

JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE:

The Marietta Holley Story



TEACHER GUIDE

WHO WAS MARIETTA HOLLEY?

Marietta Holley was born near Adams, New York, in 1836. From early in her youth she wrote poetry, but it was her novels that brought her recognition. In 1870, having published only a few poems, she sent a sample of work to Mark Twain's publisher, Elijah Bliss. He liked her writing and encouraged her to write in dialect. In 1873 *My Opinions And Betsey*



Bobbet's was published under the pseudonym Josiah Allen's Wife. It was immediately a hit with the public. The principal characters, Samantha Smith Allen and Betsey Bobbet, represent opposite ends of the suffrage debate. During her lifetime, Holley wrote sixteen "Samantha" novels as well as numerous plays and poems. Subsequent books are built around trips made to cities and the people encountered there. In addition to her role as an author, Holley was part of a community that included women writers and activists such as Clara Barton, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She lived her entire life in upstate New York and died there in 1926 at the age of eighty-nine. Holley was known in her time as the female Mark Twain. But in recent years her role in the women's rights movement and in literary history has been obscured.

Dear Teacher,

You have probably laughed at Mark Twain's humorous writing and know a few snippets about his public life. You may not have known that there was a "female Mark Twain," Marietta Holley, who also used dialect humor to challenge the social conventions and political barriers that plagued America in the late 19th century.

I grew up near Holley's home in upstate New York hearing the same inflections and arguments that she recorded so comically in her "Samantha books." The proud, independent New Yorkers of that farm country still wrestle with issues of race and human rights, ethics in democracy, the importance of the vote, and the place of women in the country's work.

Learning about Holley's life can help us examine our own values. Holley and her characters speak out in their unique dialect, inviting you and your students to engage in conversation about our past and how every citizen can be important, and can even help bring about dramatic social change.

*Happy teaching!
Professor Kate H. Winter*

THE DOCUMENTARY

JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE: THE MARIETTA HOLLEY STORY is intended to re-ignite awareness of Marietta Holley's importance in the history of the United States and of Jefferson County, New York, in particular, and to re-introduce her literary style and the flavor of her work to contemporary audiences. The video was produced by St. Lawrence Valley Educational Television Council, Inc., WPBS-TV in Watertown, New York.

DVD CONTENTS

The DVD includes:

- The complete broadcast version of **JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE: THE MARIETTA HOLLEY STORY**
- Marietta Holley's play, *Josiah's Secret*, starring two students from South Jefferson High School
- A music video featuring local talent
- A bibliography of Holley's writings

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide has been developed to help teachers use *JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE* in the classroom. It is intended to be used with students in middle school and high school history and English/language arts classes.

HOW TO USE THE DVD

Video is most effective when used interactively, rather than passively, in class or group discussion. Consider using some of the following strategies when planning lessons or discussions based on *JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE: THE MARIETTA HOLLEY STORY*:

1. **Preview the program or other DVD sections** to determine suitability for your objectives and your group members.
2. **Select DVD segments** that are directly relevant to your topic and appropriate for your group – you need not use the entire program at one time. A few well-chosen minutes may be more effective in illuminating your topic.
3. **Provide a focus for interaction** – something specific to do or look or listen for in relation to the chosen segment or presentation. This assures that the group will focus together on the information most relevant to your topic.
4. Don't be afraid to **pause the DVD or to replay the segment** to underscore or clarify a particular point. This allows video to play a more interactive role in discussion.

When you've decided on the program or segments you'd like to cover with your class, **photocopy the corresponding section of this guide to distribute to your class.** You might also want to hand out the bibliography on the back cover.

WEB SITE AND ORDERING INFORMATION

Visit an interactive Web site with additional learning extensions at www.wpbstv.org under "A Year of Women." For additional copies of the DVD, call 1-800-869-2665.



STANDARDS

New York State History Standards

[available online at www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/socstands/socstand.html]

Standard 1: History of the United States and New York

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

Key Idea 2: The study of New York State and United States history requires an analysis of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context, and the ways people are unified by many values, practices, and traditions.

