



Macculloch Hall Historical Museum

45 Macculloch Avenue, Morristown, NJ 07960 • www.maccullochhall.org

Lesson Plan Middle & High School Grades

Rhymes for All Times: Using Alice Duer Miller Suffrage Poems

●●●Overview

Students analyze two poems by Alice Duer Miller (1874-1942) to identify the perspectives of the author, the audience, and discuss the current events when the poems were written.

●●●Essential Question

What can poems teach us about the past?

●●●Objectives

Students use a primary source to:

- observe the tone and type of poem.
- reflect on what was happening in U.S. history when the poems were written.

●●●NJ Student Learning Standards

6.1.12.CivicsDP.6.a: Use a variety of sources from multiple perspectives to document the ways in which women organized to promote government policies designed to address injustice, inequality, and workplace safety (i.e., abolition, women's suffrage, and the temperance movement).

●●●Procedure

1. Define **primary** source. To introduce the activity, examine a poem from today to identify the tone, the purpose, and the perspective of the creator of the poem.
2. Give each student copies of the poem to read through together.
3. Break the poems into sections and have students either select or assign sections for the students read and write the section in their own words.
4. Ask students to share in class what they have written. Discuss what the poems help us to understand about the women's suffrage movement in the United States.
5. Find photographs from the early 1900s to supplement the poem activity.

Top photos: Alice Duer Miller (1847-1942), 19th Amendment flag

Source: *Are Women People?: Rhymes for Suffrage Times* (1915)

Our Idea of Nothing at All Alice Duer Miller

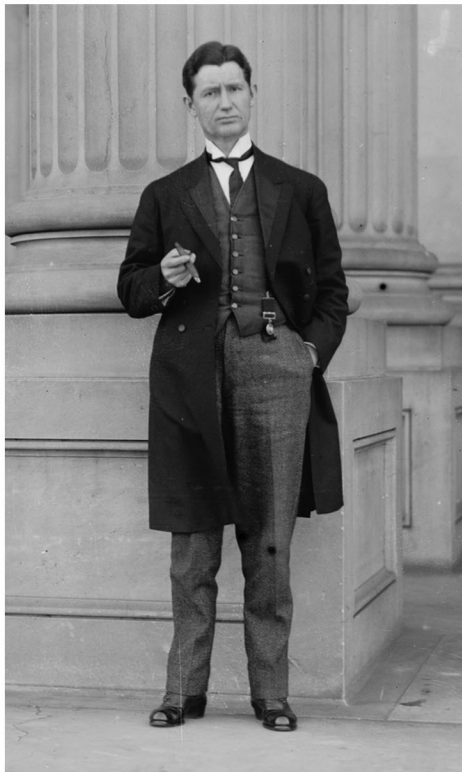
O, women, have you heard the news
Of charity and grace?
Look, look how joy and gratitude
Are beaming in my face!
For Mr. Webb is not opposed
To woman in her place!

O, Mr. Webb how kind you are
To let us live at all,
To let us light the kitchen range
And tidy up the hall;
To tolerate the female sex
In spite of Adam's fall.

O, girls suppose that Mr. Webb
Should alter his decree!
Suppose he were opposed to us—
Opposed to you and me.
What would be left for us to do—
Except to cease to be?

The Revolt of Mother Alice Duer Miller

("Every true women feels ____" --Speech of almost
any Congressman.)
I am old-fashioned, and I think it right,
That man should know, by Nature's laws eternal,
The proper way to rule, to earn, to fight,
And exercise those functions called paternal;
But even I a little bit rebel
At finding that he knows my job as well.
At least he's always ready to expound it,
Especially in legislative hall,
The joys, the cares, the halos that surround it,
"How women feel"—he knows that best of all.
In fact, his thesis is that no one can
Know what is womanly except a man.
I am old-fashioned, and I am content
When he explains the world of art and science
And government—to him divinely sent—
I drink it in with ladylike compliance.
But cannot listen—no, I'm only human—
While he instructs me how to be a woman.



North Carolina Congressman Edwin Yates Webb (1872-1955)

At the January 12, 1915 10-hour debate in the House of Representatives on woman suffrage, Representative Webb spoke these words:

"Mr. Speaker, I am opposed to woman suffrage, but I am not opposed to woman," said Rep. Edwin Y. Webb, a North Carolina Democrat. "I am unwilling, as a southern man, to force upon her any burden which will distract this loving potentate from her sacred, God-imposed duties. I am unwilling to force her into the vortex of politics, where her sensitiveness and her modesty will often be offended."

On this date the House of Representatives denied women the right to vote for the last time.