

WELL-READ LIVES: HOW BOOKS INSPIRED A GENERATION OF AMERICAN WOMEN
By Barbara Sicherman

QUESTIONS FOR READERS

1. What are the major differences in the lives of girls and young women in the late nineteenth century and those growing up today? Do you see any advantages to growing up female then as compared to now?
2. What role did reading play in the lives of girls and young women in the late nineteenth century?
3. How, in particular, did reading encourage women to become active in public life? What other factors were important?
4. Which aspect of reading do you consider most important at the time: its role as a marker of cultural and class status? the intimate social settings in which it took place? its intense emotional meaning for many young female readers?
5. How did the experiences of African American and Jewish immigrant readers differ from those of native-born and middle-class white women. In your view was class or race/ethnicity most important?
6. What are the different relationships to reading and writing of Jane Addams and M. Carey Thomas? Can you identify with either woman and her approach to reading and writing?
7. Compare any two readers (or groups of readers) discussed in the book with respect to: access, motivation, ability, impact of reading, etc.
8. Why were some women so fascinated with the Greek language and classical learning in the late nineteenth century?
9. What impact did reading have on your own intellectual and emotional development? Did this impact differ at successive stages of your life? How would you compare your own experiences to those of some subjects in *Well-Read Lives*?
10. *Little Women* was of critical importance to many girls and young women born in the late nineteenth century, as was the character Jo March. What books were especially important to you as you were growing up and why? What characters did you identify with?
11. Why do you think reading as a cultural institution declined in the early twentieth century?
12. Do you think that a significant “culture of reading” still exists for women? If so, what is its nature and how does it differ from the culture of reading in the late nineteenth century?
13. Why do you think women have been more attracted to fiction than men?