

MODULE C: A WHITE WOMAN TAKING A STAND IN KANSAS

Overview

While attending the 1859 Kansas State Constitutional Convention in Wyandotte, Kansas Territory (Kansas would not be a state until January 1861), it is rumored that Clarina Irene Howard Nichols (1810–1885)—a teacher, newspaper editor, writer, and orator—promised, “I will leave the country if you give women their rights.” Nichols was the only woman allowed a seat on the convention floor. While the men debated during the day she listened. During breaks and in the evening, she lobbied and spoke for women’s rights to be codified in the Kansas State Constitution that was being drafted, going so far as to demand full equal rights. Through her efforts, women in Kansas gained the right to vote in school elections, own property independent of a man, and obtain custody of their children without the consent of a man.

In this lesson, students will examine the actions of Clarina Irene Howard Nichols in taking a stand for voting rights for women in Kansas. The students will analyze a letter and a fundraising appeal to address the following questions:

- What actions were taken by this individual to secure the right to vote in Kansas?
- How could these actions in Kansas impact voting rights across the United States?

Materials

- A Letter to Susan B. Anthony (1859) and the Keyword/Summary/Restatement activity sheet: Clarina Irene Howard Nichols to Susan B. Anthony, July 16, 1859, Clarina Irene Howard Nichols Papers, Letters from others to others, 1861-1904, MC 355, folder 7, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, [iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:489911194\\$18i](http://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:489911194$18i).
- Fundraising Appeal: “Nichols Memorial” (1881): Mrs. John P. St. John, Mrs. J. K. Hudson, Mrs. John Francis, and Mrs. F. G. Adams, *Nichols Memorial: To the Women of Kansas*, May 10, 1881, *Kansas Memory*, Kansas State Historical Society, kansasmemory.org/item/225558.

Procedure

1. **Lesson Preparation (5 minutes):** Remind students of the essential questions.
2. **Lesson Activity (One Class Period):**
 - a. You may work on the two documents in this module as whole-class, small-group, or individual activities.
 - b. Distribute Clarina Nichols’s letter to Susan B. Anthony with the Keyword/Summary/Restatement activity sheet and describe the process for completing the activity. If the students have not yet completed the K/S/R activity for a different module, see the instructions in the Lesson 2 Overview on page 7. This letter is 398 words in length. The students should select 7–9 keywords from the text.
 - c. Distribute the excerpt from the fund-raising appeal from 1881, the “Nichols Memorial,” which provides a short description of Clarina Nichols’s role at the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention along with the Keyword/Summary/Restatement activity sheet. The students will identify 7–9 keywords for this excerpt.
3. **Discussion (5–10 minutes)**
 - a. Engage the class in a brief discussion of the actions taken by Nichols to secure the right to vote in Kansas. Be sure to emphasize and identify the stand she took and the challenges she faced in her efforts to secure the right to vote.
 - b. As a culminating topic for discussion, have students revisit the essential questions and make predictions about how the actions taken by Nichols in Kansas could have impacted voting rights across the United States, citing key evidence from the documents to support their claims.

A Letter to Susan B. Anthony (1859)

DIRECTIONS

1. *Underline, circle, or highlight 7–9 keywords in this letter Clarina I. H. Nichols wrote to Susan B. Anthony. Do not select “connector” words (are, is, the, and, so, etc.).*
2. *Use the keywords you select to write a sentence that summarizes the meaning of the letter.*
3. *Restate the summary sentence—but this time in your own words.*

Dear Susan

We are accomplishing something practical besides creating a public sentiment perfectly irresistible by politicians. When the Con[ventio]n came together our friends in the Con[ventio]n & out gave no hope of our getting any thing but large legal securities for person property & children So great had been the change of policy since [Horace] Greeley's instruction to stick to precedents and insist white males of 21 y[ea]rs as qualifications for suffrage.

Well we have presented 560 petitioners names and some 200 have been unaccountably detain[ed] on the mail route.

I have spoken by invitation before the Con[ventio]n a crowded house tho' all the democracy went in a body (some 16) to Kansas City to a Circus. I wrote out & got thro' a resolution instructing the Com[mitte]e on Preamble & Bill of rights to report taxation & rep.[resentation] inseparable. They reported a section declarating “no Constitutional distinction on account of Sect or Sex” that is now coming up for consideration in Com[mitte]e of the Whole.