Key Idea 3: Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural, and religious developments in New York State and United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.

New York State English Language Arts Standards

(available online at www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elastandards/elamap.html)

Standard 1: Students will discover concepts and use knowledge generated from texts.

Standard 2: Students will read and listen to texts and performances, relate them to their own lives, and develop an understanding of their social, historical, and cultural dimensions.

Standard 3: Students will present their opinions and judgments in oral and written language and from a variety of perspectives.

Standard 4: As readers and listeners, students will use the social communications of others to enrich their understanding of people and their views.

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SOCIAL STUDIES LESSON

OBJECTIVES

To discuss how women's roles in U.S. society and politics have changed during the last two centuries.

To analyze the variety of strategies used by the women's suffrage movement in the 19th and 20th centuries.

To discuss whether or not Marietta Holley's use of humor in her novels helped shape public opinion about the temperance and suffrage movements.

To infer why Marietta Holley's "Samantha novels" were very popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but are largely forgotten today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What personal qualities contributed to Marietta Holley's ability to carefully observe the actions and language of those around her?
2. Do you think that humor is an effective tool for social activism? Why or why not?
3. If Marietta Holley were alive today, what women's issues might she be satirizing in her novels?
4. Why did other women activists see Marietta Holley as an important ally?
5. Why did the women's suffrage movement gather momentum in the mid-and late-19th century?
6. What were the differences between the way men and women were valued and educated during Holley's time? Do some of the same differences exist today?

OVERVIEW

While most people today have never heard of Marietta Holley, about a century ago, she was a popular author of humorous novels and poetry. In fact, between 1873 and 1914, she wrote more books and made more money than Mark Twain. It's surprising that an author who sold about 10 million books disappeared into oblivion. Dr. Kate Winter, one of the leading authorities on Marietta Holley, and author of her biography entitled *Marietta Holley: Life with Josiah Allen's Wife* (Syracuse University Press, 1984) notes that Holley's character Samantha used humor for a new purpose: "propaganda for the feminist movement, which had previously been the butt of much comedy." This documentary presents highlights from Holley's personal and professional life, growing up in Adams, New York. The DVD includes commentary from Dr. Winter, and as a special feature, it features high school students acting out a play that Marietta Holley wrote in 1912 entitled "Josiah's Secret."

Before viewing the video, ask students if they know what year women throughout the U.S. earned the legal right to vote. Write all guesses on the board, and take a vote. Once you have a "class guess" reveal that the answer is 1920. That year, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gave all women the right to vote. This victory was the final step in a struggle that began about 70 years before called the suffrage movement.

As students watch the DVD, have them look for examples of Marietta Holley's political humor. In what ways has satire changed since the Samantha books were popular?

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Working in pairs, students will explore the social and historical events and culture that inspired Marietta Holley's writing. Students start by reading aloud and analyzing an excerpt from one of Marietta Holley's comic novels [NOTE: The text comes from p. 20 of *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet's*, can be viewed at www.canadiana.org/ECO/PageView/08398/0022?id=fe0e0f62d497a80e].

Students work together to write a response to this key question: Do you think that humor is an effective tool for social activism? Why or why not? Students may then use online resources (many listed on the back page of this guide) to identify five milestones in the suffrage movement between when the first women's rights convention in the United States is held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 to when the 19th Amendment is passed in 1920. Students then create a paper or annotated mural of the milestones they selected.

STUDENT ACTIVITY PAGE

EXPLORING MARIETTA HOLLEY'S WORLD

Marietta Holley's first book, *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet's*, was published under the pseudonym Josiah Allen's Wife in 1873. This novel satirized the role of women in the 19th century, as you can tell from its whimsical subtitle—*Designed as a Beacon Light, To guide Women to Life Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, But which May Be read by Members of the Sterner Sect, Without Injury to Themselves or This Book.*

The following activities will help you understand what it was like to be a man or woman in the 1800s.

