In the early 1800s, women were considered inferior to men. Women did not enjoy the rights they have today, such as the right to vote. It was difficult for them to get an education. But times were starting to change. Women began to go to college. They also began to organize to demand more equality. This play is about Lucy Stone, a pioneer of the women’s rights movement.
Before rise:‡ Two Women, wearing shabby farm clothing with aprons, enter, followed by Man, wearing somber clothes of the early 1800s.

1st Woman. We come from the shadows of time to remind you—men and women both—of how things used to be.

2nd Woman. If the world is a better place for women now, it is because of the courage and persistence of one young girl—Lucy Stone.

1st Woman. In the early nineteenth century, when Lucy was growing up, girls weren’t educated beyond the sixth grade.

2nd Woman. A husband had the legal right to beat his wife.

1st Woman. And women had no legal rights!

Man (vehemently). Education? Legal rights? For women? Never! Why, they are the inferior sex. A woman must be subservient to her husband in all things. ’Twas ever thus and shall always be so. Subject closed!

2nd Woman. Subject closed. Until Lucy Stone.

1st Woman. Lucy Stone, champion of women’s rights.

Man (shaking head). Lucy Stone. She’s nothing but an agitator! A disturber of the natural order! (They exit.)

Time: a summer evening, 1834.

Setting: the parlor of the Stone farmhouse, West Brookfield, Massachusetts. A settle stands in front of large fireplace, up center. Behind settle is a metal oil can. A table with oil lamp and three chairs stand left, before curtained window. An easy chair stands up right, beside which is a knitting basket. Against wall right is a small settle. Exit down right leads outside, exit down left leads to rest of house.

‡before rise: before the curtain rises.

2. settle: a long wooden bench with a high back.

3. at rise: as the curtain rises.
Lucy (laughing). Well, don’t, then. Go race with the other slowpokes—the boys. (Luther scowls and limps off left.)

60 Aunt Sally (shaking her head). Lucy, Lucy. What’s to become of you? Look at you, all tousled like a dog caught in the brambles.

Lucy (tossing her head). I like being tousled, Aunt Sally. It makes me feel alive—not like a wax dummy of a girl in a frilly dress.

Aunt Sally. I’ve been meaning to speak to you. You’re sixteen years old, no longer a child. Young men’ll be looking you over soon, for marriage.

Lucy (defiantly). Looking me over? You mean like a prize cow? (opens her mouth wide) Checking to see if my teeth are good, and if I’m strong enough to work the fields?

Aunt Sally (briskly). Don’t be pert4 with me, young lady. You’ve got to start thinking about marriage. It’s the only way for a woman.

Lucy (sharply). Well, it’s not the way for this woman. I’ve seen the mean way men treat their wives around here. They work them until they’re ready to drop, and then complain that they aren’t young and pretty anymore. Why, if a man did that to his hired hand, he’d be brought up on charges.

Aunt Sally (sighing). That’s the way of the world. You can’t change it.

Lucy. I can change it for me. (tossing her head) I just won’t marry.

Aunt Sally (firmly). Oh, yes, you will. You don’t want to end up an old maid, like me. A left-over person of no use to anyone. (Lucy runs to her.)

90 Lucy (hugging her). Aunt Sally, don’t say that! You’re not a left-over person. Why, I don’t know what we’d do without you. You have character!

Aunt Sally (bemused). Where do you get your notions, child? I declare there’s not another like you in the state of Massachusetts. All that fire and spunk is wasted on a girl. What a pity you weren’t a boy!

Lucy (defiantly). I like being a girl. I wouldn’t be a boy for all the tea in China.

100 Aunt Sally (sighing). Be that as it may— (She rises, crosses to window, and peers out.) The sun’s going down. You’d best fill the lamp. Your father wants everyone gathered here at sundown. He has something to tell us. (shivering) It’s a bit cold. I’ll get my shawl. (She exits left. Lucy takes metal oil can from behind settle, fills the lamp on table, and lights it. Bowman enters left, carrying a Bible. He approaches Lucy hesitantly.)

110 Bowman. Lucy?

Lucy (looking up). Yes, Bowman? (spying Bible) Ah—you want a little help with your Bible lesson again?

Bowman. I’d be obliged, Lucy. I’m to read the lesson this Sunday and I don’t want to make a fool of myself. You’re the only one in the family who can help me. Pa’s too busy, and Ma doesn’t know much.

Lucy (hotly). Ma knows a good deal, Bowman, even if it’s not from books. If you had to work from sunup to sundown and raise children to boot, you wouldn’t have much time for book learning either.

Bowman (taken aback). I suppose not. I never thought about it. (opens Bible and indicates place) I’ve tried to read these words, but I stumble on them.

Lucy (reading clearly). “Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son

4. pert: too bold in speech or action.
of Joseph; and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah.”

