

The Dinner Party Curriculum Project

Power and Empowered Women: Power and Suffrage



Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony

Before suffrage, life for women was very different from the life we know today. Women living before the Suffrage Movement had very little power. Here is a picture of what life would have been like if you were a girl before the success of United States American Woman Suffrage Movement.

During childhood, girls attended school for a shorter time than boys. Some girls were fortunate enough to attend school until they were in their early teenage years. It was considered more important for girls to learn how to run a household and take care of a husband. Women were not allowed to attend college, although a handful did. Many people believed that it was dangerous for women to be educated, especially in the company of men. Coeducation was not considered normal, and many girls attended school separately from boys if they were allowed to go to school at all.

When a girl grew up and married, she no longer had the same rights that she did when she was not married. Legally, married women were not allowed to keep their first names. For instance, if a woman's name was Anne Clark, and she married John Smith, her new name would legally be Mrs. John Smith. Also,

as a married woman, she was no longer allowed to own property. If her parents died and left her property or money, it immediately became the property of her husband. This also meant that if a woman had a job, her husband could take all of her earnings. Women had no right to their own hard-earned money.

Women also did not have legal rights to their own children. If a woman divorced, she had no legal rights to her children. This meant that many women remained in unhappy or abusive marriages so that they could remain with their children.

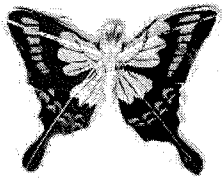
Finally, women did not even have the right to their own body. Legally, a woman was the property of her husband and by law had to do what he said. This was a particular problem in the case of physical abuse. Because a wife was the property of her husband, it was not against the law for men to violently beat their wives.

The American Woman Suffrage Movement sought to change all of this. Beginning with a few determined women and men, a women's rights movement was born. Suffragists first fought to reform marriage and property laws. That was only the beginning. They would later realize that the right to vote was the key to empowerment. Women understood that if they had the power to vote, they would have the power to challenge and change injustice towards women. The American Women's Suffrage Movement began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and grew to a national movement consisting of thousands and thousands of women. It lasted until 1920 with the ratification of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women the right to vote, giving them power.

Today, it is hard to imagine a time when girls could not learn in the same classroom as boys, or even go to college. It is hard to believe that women could not own their own property or keep their own wages. It seems ridiculous to think that it was perfectly legal to abuse women. When you think of how different your life is today, think of the women who made it all possible. Think of the suffragists who fought to empower future generations of American women.

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The Butterfly: Scientific Perspective



Order: *Lepidoptera*, meaning “scaly wings.” Butterflies and moths are the only insects covered with scales that are actually flattened hairs that overlap.

Butterflies evolved into existence 40 million years ago. Today there are 20,000 butterfly species worldwide with 700 species found in America, north of Mexico.

Butterflies generally fly in the daytime. They bask in the sun to warm their flight muscles. The morning sun aids in their birth and the average lifespan of an adult butterfly is around two weeks. Some colder-climate species may take up to two years to reach adulthood.

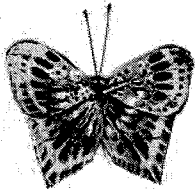
When courting, butterflies touch or flutter in unique ways. Males spend their lives searching for females and mating can last from 10 minutes to hours, sometimes occurring in tandem flight. Butterflies are able to distinguish the sex and/or species of other

butterflies and find nectar in special flowers by seeing “hidden” ultraviolet colors. They smell with antennae that are knobbed at the ends. Females taste plants with their feet to determine if it is the right place to lay eggs.

Metamorphosis is the process of changing from eggs to caterpillars (larvae) to chrysalises (pupae) to winged adults. Caterpillars survive by eating host plants while butterflies seek nectar plants. Host plants include citrus, broadleaf trees, cherries, poplars, birches, and willows. Nectar plants include lilac, honeysuckle, goldenrod, clover, azalea, jewelweed, milkweed, petunia, fruit tree blossoms and thistle.

When storms approach, butterflies seek shelter under blades of grass, leaves, woody surfaces and rocks. Hibernation boxes lined with tree bark and mounted in the shade can help protect adult butterflies in the winter.