1) READ AND ANALYZE THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT

Find a partner in your class. Read the following passage. If you wish, assign roles, so that one of you is the husband, Josiah, and one is the wife, Samantha. Use a dictionary or the Internet when you come across any unfamiliar vocabulary, such as “hop pole.” Keep in mind that Marietta Holley sometimes wrote in dialect to make her characters more realistic.

“Josiah Allen, you haint heard a word I’ve said, you know you haint.”

“Yes I have,” says he, shettin’ up the almanac; I heard you say wimmin ought to vote, and I say she hain’t. I shall always say that she is too fragile, too delicate, it would be too hard for her to go to the pole.”

“There is one pole you are willin’ enough I should go to, Josiah Allen,” and I stopped allegorin’, and spoke with witherin’ dignity and self respect – “and that is to the hop pole.” (Josiah has sot out a new hop yard, and he proudly brags to the neighbours that I am the fastest picker in the yard.) “You are willin’ enough I should handle them poles!”

He looked smit and conscience struck, but still true to the inherent principles of his sect, and their [sic] doggy obstinacy, and he murmured—

“If wimmin know when they are well off, they will let poles and ‘lection boxes alone. It is too wearin’ for the fair sect.”

“Josiah Allen,” says I, “you think that for a woman to stand up straight on her feet, under a blazin’ sun, and lift both her arms above her head, and pick seven bushels of hops, mingled with worms and spiders, into a gigantic box, day in and day out, is awful healthy – so strenthin’ and stimulin’ to wimmin, but when it comes to droppin’ a little slip of clean paper into a small seven by nine box once a year in a shady room, you are afraid it is goin’ to break down a woman’s constitution to once.”

2) DEBATE A QUESTION

Discuss the excerpt. How does Samantha use humor to point out the unfairness of how women are treated? What does the excerpt tell you about the time period it was written in? Working with your partner write a brief (about 100 words) response to the question: Do you think that humor can be an effective tool in changing people’s opinions about social issues? Think of a social issue that you feel strongly about, then write a short story in which you take both sides of the issue to the extreme for the sake of humor.

3) A LONG JOURNEY

Use online resources to identify five milestones in the suffrage movement between when the first women’s rights convention in the United States is held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 to when the 19th Amendment is passed in 1920. Then create a research paper, annotated mural, or mock TV News presentation of the milestones you’ve selected.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In the video, expert Kate Winter says: “She [Marietta Holley] made people laugh at her characters and laugh at the absurdities of the things that people in America in that period were clinging to. What were some of the “absurd ideas” that Americans were “clinging to” in the 1800s and early 1900s?”

What similarities do you see between the temperance movement and the suffrage movement, both of which Marietta Holley wrote humorously about in her novels?



JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE: *The Marietta Holley Story*

LANGUAGE ARTS LESSON

OBJECTIVES:

- To discuss the life and work of Marietta Holley
- To discuss social, political and literary roles assumed by women in 19th Century America
- To understand popular literary conventions of the 19th Century
- To analyze shifting ideas of aesthetic merit in the evolution of American literature

QUESTIONS

1. Marietta Holley is known as the female Mark Twain. While Mark Twain is still well-known, Holley's work has slipped into obscurity. Why do you think this happened? How does her career compare with Twain's and other 19th century writers, such as Emily Dickenson?
2. Why might Holley have found novels a more effective vehicle for political messages than essays or manifestoes?
3. What role can dialect have in raising an audience's interest in a story? What are some contemporary examples of dialect writing?
4. Compare Holley's two protagonists, and explain why, for a period of time, Betsey Bobbet proved a more popular character than Samantha.

OVERVIEW

JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE: THE MARIETTA HOLLEY STORY traces the life and work of Marietta Holley and places her writing and ideas in the context of the politics and literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The program brings into focus the domestic roles of American women in that era, the prevailing views of their intellectual capacities, and 19th century literary conventions of satire and dialect humor.



