

This Old Hat
Famous Women of American History
“Leading Ladies”
By Patty Carver
Musical Arrangements by Leo Carusone

STUDY GUIDE

About the Show...

This Old Hat, Famous Women of American History, "Leading Ladies" is a one woman, original musical where Dolley Madison (the "Hostess of America"), Nellie Bly (First undercover reporter), Elizabeth Blackwell (First American female doctor), and Belva Lockwood (First woman to run for President) are portrayed through dialogue and music. Belva Lockwood also talks and sings about Eleanor Roosevelt (First Lady of the World). Following are short biographies on each of these famous American Women.

Dolley Madison (1768-1849)

Dolley Madison was the wife of James Madison, the fourth President of the United States. She was born Dolley Payne in Guilford, North Carolina on May 20, 1768. She was born into the Quaker religion. Her family moved to Virginia when she was an infant, and she spent the first 15 years of her life there. In 1783 her family moved to Philadelphia where, in 1790, she married Quaker lawyer, John Todd, Jr. They had two children: one died in 1793 during the same yellow fever epidemic that took her husband's life. Her other son's name was John Payne Todd.

Dolley married Congressman James Madison, 17 years her senior on Sept. 15, 1794. The marriage, though childless, was apparently a very happy one. Mrs. Madison first served as unofficial first Lady for President Thomas Jefferson who was a widower. During her husband's presidency, (1809-1817) she became the unquestioned center of Washington society. She was best known for her Wednesday evening receptions, where politicians, diplomats, and the general public gathered. These gatherings helped to soothe some of the tensions between the Federalists and Republicans in a time of intense party rivalries. Her correspondence indicates, moreover, that not only was she an effective counterbalance to her husband's rather colorless public personality, but her influence on Madison's political decisions was not insignificant.

The Madison's retired to Virginia in 1817 and continued to entertain lavishly and support the profligate habits of Dolley's son, Payne. After her husband's death in 1836, Mrs. Madison returned to Washington, where her house again became a center of social life. She made her last public appearance at a ball for President Polk in 1848. She died in Washington on July 12, 1849.

Nellie Bly (1864-1922)

Nellie Bly was born Elizabeth Jane Cochrane. In the 1880s and 1890s, as a reporter for Joseph Pulitzer's New York World, she became a pioneer in journalism and investigative reporting. Before the muckrakers of the early 20th century publicized corruption and before the investigative reporters of today sought out the story behind the story, Bly paved the way to valuable journalism as one of the first to go "behind the scenes" to expose society's ills. At some personal danger, she had herself committed to a mental institution for ten days so she could study first hand how the mentally ill were being treated. As a result of her expose, the care of the mentally ill was reformed. As the New York Journal recognized, Bly was considered the "best reporter in America."

Bly "retired" from journalism after her marriage to Robert Seaman in 1895, but embarked on a new career after his death 10 years later. Taking over his failing industries, she introduced the steel barrel to the distilling process in America and made his companies a huge success. For almost ten years she managed two multi-million dollar companies. More importantly, she recognized the value of treating her workers well. She ran her plants as social experiments, initiating physical fitness by providing gymnasiums, bowling alleys and health care, and mental fitness by providing staffed libraries to teach employees how to read and pass examinations for diplomas so they could enjoy intellectual pursuits and improve their lives. Then, after retiring as a businesswoman, she was trapped in Europe while vacationing there as World War I broke out. She used her skills as a reporter to cover the war from the eastern front.

As a researcher, reporter, industrialist and reformer, Bly was a model of progress and achievement for women in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries.

Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910)

Elizabeth Blackwell, born in Britain, was the first woman awarded the M.D. degree. Many nineteenth-century physicians, including a few women, practiced without a degree, but Elizabeth Blackwell wished to attain full professional status. She was rejected by all the major medical schools in the nation because of her sex. Her application to Geneva Medical School (now Hobart & William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York) was referred to the student body. They accepted with great hilarity in the belief that it was a spoof perpetrated by a rival school.

Working with quiet determination, she turned aside the hostility of the professors, students and townspeople. She earned her medical degree in 1849. Blackwell completed her medical education in Europe, but faced additional difficulties in setting up her practice when she returned to New York. Barred from city hospitals, she founded her own infirmary. Eventually, she founded a Women's Medical College to train other women physicians.

Blackwell's educational standards were higher than the all-male medical schools. Her courses emphasized the importance of proper sanitation and hygiene to prevent diseases. She later returned to Britain and spent the rest of her life there, working to expand medical opportunities for women as she had in America.

Belva Lockwood (1830-1917)

Belva A. Lockwood is one of America's most remarkable women, achieving marked success in the field of law. In this profession, Belva was a pioneer in American law and her career is the story of struggle and well-earned victories.