The Butterfly: Cultural-Historical Perspective



In the Native American spiritual practice of Earth Medicine, the butterfly was possibly chosen as the totem for elemental Air not just for its constant activity of being in motion, traveling from one place to another, but also because of its “great transforming powers” (Meadows, 1996, p. 81). According to the teachings of the Medicine Wheel, those born between January 20 to February 18, May 21 to June 20, and September 22 to October 22 belong to the Butterfly Clan. They are described as “always active—physically, mentally, or emotionally—with fresh ideas and unexpected ways of doing things. They are manipulative and like to transform things.”

“Butterfly Clan people have an affinity with air, so they will be invigorated and stimulated by being out in big open spaces and away from any kind of confinement whenever possible” (p. 81).

Butterfly lore links the butterfly to the human soul. The Aztecs believed that deceased family members would visit them in the form of butterflies to assure that all is well.

Egyptians believed that butterflies reflected the immortality of the soul and awaited them in the afterlife.

The Irish and other cultural groups view butterflies as the souls of the dead waiting for passage through purgatory.

Many cultural groups associate butterflies with souls. When Chinese newlyweds are given a jade butterfly as a gift, it symbolizes the coming together of their two souls.

People in medieval times considered the butterfly a symbol for the arrival of spring.

Butterflies in ancient Mexico were associated with the earth and its many gifts.

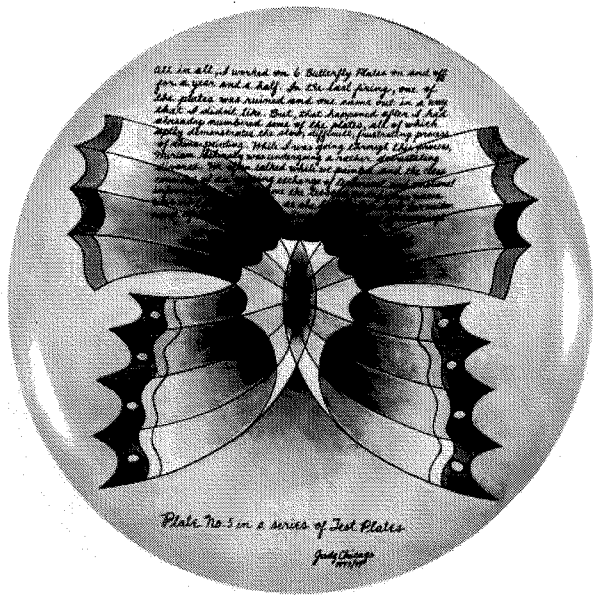
Several Asian cultures view butterflies as symbols of happiness and joy.

The Japanese consider the butterfly a symbol of womanhood.

By representing the women at the table and sharing their stories, Chicago freed women from imposed silence and invisibility.

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The Butterfly: Judy Chicago's Perspective



An ancient symbol for liberation, Judy Chicago selected the butterfly as a visual base for many of the transmuting forms on *The Dinner Party* plates. As a metaphor, a butterfly represents an active form, chosen by the artist to challenge the notion of female passivity. As butterflies, the women attempt to lift themselves up from their socially confined roles.

Butterfly is "a metaphor for an assertive female identity"

(Chicago, 1996, p. 6)

Judy Chicago on May 13, 1973: *I want the butterfly forms to allow me to express a variety of emotional stances and to be free, liberated forms. They are slowly taking shape in my head, and it looks like they'll occupy me for some time to come—perhaps the next five years.*

(Chicago, 1996, p. 21)

Judy Chicago on June 2, 1974: *I want to make butterfly images that are hard, strong, soft, passive, opaque, transparent—all different stages—and I want them all to have vaginas so they'll be female butterflies and at the same time be shells, flowers, flesh, forest—all kinds of things simultaneously.*

(Chicago, 1979, p. 22)

I developed an iconography using the butterfly to symbolize liberation and the yearning to be free. The butterfly form undergoes various stages of metamorphosis as the piece unfolds. Sometimes she is pinned down; sometimes she is trying to move from a larva to an adult state; sometimes she is nearly unrecognizable as a butterfly; and sometimes she is almost transformed into an unconstrained being.

(Chicago, 1979, p. 52)

The butterfly forms undergo a metamorphosis as the painted and sculpted abstract portraits become increasingly dimensional, a metaphor for women's intensifying struggle for freedom.

(Chicago, 1996, p. 5)