The DVD allows students to examine how literary history is written and re-written, considering why certain authors remain relevant while others fade from the canon. Before viewing JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE (or excerpts), encourage your students to discuss dialect humor and to question the role of gender in relation to literary history.

Before viewing the DVD, tell your students that dialect humor relies on the audience's recognition of regional customs and expressions, and then modifies those customs and expressions by exaggerating or (as in Marietta Holley's travel narratives) re-contextualizing them in incongruous circumstances. The skill in working with this type of humor is to achieve a balance between parody (which may become too mocking and risk losing the audience's sympathy) and empathy. Encourage students to draw parallels between Holley's writing and contemporary instances of dialect humor, from television, cinema or literature. You may also discuss discrimination in all its forms, comparing Holley's involvement with the suffrage movement with more recent writers' participation in the civil rights movement.

After watching the DVD, students may debate whether Holley succeeds in achieving balance between parody and empathy and how well she makes her political arguments. When working with the writing sample on the facing page, it will be helpful for students to read the text aloud to have a better understanding of the conversational nature of dialect writing.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE ARTS

Read and discuss the following excerpt from *Samantha on the Woman Question* by Josiah Allen’s Wife (Marietta Holley). After that, work on the activity below.

And finally Serepta married Lank Burpee, and did considerable well it wuz spozed. Her property, put with what little he had, made ‘em a comfortable home and they had two pretty children, a boy and a girl. But when the little girl wuz a baby he took to drinkin’, neglected his bizness, got mixed up with a whiskey ring, whipped Serepta—not so very hard. He went accordin’ to law, and the law of the United States don’t approve of a man’s whippin’ his wife enough to endanger her life, it sez it don’t. He made every move of hisen lawful and felt that Serepta hadn’t ort to complain and feel hurt. But a good whippin’ will make anybody feel hurt, law or no law. And then he parted with her and got her property and her two little children. Why, it seemed as if everything under the sun and moon, that could happen to a woman, had happened to Serepta, painful things and gauldin’.

Jest before Lank parted with her, she fell on a broken sidewalk: some think he tripped her up, but it never wuz proved. But anyway Serepta fell and broke her hip bone; and her husband sued the corporation and got ten thousand dollars for it. Of course the law give the money to him and she never got a cent of it. But she wouldn’t have made any fuss over that, knowin’ that the law of the United States wuz such. But what made it so awful mortifyin’ to her wuz, that while she wuz layin’ there achin’ in splints, he took that very money and used it to court up another woman with. Gin her presents, jewelry, bunnets, head-dresses, artificial flowers out of Serepta’s own hip money.

And I don’t know as anything could be much more gauldin’ to a woman than that—while she lay there groanin’ in splints, to have her husband take the money for her own broken bones and dress up another woman like a doll with it.

But the law gin it to him, and he wuz only availin’ himself of the glorious liberty of our free Republic, and doin’ as he wuz a mind to. And it wuz spozed that that very hip money wuz what made the match. For before she wuz fairly out of splints he got a divorce from her and married agin. And by the help of Serepta’s hip money and the Whiskey Ring he got her two little children away from her.

QUESTIONS

1. *Samantha on the Woman Question* directly addresses the problems faced by women in 19th Century America. What specific problems does Marietta Holley address in this section of her novel? How much do you think things have changed for contemporary women?
2. Holley employs satire to make political statements in her work. Locate an instance of satire in this excerpt. Who or what is Holley ridiculing and why?

ACTIVITY

Marietta Holley’s work is sometimes described as “dialect literary humor.” Translate a paragraph of this excerpt into standard English. How might this text be differently received if it was written in standard English? Would it be as effective and interesting?

FOR EXTRA CREDIT, YOU MAY ALSO WORK ON ONE OF THESE PROJECTS:

View the performance of “**Josiah’s Secret**” on the *Josiah Allen’s Wife: The Story of Marietta Holley* DVD. Write and enact a debate between men and women in the 19th Century about the treatment of women. Make use of the information you have gathered from Holley’s writing to back up your arguments.

