

# What a Woman Ought to Be

## Introduction

Mary Wollstonecraft was a pioneering feminist, philosopher, and writer who lived in the 18th century. She is best known for her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which was published in 1792. In this groundbreaking work, Wollstonecraft argued that women are rational creatures who deserve the same rights and opportunities as men. She also criticized the traditional roles that society assigned to women, arguing that they were based on prejudice and superstition.

Wollstonecraft's ideas were radical for her time, and they sparked a great deal of controversy. However, they also had a profound impact on the development of feminism. Wollstonecraft's work helped to inspire a

new generation of women to fight for their rights, and it continues to be read and studied by feminists today.

Wollstonecraft was a complex and contradictory figure. She was a passionate advocate for women's rights, but she also had some views that would be considered controversial today. For example, she believed that women should be educated, but she also believed that they should be subordinate to men. Despite her contradictions, Wollstonecraft was a brilliant thinker and a powerful writer. Her work has had a lasting impact on the world, and she is considered one of the most important figures in the history of feminism.

Wollstonecraft's life was full of challenges. She was born into a poor family, and she had to struggle to make a living. She also suffered from mental illness, and she attempted suicide on several occasions. However, she never gave up on her fight for women's rights. She continued to write and speak out against the

injustices that women faced, even when it meant risking her own safety.

Wollstonecraft's legacy is complex and multifaceted. She was a brilliant thinker, a passionate advocate for women's rights, and a complex and contradictory figure. Her work has had a lasting impact on the world, and she is considered one of the most important figures in the history of feminism.

Wollstonecraft's story is one of courage, resilience, and determination. She faced many challenges in her life, but she never gave up on her fight for women's rights. Her work has inspired generations of women to fight for their own rights, and it continues to be read and studied today.

## Book Description

**What a Woman Ought to Be** is a groundbreaking exploration of the life and ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the most important figures in the history of feminism. Drawing on Wollstonecraft's own writings, as well as the work of scholars and historians, this book provides a comprehensive and nuanced portrait of a woman who was both brilliant and flawed, passionate and contradictory.

Wollstonecraft was born into a poor family in 18th-century England. Despite the challenges she faced, she managed to educate herself and become a respected writer and philosopher. In her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argued that women are rational creatures who deserve the same rights and opportunities as men. She also criticized the traditional roles that society assigned to women, arguing that they were based on prejudice and superstition.

Wollstonecraft's ideas were radical for her time, and they sparked a great deal of controversy. However, they also had a profound impact on the development of feminism. Wollstonecraft's work helped to inspire a new generation of women to fight for their rights, and it continues to be read and studied by feminists today.

**What a Woman Ought to Be** is more than just a biography of Mary Wollstonecraft. It is also an exploration of the ideas that shaped her life and work. The book examines Wollstonecraft's views on education, marriage, love, and revolution. It also discusses her relationships with other intellectuals and activists, including William Godwin, Thomas Paine, and Helen Maria Williams.

Through its exploration of Wollstonecraft's life and ideas, **What a Woman Ought to Be** sheds light on the origins of feminism and the ongoing struggle for women's rights. The book is a must-read for anyone

interested in women's history, intellectual history, or the history of ideas.

**What a Woman Ought to Be** is a powerful and inspiring story of a woman who dared to challenge the status quo and fight for a better world. Wollstonecraft's life and ideas continue to resonate today, and her work remains a source of inspiration for feminists around the world.

# Chapter 1: A Voice for Equality

## Topic 1: The Plight of Women in the 18th Century

Women in the 18th century faced many challenges and injustices. They were denied basic rights and opportunities that were afforded to men. In the eyes of the law, women were considered to be the property of their husbands. They could not own property, they could not vote, and they could not enter into contracts.

Women were also expected to conform to strict social norms. They were expected to be submissive and obedient to their husbands. They were expected to be chaste and virtuous. And they were expected to focus their lives on domestic duties, such as raising children and managing the household.

Any woman who deviated from these norms was likely to face social ostracism and ridicule. She might even be punished by the law. For example, women who were

caught engaging in adultery could be sentenced to death.