Belva Lockwood was born Belva A. Burnett in the town of Royalton, Niagara County, New York in 1830. When she was only fourteen she began teaching school. Though she earned only half the salary of a male teacher, she used her earnings to attend a local academy. Soon she married Mr. McNall, a local farmer. Together they had one daughter, but soon after the birth, Mr. McNall died, leaving Belva to support her family.

Belva returned to teaching but was also determined to continue her education. She entered Syracuse University (then called Genesee University) and graduated with honors in 1857. Upon graduation, she received an offer to become the principal of Lockport Union School. She accepted and remained employed there for four years. Afterwards, she taught at Gainesville Seminary, and later founded the McNall Seminary at Oswego, N.Y.

In 1868 Belva moved to Washington, D.C. and opened a school there. It was there that she met Rev. Ezekiel Lockwood and soon married him. It was around this time that Belva began studying law and sought admission to the law school of Columbia College. She was refused because of her sex, the faculty feeling that her presence at the school would distract the male students.

The following year she was admitted to the National University Law School, from which she graduated. While this was an accomplishment, Belva was unable to receive her diploma until she appealed to the school's president, US President Ulysses S. Grant. Finally, she received the degree of B.L. from that school and opened a law practice in Washington. Her clients consisted mainly of women, Native Americans and the poor. When one of Belva's cases reached the Supreme Court, she was not legally able to argue the case before it. While Belva was admitted to the Bar of the District of Columbia, she was refused admission to practice before the Supreme Court. She spent the next five years lobbying for a bill to pass through congress that would allow a woman to practice before the Supreme Court. In 1879, Belva Lockwood had the honor of becoming the first woman admitted to the Bar of the U.S. Supreme Court.

While Belva Lockwood is best known for her work in opening up the legal profession to women, she was also a staunch supporter of women's rights, working unceasingly to secure the vote for women. She ran for president in 1884 on behalf of the Equal Rights Party. She was also a strong advocate of world peace and worked toward developing the rules for international arbitration. She died a hero among women in 1917.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962)

Eleanor Roosevelt is one of America's great reforming leaders who had a sustained impact on national policy toward youth, blacks, women, the poor and the United Nations. The wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, she was one of the most active first ladies as well as important public personality in her own right.

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt was born in New York City on October 11, 1884. Her parents, Elliott and Anna Hall Roosevelt, were members of socially prominent families, and she was the niece of President Theodore Roosevelt. She had an intensely unhappy childhood. Her mother, widely known for her beauty, called Eleanor "granny," and her father, whom she adored, was banished from the family because of alcoholism. Her parents died when she was young, and she was raised strictly by her Grandmother Hall. Her childhood and adolescent experiences left her with a deep sense of insecurity and inadequacy and a craving for praise and affection.

She first attended private classes and at the age of 15 was sent to Allenswood, a finishing school near London. With the encouragement of the headmistress, Marie Souvestre, the shy girl emerged as a school leader. She returned to New York in 1902 to make her debut in society, but soon sought to escape its rituals through work with the cities poor at a settlement house. On March 17th, 1905, she married her distant cousin Franklin D. Roosevelt. She was given in marriage by President Theodore Roosevelt.

In the next 11 years Eleanor Roosevelt gave birth to six children. One died in infancy. In the bringing up of her children, she submitted to the domination of her formidable mother-in-law. After her husband's election to the New York State Senate in 1910, she performed the social role expected of the wife of a public official. As the wife of the assistant secretary of the navy during World War I, she pitched into war work with the Red Cross.

The end of the war coincided with a grave personal crisis, the discovery of her husband's love for another woman. Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt were reconciled, but when they returned to New York in 1921, she determined to build a life of her own. She became active in The League of Women Voters, the Women's Trade Union League, and the women's division of the Democratic Party. Her personal emancipation was completed after Roosevelt was stricken with polio in 1921. Eleanor Roosevelt was determined to keep alive her husband's interest in public affairs. Encouraged and tutored by Louis Howe, Roosevelt's close advisor, she became her husband's political stand-in. By 1928, when Roosevelt became governor of New York, she had become a public figure in her own right. In 1926, she helped found a furniture factory in Hyde Park to aid the unemployed. In 1927, she became part owner of the Todhunter School in New York City, serving as vice principal and teaching history and government.

When her husband became president in 1933, she feared the move to the White House would make her a prisoner in a gilded cage. But as First Lady, she broke many precedents. She initiated weekly press conferences with women reporters, lectured throughout the country, and had her own radio program. Her syndicated newspaper column, *My Day*, was published daily for many years. Traveling widely, she served as her husband's eyes and ears and became a major voice in his administration for measures to aid the underprivileged and racial minorities.