Bowman (admiringly). You read that every bit as well as Reverend Blagdon. You’d make a mighty fine preacher—if only you were a boy.

Lucy (angrily). I could do a thousand wonderful things, if only I were a boy. Why shouldn’t I go to school, learn a profession—even preach, if I want to? Answer me that, Bowman!

Bowman (backing away, alarmed). Don’t take it out on me, Lucy. I didn’t make the world the way it is.

(Hannah Stone enters left, carrying a handbell.)

Hannah. Oh, there you are, Bowman. Will you please go out to the barn and ring the bell to call the other children? Your father has something to tell everyone. And Bowman—tell them to hurry. You know how your father hates to be kept waiting. (She hands the bell to Bowman.)

Bowman. I’ll make them hustle, Ma. Don’t worry. (He exits right.)

Hannah (to Lucy). Thank you for lighting the lamp, Lucy dear. (offstage sound of bell ringing)

Lucy (thoughtfully). Mama—I’ve been thinking . . .

Hannah (sighing). Oh, Lucy. I wish you wouldn’t. . . . Every time you think, it means trouble.

Lucy (insistently). But that’s just it, Mama. I must think. My mind won’t let me stop. Here on the farm I feel as if I’m starving. (firmly) Mama—is it true that a woman must submit to her husband in all things? (pause, then dreamily) If I could only go to college, I could study Greek and Latin and decide for myself.

Hannah (aghast). Oh, Lucy! What a notion.

Lucy. But what if I approached him in a calm, logical manner? I would say, “Father, you must be aware that I am the equal of any of the boys in this family. Do you not conclude that I am worthy of an education?” (Hannah, shaking her head, puts her arm around Lucy’s shoulder.)

Hannah (gently). When you were first born, I looked at your sweet face, so like a flower, and I wept. Yes, I wept because you were a girl, and a woman’s life is so hard. Why must you make it even harder by defying the way things are?

Lucy. Because all around me I see bright women with fine minds reduced to a kind of slavery. (fiercely) It isn’t right, Mama! It just isn’t fair!

Hannah (reasoning with her). But my dear child, it isn’t your burden. It isn’t up to you to turn the world upside down.

Lucy (strongly). But somebody must. Why shouldn’t I be the one? (Bowman enters, followed by Eliza, Rhoda, Luther, and Sarah. They ad lib boisterously.)

Bowman. Here they are, Ma. (smiling) They were frisky as spring lambs, but I brought them into the fold. (The girls and Lucy sit on settle right; the boys sit on chairs at table left. Hannah sits on settle upstage. Aunt Sally enters, adjusting her shawl.)

Aunt Sally (anxiously). Am I late?

Hannah. Not at all, Sally.

Eliza. What do you reckon Papa wants to tell us?

Luther (sourly). He’s probably got a complaint about how we did the haying.

Rhoda (teasingly). Well, Luther, you did lean on your pitchfork more than usual.

Bowman. Seemed to me, Papa was almost happy when I saw him in the field. He nearly smiled at me.

5. ad lib boisterously: make up dialogue on the spot, in a loud manner.
Sarah (in mock surprise): Pa nearly smiled? Sakes alive. The world is coming to an end! (All laugh uproariously.)

Hannah: Hush, children. (looks off left) Here comes your father, now. (Laughter stops abruptly. Children rise, as Francis Stone, a stern patriarch, enters left, crosses to stand in front of the upstage settle. Girls curtsey, boys bow and are seated.)

Francis (clearing his throat): I’m a man of few words, and I’ll not make a book of the matter at hand. This concerns Bowman and Luther—and the rest of you as well.

Bowman and Luther (exchanging worried looks): Us?

Francis: It seems that Bowman and Luther have high ambitions. They want to go to college. (All buzz with excitement. Francis holds up his hand for silence.) I have taken the matter under consideration. (pauses) They may go, even though it means you girls will have to double up on the work. I expect we can do without the boys while they get their education.

Girls groan. Francis looks at them sharply.

Bowman (excitedly): Thank you, Papa, thank you.

Luther (happily): That is mighty good news, Papa. Will you pay for the books, too?

Francis: I reckon so. It’s worth the expense to have educated men in the family.

Aunt Sally (aside): Humph. Educated “men,” is it?

Lucy (rising): Papa! (Hannah tries to hush her.)

Francis (impatiently): Not now, Lucy. Whatever it is can wait. It’s time for you to do the evening chores, now.

Lucy (persistently): But, Papa—(Francis waves her aside.)

Hannah (nervously): Come along, children. There are things for us to do. Lucy, dear. Do come with me. (Lucy shakes her head. All exit left, except Lucy, who faces her father with determination.)