The plight of women in the 18th century was a serious problem. It was a problem that cried out for reform. And it was a problem that Mary Wollstonecraft was determined to address.

Wollstonecraft was a brilliant writer and philosopher. She was also a passionate advocate for women's rights. In her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argued that women are rational creatures who deserve the same rights and opportunities as men. She also criticized the traditional roles that society assigned to women, arguing that they were based on prejudice and superstition.

Wollstonecraft's work had a profound impact on the development of feminism. It helped to inspire a new generation of women to fight for their rights. And it continues to be read and studied by feminists today.



Wollstonecraft's work is a powerful reminder of the challenges that women have faced throughout history. It is also a reminder of the importance of fighting for justice and equality.

# Chapter 1: A Voice for Equality

## Topic 2: Wollstonecraft's Early Life and Influences

Mary Wollstonecraft was born on April 27, 1759, in Spitalfields, London, England. She was the second of seven children born to Edward John Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Dixon. Her father was a weaver, and her mother was a staymaker. Wollstonecraft's early life was marked by poverty and instability. Her father was often unemployed, and the family was forced to move frequently. Wollstonecraft received little formal education, but she was a voracious reader and autodidact. She was particularly interested in history, philosophy, and literature.

As a young woman, Wollstonecraft worked as a governess and a teacher. She also wrote several novels, including *Mary: A Fiction* (1788) and *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). In these novels, Wollstonecraft

explored themes of female independence, equality, and education.

In 1792, Wollstonecraft published her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In this groundbreaking book, Wollstonecraft argued that women are rational creatures who deserve the same rights and opportunities as men. She also criticized the traditional roles that society assigned to women, arguing that they were based on prejudice and superstition.

Wollstonecraft's ideas were radical for her time, and they sparked a great deal of controversy. However, they also had a profound impact on the development of feminism. Wollstonecraft's work helped to inspire a new generation of women to fight for their rights, and it continues to be read and studied by feminists today.

Wollstonecraft's early life and influences shaped her into a passionate advocate for women's rights. Her experiences of poverty and discrimination gave her a

firsthand understanding of the challenges that women faced. Her voracious reading and autodidacticism gave her the knowledge and skills she needed to articulate her ideas in a powerful and persuasive way. Wollstonecraft's work continues to inspire women to fight for their rights today.

# Chapter 1: A Voice for Equality

## Topic 3: The Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is one of the most important works of feminist philosophy ever written. Published in 1792, the book argues that women are rational creatures who deserve the same rights and opportunities as men. Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* was a radical text for its time, and it sparked a great deal of controversy. However, it also had a profound impact on the development of feminism, and it continues to be read and studied today.

In her *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft argues that women are not naturally inferior to men. She points out that women have the same capacity for reason and intelligence as men, and she argues that they should be given the same opportunities to develop their minds.

Wollstonecraft also criticizes the traditional roles that society assigns to women. She argues that women should not be confined to the domestic sphere, and she calls for them to be given the same access to education and employment as men.

Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* is a powerful and persuasive argument for women's rights. It is a passionate call for a more just and equitable society. Wollstonecraft's work has had a lasting impact on the world, and it continues to inspire feminists today.

### **The Vindication's Impact**

Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* had a profound impact on the development of feminism. It helped to inspire a new generation of women to fight for their rights. Wollstonecraft's work also influenced the thinking of many leading intellectuals, including William Godwin, Thomas Paine, and Helen Maria Williams.

The Vindication was also controversial in its own time. It was attacked by many critics, who argued that Wollstonecraft was unwomanly and that her ideas were dangerous. However, Wollstonecraft's work also found many supporters, and it helped to raise awareness of the issue of women's rights.

### **Wollstonecraft's Legacy**

Wollstonecraft's Vindication is a landmark work of feminist philosophy. It is a powerful and persuasive argument for women's rights, and it has had a lasting impact on the world. Wollstonecraft's work continues to inspire feminists today, and it is a reminder of the importance of fighting for a more just and equitable society.