View the music video segment of the *Josiah Allen’s Wife: The Story of Marietta Holley* DVD. Make an object, mural, dance, or piece of music that addresses the dilemmas of a person or group of people in contemporary culture.

MARIETTA HOLLEY BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

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- *Josiah Allen's Wife as a P.A. and P.I.: Samantha at the Centennial*, Hartford, Ct.: American Publishing, 1877.
- *The Lament of the Mormon Wife*. Hartford, Ct: American Publishing, 1880.
- *My Wayward Pardner; or, My Trials with Josiah, America, the Widow Bump, and Etcetery*. Hartford, Ct: American Publishing, 1880.
- *Sweet Cicely; Josiah Allen as a Politician*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885.
- *Miss Jones' Quilting and Other Stories*. New York: J.S. Ogilvie, 1887.
- *Poems*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1887.
- *Samantha at Saratoga or Flirtin' with Fashion*. Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1887.
- *Samantha Among the Brethren*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1890.
- *Samantha on the Race Problem*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1892: republished 1898 as *Samantha Among the Colored Folks*.
- *Tirzah Ann's Summer Trip and Other Stories*. New York: F.M. Lupton, 1892.
- *Samantha at the World's Fair*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1893.
- *Widder Doodle's Love Affair and Other Stories*. New York: F.M. Lupton, 1893.
- *Josiah's Alarm and Abel Perry's Funeral*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1895.
- *Samantha in Europe*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1895.
- *Samantha at the St. Louis Exposition*. New York: G.W. Dillingham, 1904.
- *Around the World with Josiah Allen's Wife*. New York: G.W. Dillingham, 1905.
- *Samantha vs. Josiah: Being the Story of the Borrowed Automobile and What Became of It*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906.
- *Samantha on Children's Rights*. New York: G.W. Dillingham, 1909.
- *Samantha at Coney Island and a Thousand Other Islands*. New York: Christian Herald, 1911.
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MAGAZINES

- "How I Wrote My First Books," *Harper's Bazaar* (September, 1911).
- "The Story of My Life," published serially, *Watertown Daily Times*, Watertown, N.Y., (5 February to 9 April, 1931).

PLAYS

- *Betsey Bobbet: A Drama*, Adams, New York: W.J. Allen, 1880.
- *Josiah's Secret*, Watertown, New York: Hungerford-Holbrook, 1910.

ONLINE RESOURCES

WEBSITES ABOUT MARIETTA HOLLEY

Marietta Holley
www.mariettaholley.com

Marietta Holley (1836-1926)
<http://guweb2.gonzaga.edu/faculty/campbell/enl311/holley.htm>

Marietta Holley site by students at South Jefferson Central School [who appear on the DVD]
<http://www.spartanpride.org/marietta/homepage.htm>

Marietta Holley
www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaauw/holley.html

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

One Hundred Years Toward Suffrage: an Overview {excellent}
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/naw/nawstime.html>

Women's suffrage timeline
<http://www.thelizlibrary.org/suffrage/index.html>

Upstate New York and the Women's Rights Movement
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/rbk/women/women.htm>

By Popular Demand: "Votes for Women" Suffrage Pictures, 1850-1920
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/vfwhtml/vfwhome.html>

Votes for Women: Selections from the National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection, 1848-1921
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/naw/nawshome.html>

The Seneca Falls Convention
July 19-20, 1848
<http://www.npg.si.edu/col/seneca/senfalls1.htm>

The U.S. Constitution:
Nineteenth Amendment—Women's Suffrage Right
<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/constitution/html/amdt19.html>

The Constitution: The 19th Amendment
http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/charters_of_freedom/constitution/19th_amendment.html

Women's suffrage
<http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/suffrage.htm>

National Women's Hall of Fame
<http://www.greatwomen.org/women.php?action=viewAll>

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