSA, the National Woman Suffrage Association, was
led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. They \((17)\) ________________ for equal education, equal employment, and the right to \((18)\) ________________ . The AWSA, the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Lucy Stone and others, believed in more gradual change. They suggested that women first be allowed to vote only in small local elections. In 1890, the two groups combined to form the NAWSA and continued their work. They got people interested in their cause by printing pamphlets, making speeches, and having parades. But they had a long fight ahead of them. In the 1900's, women would still be fighting for their rights.

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   - **B** They already had equal rights
   - **C** They had more rights than men
   - **D** They were too busy surviving in a new country

3. From the information in the article, you can infer that women teachers in the early days of our country _____.
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   - **A** False
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8. Women finally won the right to vote in 1890.
   - **A** False
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The First U.S. Women's Rights Movement (1800's) - Answer Key

1. B  1800's
2. A  They were too busy surviving in a new country
3. B  Had little education
4. C  Mary Wollstonecraft
5. A  National American Woman Suffrage Association
6. D  The right to vote
7. A  False
8. A  False
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Women's groups were already active in America, working for changes that they felt were important to our whole **society**. There were **temperance societies** that worked to end alcohol use. Missionary societies worked to spread the Christian faith, and other women's groups worked to aid the poor. Soon, a new type of women's group appeared. These groups of women worked to gain equal rights for women. Sometimes called feminist groups, these women worked for higher **education**, property rights, **custody** rights, and voting rights for women.

The women argued that these rights were needed to bring **equality** between men and women. They argued that the property rights were especially needed by widowed and abandoned women who often had an especially difficult life. They argued that **voting** rights were most important so that women could participate in American **democracy**.

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Answers to Reading Comprehension Questions
1. D 1800's
2. D They were too busy surviving in a new country
3. A Had little education
4. A Mary Wollstonecraft
5. C National American Woman Suffrage Association
6. B The right to vote
7. A False
8. A False

Answer Key 0425638

1 S P R 2 E A D
3 G 4 S 5 T
6 C U S T O D Y 7 P E
8 9 F 10 E E L I N G 8 D O M
11 E D U C A T I O N 9 C E P
12 G A Y L C A
13 A N T I - S L A V 14 E R Y A C
15 16 T O T A L L Y