**This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.**

**Discover the complete 10 chapters and 50 sections by purchasing the book, now available in various formats.**



## Table of Contents

**Chapter 1: A Voice for Equality** \* Topic 1: The Plight of Women in the 18th Century \* Topic 2: Wollstonecraft's Early Life and Influences \* Topic 3: The Vindication of the Rights of Woman \* Topic 4: Wollstonecraft's Views on Education \* Topic 5: Wollstonecraft's Legacy

**Chapter 2: A Daughter of Revolution** \* Topic 1: Wollstonecraft's Relationship with Her Father \* Topic 2: Wollstonecraft's Experiences in Revolutionary France \* Topic 3: Wollstonecraft's Views on Revolution \* Topic 4: Wollstonecraft's Relationship with Gilbert Imlay \* Topic 5: Wollstonecraft's Daughter, Fanny

**Chapter 3: A Woman of Passion** \* Topic 1: Wollstonecraft's Passion for Life \* Topic 2: Wollstonecraft's Passion for Love \* Topic 3: Wollstonecraft's Passion for Writing \* Topic 4:

Wollstonecraft's Passion for Justice \* Topic 5:  
Wollstonecraft's Passion for Education

**Chapter 4: A Pioneer of Feminism** \* Topic 1:  
Wollstonecraft's Contribution to Feminism \* Topic 2:  
Wollstonecraft's Influence on Later Feminists \* Topic 3:  
Wollstonecraft's Legacy as a Feminist \* Topic 4:  
Wollstonecraft's Impact on the Women's Rights  
Movement \* Topic 5: Wollstonecraft's Place in History

**Chapter 5: A Complex and Contradictory Figure** \*  
Topic 1: Wollstonecraft's Contradictory Views on  
Marriage \* Topic 2: Wollstonecraft's Contradictory  
Views on Love \* Topic 3: Wollstonecraft's Contradictory  
Views on Education \* Topic 4: Wollstonecraft's  
Contradictory Views on Revolution \* Topic 5:  
Wollstonecraft's Contradictory Views on Religion

**Chapter 6: A Life Cut Short** \* Topic 1: Wollstonecraft's  
Death \* Topic 2: The Legacy of Wollstonecraft's Death \*  
Topic 3: Wollstonecraft's Impact on the Romantic  
Movement \* Topic 4: Wollstonecraft's Influence on

Later Writers \* Topic 5: Wollstonecraft's Place in Literary History

**Chapter 7: A Woman Remembered** \* Topic 1: Wollstonecraft's Reputation in the 19th Century \* Topic 2: Wollstonecraft's Reputation in the 20th Century \* Topic 3: Wollstonecraft's Reputation Today \* Topic 4: Wollstonecraft's Impact on Popular Culture \* Topic 5: Wollstonecraft's Place in the Canon of English Literature

**Chapter 8: A Legacy of Inspiration** \* Topic 1: Wollstonecraft's Inspiration to Later Generations \* Topic 2: Wollstonecraft's Impact on Social Reform \* Topic 3: Wollstonecraft's Influence on Political Thought \* Topic 4: Wollstonecraft's Contribution to Philosophy \* Topic 5: Wollstonecraft's Place in Intellectual History

**Chapter 9: A Woman for All Time** \* Topic 1: Wollstonecraft's Relevance Today \* Topic 2: Wollstonecraft's Message for the 21st Century \* Topic 3: Wollstonecraft's Vision for the Future \* Topic 4:

Wollstonecraft's Legacy as a Global Icon \* Topic 5:  
Wollstonecraft's Place in History

**Chapter 10: A Call to Action** \* Topic 1: The Need for  
Gender Equality Today \* Topic 2: The Fight for  
Women's Rights \* Topic 3: The Importance of Education  
for Girls \* Topic 4: The Role of Men in the Fight for  
Gender Equality \* Topic 5: The Future of Feminism

**This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.**

**Discover the complete 10 chapters and 50 sections by purchasing the book, now available in various formats.**