

Wednesday, March 18th :

Directions: Read the following nonfiction passage and answer the questions below. You may submit this assignment handwritten upon return OR submit your answers electronically via Schoology (Online Learning Folder)

The Solitude of Self

By Elizabeth Cady Stanton 1892

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) was a leading figure in the early women's rights movement, a social activist, and an abolitionist. Stanton first delivered her speech "The Solitude of Self" at the 1982 convention of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association. As you read, take notes on what it means to Stanton for women to have equal rights.

[1] The strongest reason for giving woman all the opportunities for higher education, for the full development of her faculties, her forces of mind and body; for giving her the most enlarged freedom of thought and action; a complete emancipation from all forms of bondage, of custom, dependence, superstition; from all the crippling influences of fear — is the solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life. The strongest reason why we ask for woman a voice in the government under which she lives; in the religion she is asked to believe; equality in social life, where she is the chief factor; a place in the trades and professions, where she may earn her bread, is because of her birthright to self-sovereignty; because, as an individual, she must rely on herself. No matter how much women prefer to lean, to be protected and supported, nor how much men desire to have them do so, they must make the voyage of life alone, and for safety in an emergency, they must know something of the laws of navigation. To guide our own craft, we must be captain, pilot, engineer; with chart and compass to stand at the wheel; to watch the winds and waves, and know when to take in the sail, and to read the signs in the firmament¹ over all. It matters not whether the solitary voyager is man or woman.

Nature, having endowed them equally, leaves them to their own skill and judgment in the hour of danger, and, if not equal to the occasion, alike they perish.

To appreciate the importance of fitting every human soul for independent action, think for a moment of the immeasurable solitude of self. We come into the world alone, unlike all who have gone before us, we leave it alone, under circumstances peculiar to ourselves. No mortal ever has been, no mortal ever will be like the soul just launched on the sea of life. There can never again be just such a combination of prenatal² influences; never again just such environments as make up the infancy, youth and manhood of this one. Nature never repeats herself, and the possibilities of one human soul will never be found in another. No one has ever found two blades of ribbon grass alike, and no one will ever find two human beings alike. Seeing, then, what must be the infinite diversity in human character, we can in a measure appreciate the loss to a nation when any class of the people is uneducated and unrepresented in the government. We ask for the complete development of every individual, first, for his own benefit and happiness. In fitting out an army, we give each soldier his own knapsack, arms, powder, his blanket, cup, knife, fork and spoon. We provide alike for all their individual necessities; then each man bears his own burden.

Again, we ask complete individual development for the general good; for the consensus of the competent on the whole round of human interests, on all questions of national life.

"The Solitude of Self" by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1892) is in the public domain.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: How does the author use the term “solitude” in the passage from her speech “The Solitude of Self”?
 - a. She uses the term to emphasize each person’s desire to be left alone.
 - b. She uses the term to highlight each person’s uniqueness.
 - c. She uses the term to highlight the isolation some women feel.
 - d. She uses the term to emphasize a separation between the needs of self and of society.
2. PART B: Which statement offers the strongest support for the answer in Part A?
 - a. “a complete emancipation from all forms of bondage, of custom, dependence, superstition” (Paragraph 1)
 - b. “they must make the voyage of life alone” (Paragraph 1)
 - c. “the possibilities of one human soul will never be found in another” (Paragraph 3)
 - d. “each man bears his own burden” (Paragraph 3)
3. PART A: In paragraph 1, the author said “in the government under which she lives; in the religion she is asked to believe; equality in social life, where she is the chief factor; a place in the trades and professions, where she may earn her bread.” Why does the author use this list-like structure?
 - a. to emphasize a large scope
 - b. to highlight a particular issue
 - c. to provide specific detail
 - d. to contradict an earlier impression
4. PART B: Select one other quote in paragraph 1 that serves a similar function to the excerpt in Part A.
 - a. “for giving her the most enlarged freedom of thought and action, a complete emancipation from all forms of bondage, of custom, dependence, superstition; from all the crippling influences of fear”
 - b. “No matter how much women prefer to lean, to be protected and supported, nor how much men desire to have them do so, they must make the voyage of life alone”
 - c. “and for safety in an emergency they must know something of the laws of navigation”
 - d. “It matters not whether the solitary voyager is man or woman.”
5. PART A: In paragraph 1, what is the author’s purpose of acknowledging that women may “prefer to lean” and men may “desire to have them do so”?
 1. to counter claim that society has offered women more control and they have refused it
 2. to illustrate that most men are encouraging women to become more independent
 3. to prove that women and men have specific roles in society that cannot be changed
 4. to argue that despite some people’s conflicted feelings, society will benefit from women having more control of their own lives
6. PART B: What broader idea in the passage is the author developing through her discussion of women who “prefer to lean” and men who “desire to have them do so”?
 1. that the best society is one composed of strong individuals
 2. that fundamental biological differences between men and women cannot be ignored
 3. that societal attitudes about independence will not change
 4. that what people do in their personal lives is not relevant to the nation’s overall political life