

# MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Wollstonecraft's ideas and writings have provided the foundation for the feminist movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries



# MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

## Biography

- Born 1759 in London, England
  - ↳ Dad may have been violent. Mom suffered from postpartum depression
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> of 7 children, she received a “typical female” education at the Yorkshire Country School
- Resenting the favoritism extended to her older brother, she found companionship with women as friends
- 1777, the family moves frequently for two years
- She defied her parents by accepting employment as an assistant to a wealthy, demanding widow in Bath
  - ↳ She called this experience “a nightmare of tyranny and humiliation”
- 1781, she returns home to nurse her dying mother
- 1782, she moves in with a poverty-stricken family (friends from school) in south London
  - ↳ This is the first time she has experienced poverty
  
- She abducts her own new-born niece (when her sister is depressed about the birth). Sister later joins her, abandoning the brother-in-law. It is a public scandal
  
- 1784, opens school. Here she is exposed to radical dissenting views
- She teaches and writes fiction. Travels to Portugal and Ireland
- Reads philosophy words – William Godwin, William Blake, Thomas Payne, etc
- Has an unhappy affair with Henri Fuseli in London. Then in Paris 1792 fell in love with American Gilbert Imlay
- She and Gilbert have a child. In post-revolutionary France she escapes prison time by claiming to be American
- She follows Gilbert back to London in 1795. Discovers his infidelity
  - ↳ She attempts suicide.
    - ↳ Desperate to save the relationship she goes to Scandinavia as Gilbert’s business” emissary”; he continues cheating
    - ↳ Tries suicide again. Jumps in Thames River
  
- Rekindles friendship with William Godwin. Transforms to love
  - ↳ Neither believe in the institution of marriage, but with her 1797 pregnancy they decide to wed.
- Died 1797 in London, England , 11 days after giving birth due to delivery complications

Mary Wollstonecraft – A Vindication of the Rights of Women

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YocoUuAZvCA&t=102s> (12 minutes)

## Philosophy (major ideas)

Unwilling submission to any person, institution or custom is limiting, degrading and destructive

Education is the right of all humankind and the vehicle through which women can gain independence and equity

Environment and education shape character and morality

Humankind is evolving socially toward perfectibility

Reason – infallible and God given – should control all human thought and action

Women must have the freedom to cultivate reason; the key to self-improvement and social change

She admonishes excessive drinking, calls intoxication “the pleasure of savages”

Wollstonecraft was skeptical about organized religion

Wollstonecraft denied all double-standards emanating from the “sexual character theory”, which ascribed reason to men alone.