RIGHTS OF WOMAN:
WITH
STRICTURES
ON
POLITICAL AND MORAL SUBJECTS,

BY MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.
Did not write...

... her daughter Did.
Did write...

OTHER

STUFF

Which is vastly more important
Early Life

- Wollstonecraft was raised in an environment where physical abuse was commonplace.

- Her father, an imposing, violent patriarchal figure gradually forced the family into poverty.
Unhappy with her domestic situation, Wollstonecraft became a “Lady’s Companion”

- She provided amiable company, helped with sewing etc., and attended events.
- Her experiences in this profession later provide inspiration for her Thoughts on the Education of Daughters.
Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787)

- Consisted of guidelines for the raising of middle-class, female children.
- To teach young girls to be effective housewives and mothers.
  - It is through these positions that Wollstonecraft argues that Women are most capable of affecting society.
• Returned home to care for her dying mother.
• Became close friends with Fanny and, through friendship, realized the power of female Independence.

• Fanny’s death consequently inspired Mary to write her only complete novel: Mary: A Fiction.
MARY: A Fiction (1788)

- **Mary:** an industrious, self-taught heroine.
- **Wollstonecraft intends to critique male dominant societies and undermine the value of marriage.**
- **By using a rational, independent, female protagonist she helps set the stage for emerging feminist discourse.**
Original Stories from Real Life (1788)

- After Fanny’s death, Wollstonecraft took a position as a governess in Ireland where she worked for a year. Her experiences, here, with children inspired her to write Original Stories from Real Life:
  - advocated androgynous notions of virtue
  - served to alter middle-class perceptions of happiness
  - written in opposition to pedagogical texts by Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Locke
  - promoted reason and intellectualism in young females
  - dismissed wealth and status as middle-class signifiers of happiness
The second edition of *Original Stories* was illustrated by William Blake.
• Wollstonecraft moved to London and, with the help of Joseph Johnson, a radical publisher, began broadening her intellectual horizons.
A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790)

- Written in response to a political pamphlet by Edward Burke, Wollstonecraft’s text attacks Burke’s defence of a constitutional monarchy and, instead, proposes republicanism.

- Wollstonecraft, in this decidedly political document, also manages to provide the first feminist critique of language; she attacks Burke’s gendered descriptions of society and discredits his views on the passivity of women.
A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)

• Extends ideas on gender and education; focuses less heavily on political structure.

• Despite popular misconception was well received among her contemporaries.

• One of the earliest works of feminist philosophy and argues in favour of gender equality in education and society.

• Argues that women ought to have an education that corresponds with their position in society, claiming that women are essential to the nation because they are responsible for teaching values to its children.
• **Argues that women are not merely ornaments within society but, instead, that they are human beings deserving of the same fundamental rights as men.**
• **Henry Fuseli and Wollstonecraft formed a close, romantic relationship — despite his already having a wife.**

• **Wollstonecraft asks to move in with Fuseli and his wife; unsurprisingly, Fuseli’s wife thinks this is an outrageous idea and forces Henry to end his relationship with Wollstonecraft.**
• **Wollstonecraft moves to France in order to escape the humiliation of this incident and, also, to participate in the French Revolution.**

• **She meets Gilbert Imlay: an American;** the pair quickly fall in love and Wollstonecraft, who to this point had denounced the sexual aspect of relationships, soon became pregnant.

• **Her first child, Fanny, is born**
• As the political situation in France worsens, it becomes dangerous for English citizens.
• Imlay registers Wollstonecraft as his wife — though they are not actually married.
• Wollstonecraft leaves France and Imlay, upon seeing her domestic, maternal transformation, loses interest and cuts communications.
At this point, Wollstonecraft attempted to commit suicide, twice:

once with Laudanum

once by throwing herself into the Thames.

Both times she was rescued before succeeding.
• She soon settled back into a regular routine and eventually married the philosopher William Godwin
• They lived happily in a conjoined house which allowed them to maintain their independence.

• Wollstonecraft died in 1797, ten days after giving birth to her second daughter Mary
  – who would grow up to write Frankenstein!
MEMOIRS OF THE AUTHOR OF A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN (1798) - GODWIN

• ENDED UP HAVING A COUNTERINTUITIVE EFFECT BECAUSE IT REVEALED THE SCANDALOUS NATURE OF HER RELATIONSHIPS AS WELL AS HER TWO SUICIDE ATTEMPTS.

• FOR ALMOST A CENTURY AFTER THE MEMOIRS WERE PUBLISHED, MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT’S REPUTATION WAS DESTROYED, HER WORK, FOR THE MOST PART, DISCOUNTED.

• IN THE LATE 1800’S AND THROUGH THE 20TH CENTURY WOLLSTONECRAFT’S REPUTATION WAS STEADILY RETURNED BY WAVE AFTER WAVE OF FEMINIST THINKERS.