In 1941 she made one venture while her husband was president into holding public office herself, as coordinator of the Office of Civil Defense. But she resigned following criticism of some of her appointments. During World War II she visited troupes in England, the South Pacific, the Caribbean and on U.S. military bases.

When her husband died on April 12, 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt assumed that the "story was over." However, she went on to 17 more years of notable public service, perhaps the most satisfactory of her career. She was appointed a member of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations by President Harry Truman in December, 1945. As Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights she was instrumental in the drafting of the UN declaration of Human Rights. She resigned from the United Nations in 1952 but was reappointed by President John Kennedy in 1961. She remained active in the Democratic Party politics and was a strong supporter of Adlai Stevenson in the Presidential campaign of 1952 and 1956 and at the Democratic National convention in 1960. In her later years Eleanor Roosevelt presided over her large family at Val-Kill, her home at Hyde Park. She kept up a voluminous correspondence and a busy social life. "I suppose I should slow down," she said on her 77th birthday. She died the next year, on November 7, 1962, in New York City and was buried in the rose garden at Hyde Park next to her husband. Her many books include *This Is My Story* (1937), *This I Remember* (1949) and *On My Own* (1958)

Post Performance Activities...

Discussion Questions

1. What was Dolley Madison known as?
Hostess of America.
2. What religion was Dolley born into?
The Quaker Religion.
3. When Thomas Jefferson became the third President of the United States, what did he ask Dolley?
Because he was a widower and had no wife to serve in the traditional role, President Jefferson requested that Dolley be Hostess of the President's House.
4. What items did Dolley save from the President's House during the War of 1812?
President Madison's important writings, the Declaration of Independence and the Portrait of General Washington painted by Gilbert Stuart.
5. Name something that Dolley Madison was the first to do.
She was the first to serve ice cream in the President's House. She was the first, first lady to open the Presidents House for receptions to all people, regardless of their position. She was the first to formally decorate the President's House.
6. What was Nellie Bly the first to do?
She was the first person to be an undercover reporter.
7. What was the name of the insane asylum where Nellie Bly went undercover?
Blackwell's Island.
8. How long did Nellie Bly spend in the asylum?
Ten days.
9. What was the name of the New York Newspaper that gave the go ahead to Nellie Bly's insane undercover stunt?
The Globe.
10. What did Nellie Bly's undercover stunt in the madhouse accomplish?
The story that she wrote for the Globe after she was released caused dozens of investigations into the treatment of the mentally ill across the country. Blackwell's Island was given 3 million dollars for the sole purpose of reform. As a result of her expose, the treatment of the mentally ill was reformed.
11. What was Elizabeth Blackwell the first to do?
She was the first American woman to become a doctor.
12. What medical college did Elizabeth Blackwell attend?
Geneva Medical School in New York.
13. What was the name of the person that encouraged Elizabeth to apply to medical school?
Mrs. Mary Donaldson.
14. What was Belva Lockwood the first to do?
The long list of firsts for Belva Lockwood includes the first American woman to go to law school, the first to become a lawyer, the first to practice law in federal courts and the first to run for President.
15. When Belva Lockwood ran for President, what party did she represent?
The Equal Rights Party.

16. What was the name of the group of men that dressed in strange costumes and campaigned for Belva?
The Mother Hubbards.
17. How many votes did Belva Lockwood receive in that election of 1884?
4,149 legal votes.
18. What happened in 1920?
The Nineteenth Amendment was approved and women won the legal right to vote.
19. What was Eleanor Roosevelt the first to do?
The list is long. It includes that she was the first, first lady to have a public life and a career. She was the first to give press conferences, the first to drive her own automobile and the first to earn her own money through lecturing, broadcasting and writing.
20. When President Roosevelt took office in 1933, what difficult time was America in the midst of?
The Great depression.
21. Why was President Roosevelt confined to a wheelchair?
He was afflicted with Polio at an earlier age.
22. What did Eleanor Roosevelt do to help the President?
She traveled across the U.S.A. inspecting relief projects and talking to people about their problems and concerns. Then she brought her experiences back to the President. The President called Eleanor "his eyes and ears."

Ask the students...

What is your favorite historical American woman from the show? Why?

Name some contemporary American women that were the first to do something.

What can you do now to work toward making your dreams come true?

Activities...

Write the names of Famous American people on small strips of paper and put them in a hat. (You might want to do a separate one for the boys and girls!) Ask the students to each pick a name. The name they pick is the character they will portray. They should do some research and write a monologue (a la This Old Hat) no longer than a minute. They may seem overwhelmed with this assignment at first, but the trick is to simply put their research into the first person... and their character of American History will come to life! The students can use costumes, props and of course, hats! Then you can put on your very own history show!

After the show is completed, take the information that the students used in their monologues and have a history bee!