

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying Document Groups A-C. You will have 60 minutes to read and analyze the documents and answer the question. You may make notes and plan your answer on the green insert or on the printed pages of the pink, free-response booklet. Write your answer to the question on the lined pages of the free-response booklet.

This question is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. You may refer to historical facts and developments not mentioned in the documents and assess the reliability of the documents as historical sources where relevant to your answer.

7. Discuss the extent to which early modern European society encouraged education for women. What criteria were used to evaluate women's education or its role, and women's potential for learning? What evolution, if any, can be seen in attitudes toward education for women from the Renaissance through the early eighteenth century?

Document Group A: THE RENAISSANCE

(1) "The Court Lady must have not only the good judgment to recognize the kind of person with whom she is speaking, but must have knowledge of many things, in order to entertain that person graciously. . . . I say that women can understand all the things men can understand and that the intellect of woman can penetrate wherever a man's can. . . . there have always been women who have undertaken wars and won glorious victories, governed kingdoms with the greatest prudence and justice, and done all that men have done. As for the sciences, do you not remember reading of many women who were learned in philosophy? Others who excelled in poetry? Others who prosecuted, accused, and defended before judges with great eloquence? . . ."

Castiglione, The Courtier,
Italy, 1528

(3) "Study busies the whole soul. . . . It is not only a weapon against idleness but also a means of impressing the best precepts upon a girl's mind and of leading her to virtue."

Erasmus, Christiani matrimonii institutio, Switzerland, 1526

(4) "All I can do is to beg our virtuous ladies to raise their minds somewhat above their distaffs and spindles and try to prove to the world that if we were not made to command, still we should not be disdained as companions in domestic and public matters by those who govern and command obedience. Apart from the good name that our sex will acquire thereby, we shall have caused men to devote more time and effort in the public good to virtuous studies for fear of seeing themselves left behind by those over whom they have always claimed superiority in practically everything. . . . If there is anything to be recommended after honor and glory, anything to incite us to study, it is the pleasure which study affords."

A letter from the poet
Louise Labé to a friend,
France, 1555

(2) Abbot: Distaff and spindle are the proper equipment for women.
Lady: Isn't it a wife's business to manage the household and rear the children?
Abbot: It is.
Lady: Do you think she can manage so big a job without wisdom?
Abbot: I suppose not.
Lady: But books teach me this wisdom.
Abbot: I could put up with books, but not Latin ones.
Lady: Why not?
Abbot: Because that language isn't fit for women.
Lady: I want to know why.
Abbot: Because it does little to protect their chastity.

Erasmus, "The Abbot and the Learned Lady,"
Switzerland, 1524

(5) "I have just given you my opinion of the advantages that women may derive from a superior education. [However, I have nearly always found that such preparation turned out to be useless for women of middling rank like yourselves]. . . There is the fact, moreover, that a disproportionate elevation of the mind is very apt to breed pride. I have seen two bad effects issue from this: (1) contempt for housekeeping, for poverty, and for a husband less clever than oneself, and (2) discord. And so I conclude that I would be most reluctant to encourage girls to pursue book learning unless they were princesses, obliged by their rank to assume the responsibilities, knowledge, competence, administration, and authority of men."

Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné,
writer and historian, to his
daughters, France, circa 1590

(6) "She has just passed her sixteenth birthday and shows such dignity and gentleness as are wonderful at her age and in her rank. Her study of true religion and learning is most eager. Her mind has no womanly weakness, her perseverance is equal to that of a man, and her memory long keeps what it quickly picks up. She talks French and Italian as well as she does English, and has often talked to me readily and well in Latin, moderately in Greek."

Roger Ascham, describing
his student, the future
Queen Elizabeth I, 1549

Document Group B: REFORMATION AND CATHOLIC REFORMATION

(1) "Men have broad shoulders and narrow hips, and accordingly they possess intelligence. Women have narrow shoulders and broad hips. Women ought to stay at home; the way they were created indicated this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit upon (to keep house and bear and raise children)."

Martin Luther,
Table Talk, 1566

(3) "If God has done the grace to some poor women to reveal to them by his Holy Scriptures some good and holy thing, dare they not write about it, speak about it, and declare it one to the other. . . . Is it not foolishly done to hide the talent that God has given us?"

Marie Dentière, a devout
Calvinist, writing in "The
War and Deliverance of
the City of Geneva," 1539

(2) "To learn essential doctrine . . . there is no need for the woman or the artisan to take time out from their work and read the Old and New Testament Then they'll want to dispute about it and give their opinion . . . and they can't help falling into error. Women must be silent in Church, as Saint Paul says."

Emond Auger, a
French Jesuit, 1566

(1) "Whence true authority in men, though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seem'd,
For contemplation he and valor form'd
For softness she, and sweet attractive Grace,
He for God only, she for God in him."

John Milton, Paradise
Lost, 1667

(2) "I'm speaking to you, sister . . . I don't like all
these useless books of yours. Apart from the
big Plutarch that keeps my neckbands pressed,
you should burn them all. Get rid of this fierce-
looking telescope and all the rest of these
gadgets. . . . Stop trying to find out what's
happening on the moon and mind what's going on
in your own house where everything is upside
down. It's not decent, and there are plenty of
reasons why it isn't, for a woman to study and
know so much. Teaching her children good
principles, running her household, keeping an
eye on her servants, and managing her budget
thriftily are all the study and philosophy she
needs. Women today . . . want to write books
and become authors. . . . In my house, they
know all about the moon and the pole star and
about Venus, Saturn, and Mars, which are no
concern of mine and . . . nobody knows how
the pot is cooking. . . . Reasoning is the
pursuit of everyone in my household, and all
their reasoning has driven out reason."

From Molière's play, The
Learned Ladies, France,
1672

(3) "The prodigious increase in the riches of the
Netherlands may be the wonder of all future
generations. And yet the means whereby they
have thus advanced themselves are sufficiently
obvious. . . . [the writer lists several, then:]
The education of their children, as well
daughters as sons; all which, be they of never
so great quality or estate, they always take
care to bring up to write perfect good hands,
and to have the full knowledge and use of
Arithmetic and Merchants-Accounts; the well
understanding and practice whereof doth
strangely infuse into most that are the owners
of that quality, of either sex, not only an ability
for commerce of all kinds but a strong aptitude,
love and delight in it; and since the women are
as knowing therein as the men, it doth encourage
their husbands to hold on in their trades to their
dying days, knowing the capacity of their wives
to get in their estates, and carry on their trades
after their deaths."

Sir Josiah Child, A New
Discourse of Trade,
England, 1668

(4) "There is little point in girls of common ex-
traction learning to read as well as young ladies
or being taught as fine a pronunciation or knowing
what a period is, etc. It is the same with writing.
All they need is enough to keep their accounts
and memoranda; you don't need to teach them
fine handwriting or talk to them of style; a little
spelling will do. Arithmetic is different. They
need it. . . . Educate your middle-class girls
in the middle-class way. . . . Don't even con-
template embellishing their minds. Teach them
their domestic duties, obedience to their
husbands, and how to look after their children
and train their small staff, to go regularly to
church on Sundays and holidays, to be modest
with customers, honest in business. . . . Tell
them that nothing is more displeasing to God
and men than stepping out of one's social sta-
tion—all are ordained by Providence, and God
resists our endeavors to be other than He
intended us to be. Teach them to be moderate
and that the peasant must not try to ape the
bourgeois nor the bourgeois the gentleman."

From Mme. de Maintenon,
mistress and later wife of
Louis XIV, to two women,
both former students at her
school in St. Cyr, in charge
of girls' secondary schools,
1713