I have labored with leading men and parties & pledge[d] all them to sustain us contending for no Con[stitutional] dis[tinctio]n. In treatment of failure in that to fall back on tax[atio]n & rep[resentation]. inseparable & make a stand then: in event of defeat on these positions or on the first to get the question referred in the best possible shape to the people.

Tax[atio]n they will show is a low ground-making property of more account than humanity the moral & intellectual interests which involve the “virtue & intelligence of the people” gagged, while the dollar is respectfully heard and obeyed &c.

I wrote & got thru a resolution instructing the Leg[islativ]e Com[mitte]e to report that “the women of the State shall have an equal voice in the organization & conduct of the Common Schools of the State.” The Report has been [given] two readings & the provision passed by a majority which with the increased favor it has since secured, makes its adoption on a third reading morally certain.

I have spent 4 weeks in the field and am to attend this Con[ventio]n till our fate is decided. . . . Soon as it adjourns I am to set off and attend Con[ventio]ns. I shall go as long as by your aid and contributions I can keep going. I can get a little by the lecture to increase the fund for expenses. . . .

Affe[ctionatel]y

C. I. H. N.

Source: Clarina Irene Howard Nichols to Susan B. Anthony, July 16, 1859, Clarina Irene Howard Nichols Papers, Letters from others to others, 1861-1904, MC 355, folder 7, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, [iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:48991194\\$18i](http://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:48991194$18i).

A Letter to Susan B. Anthony (1859)

Keywords (7–9)

Keyword Summary Sentence

Restate the Summary Sentence in Your Own Words

Fundraising Appeal: “Nichols Memorial” (1881)

DIRECTIONS

1. *Underline, circle, or highlight 7–9 keywords in this fundraising appeal to include a portrait of Clarina I. H. Nichols in a biography of leading suffragists. Do not select “connector” words (are, is, the, and, so, etc.).*
2. *Use the keywords you select to write a sentence that summarizes the meaning of the memorial.*
3. *Restate the summary sentence—but this time in your own words.*

NICHOLS MEMORIAL

To the Women of Kansas:

Those persons who attended the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention, in July, 1859, will not forget a table on the right of the president, behind which, day after day, sat an intelligent, pleasant-faced woman of middle age—Mrs. C. I. H. Nichols—sometimes knitting, but more often busy with pencil or pen, and with bright eyes always on the alert for the “business before the house.” She was there because she knew that legal rights when secured in a constitution are not so easily abrogated by amendment or repeal as when left to the power of the legislature; and, thus protected, that time would serve to test the worth of the measures for their security. The lapse of twenty years has established the wisdom and justice of the constitutional provisions which Mrs. Nichols was thus largely instrumental in securing. It was in her power only to suggest and initiate; the results had to be compassed through the hands of a few true and far-seeing men in the convention. Should this meet the eye of any of these, they will hold in their memories the vouchers for her share in the work. With no other women

to aid by their presence, her constant attention and timely words secured to the women of Kansas rights and privileges as to the holding of property, transacting business in their own name, and participation in the elections and offices under our school system. She asked for and secured:

1. Equal educational privileges in all the colleges and institutions of learning fostered and controlled by the state.
2. Equal right in the formation and conduct of the common schools.
3. An equal right for the mothers with the fathers to the custody and control of their mutual offspring.
4. The right of the wife to hold and accumulate property, and sue and be sued as if sole.

No other state has, so far as we can learn, the provision that it “is the right of the wife to sue in defence of the common property or community fund;” and for want of such provision wives have been, in other states, compelled to have guardians appointed over insane husbands to defend interests which they were competent to protect without such expenditure.

“Nichols Memorial” (1881): Mrs. John P. St. John, Mrs. J. K. Hudson, Mrs. John Francis, and Mrs. F. G. Adams, *Nichols Memorial: To the Women of Kansas*, May 10, 1881, *Kansas Memory*, Kansas State Historical Society, kansasmemory.org/item/225558

Fundraising Appeal: “Nichols Memorial” (1881)

Keywords (7–9)

Keyword Summary Sentence

Restate the Summary Sentence in your own words

LESSON SUMMARY:

Use your responses to the questions about the two documents to answer the lesson questions.

1. What actions were taken by Clarina I. H. Nichols to secure the right to vote in Kansas?
2. How could these actions in Kansas have impacted voting rights across the United States?