Francis ( sternly): Well, Lucy? What is it?
Lucy. Papa, I will do the evening chores.
But the matter I wish to discuss cannot wait.

Francis (annoyed). I declare, girl, you are like
a burr under my hide. Very well, speak up.

Lucy (taking a deep breath). Papa, you hate
waste, don’t you?

Francis (piously). Waste not, want not.
That is what I always say.

Lucy. Well, if there were someone in this
family brighter by far than Bowman and
Luther, wouldn’t it be a waste for that person
not to go to college?

Francis (briskly). Yes, but there is no such person.
What is your point?

Lucy (firmly). But there is such a person . . . Me!

Francis (astonished). You?

Lucy. If you’d paid attention, Papa, you’d know
that I learn faster, read better, and think more
clearly than the boys. (pleading) Oh, Papa. I
want to go to college so much. There’s a col-
lege in Ohio, called Oberlin, that will admit
women. Please, Papa, please let me go there!

Francis (furiously). Are you daft? You want me
to squander my money on a girl? Why, the
minute you get yourself a husband—if ever a
flibbertigibbet like you could get one—you’ll
turn your back on your so-called education and
where will I be? Shortchanged by a mere female.

Lucy (firmly). No, Papa. I would never do such
a thing.

Francis (angrily). I will not spend a penny
to educate a girl. It’s unnatural. I’d be a
laughingstock. Go now—do your chores.
(He starts to exit down left.)

Lucy (crossing to table, aside). I’ll teach every
minute the sun shines. I’ll rise at five and
gather nuts and berries to sell for my books.
I’ll work till midnight sewing and mending.
I’ll work and study until my eyes grow dim.
(drawn lamp close) I’ll snuff this flame,

Lucy. Papa—I have a proposition for you.

Francis (turning back). Have you, now?
And what sort of proposition could you
possibly have?

Lucy. Don’t the banks lend money upon a note
for security? If I were to give you a note stating
that I would pay you back every penny for my
education, would you lend me the money?

Francis (in disbelief). Lend you money? And
how, pray tell, would you ever pay me back?

Lucy. I could teach the lower grades.

Francis (scornfully). At a dollar a week,
it would take you years to repay me.

Lucy (defiantly). If it takes me till I’m ninety—
so be it. I will repay you every cent.

Francis (impatiently). You are the most
pestiferous girl ever born. You never let a man
be. It would be worth my while to give you
a loan just to get you from this house. (thinks
for a moment.) Very well. You’ll get your tuition
and not a penny more. Nothing for books, nor
for food, nor for any of your female fripperies.9
I’ll draw up the note in the morning.

Lucy (with deliberate irony). Thank you, Papa.

Francis. Go do your chores. And blow out
the lamp. I’ll not have oil wasted in this house.
(He stalks off left.)

Lucy (crossing to table, aside). I’ll teach every
minute the sun shines. I’ll rise at five and
gather nuts and berries to sell for my books.
I’ll work till midnight sewing and mending.
I’ll work and study until my eyes grow dim.
(270)

---

6. daft: crazy.
7. flibbertigibbet (flib’ert-i-bit): a silly, scatterbrained person.
8. pestiferous (pê-stî-f’ar-as): troublesome.
Papa. But inside my mind there is a flame glowing more radiant by the hour. And that flame, Papa, I promise you, will never go out! (She blows out lamp, and as stage darkens, spotlight shines on Lucy, who faces audience with a triumphant smile. Two Women enter.)

1st Woman. Lucy Stone kept her promise and more. She graduated from Oberlin College and was the first woman in the state of Massachusetts to earn a college degree.

2nd Woman. She sounded a trumpet call for the women’s rights movement, lecturing to all who would hear her.

1st Woman. She founded her own paper, the Woman’s Journal, in Boston, and called for the First National Woman’s Rights Convention in 1850. (Henry Brown Blackwell enters, bows.)

Henry. And she was the first married woman to keep her own name. Oh, yes. Despite Aunt Sally’s fears, Lucy was married. For there were men in those days who appreciated such a rare and beautiful spirit, men who wanted their wives to be equal partners in every way. I know, because I am the man who married Lucy Stone—Henry Brown Blackwell. (He crosses to Lucy and takes her arm. Two Women cross to stand beside Lucy and Henry. Other female cast members enter and join them.)

1st Woman. And now, because of Lucy Stone and others inspired by her example, the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America, passed by Congress in 1919, declares . . .

All (together). “The rights of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”

2nd Woman. And the words of Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence now include the other half of the human race.

All (together). “We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .

Henry. That all men—

All Women. And women—

All. Are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights;10 that among these are life, liberty—

Lucy (proudly). And the pursuit of happiness!”

(curtain)

Lucy Stone, about 1875

---

10. endowed . . . rights: given, by God, certain rights that cannot be taken away.