

Wallace Women Discovery Kit

Portrait of a Woman

Best for Grades 4-8

Goal: illustrate the life of Susan or Zerelda through symbols associated with her

Susan and Zerelda Wallace were unique and believed very strongly in several causes. In this exercise, students will learn about them and surround their images with symbols of the things they stood for.

Needed supplies: Susan and Zerelda bios, copies of picture pages, art supplies, 35 minutes

- 1) Present biographical information on Susan and Zerelda Wallace to students (read aloud, to themselves, etc.). (10 minutes)
- 2) Using the flag as an example, discuss the meaning of a symbol as something that represents something else. Brainstorm some ideas for symbols that could represent Susan or Zerelda. (5 minutes)
- 3) Let each student pick either Susan or Zerelda, or assign a woman to each student. Pass out the appropriate picture page to students. (5 minutes)
- 4) Using Susan or Zerelda picture, have each student draw symbols that characterize the depicted woman. (15 minutes)
- 5) Display finished products.

Variations

- Provide newspapers and magazines so students can cut and glue symbols.
- Work in small groups (especially if supplies are limited).
- Write adjectives rather than picture symbols.
- Have students present their work by naming the symbols and why they chose them.
- Make the presentations a game: concealing the picture, show or name the symbols and have other students guess which woman they describe.
- Allow students to select a woman to depict, such as famous Hoosier women or women important to them.

English/Language Arts Standards

- **2. Reading Comprehension**
- **5. Writing Applications**
- **7. Listening and Speaking Skills, Strategies, and Applications**

Social Studies Standards

- **1. History:** Historical knowledge; Chronological thinking, comprehension, analysis, and interpretation
- **2. Civics and Government:** Functions of government; Roles of citizens
- **5. Individuals, Society, and Culture**

Art Standards

- **7. Creating Art:** Production
- **14. Integrated Studies**

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Biography for Susan Elston Wallace

Name Origin: Hebrew, "Lily"

The daughter of a prosperous Hoosier businessman, Susan Arnold Elston's life was immediately rich with opportunity. As a child she developed a passion for reading and would often find a quiet place to read on a tall wooden bookcase in the sitting room, away from eight noisy siblings and a busy household. Born on Christmas day in 1830, Susan lived a frontier life and was readily schooled in household chores and child rearing, and later enjoyed a pampered life living in the largest mansion in the area. Realizing that she had a willingness to learn, Mrs. Elston sent a teenage Susan to a Quaker school in Poughkeepsie, New York until she was eighteen. Not long after her return, she was introduced to Lew Wallace--who was immediately smitten--and the two committed to making their life together. Once established as an attorney in Covington, Wallace took Susan's hand in marriage in 1852 and the couple settled in Covington. The following year saw the birth of their only child, a son named Henry Lane, and their return to Crawfordsville.

Susan found great pleasure in writing and was an accomplished poet before her husband became a published author. Writing mostly poetry before the Civil War, Susan's works were romantic in nature and spoke of love, children, and often ended in tragedy. With the onset of the Civil War, Susan's perspective begins to change as she travels, first to be near Lew during the War and later as his first lady in the New Mexico Territory and the Middle East. As a young wife, she heralded domesticity as the centerpiece of woman's life and wrote publicly in support of women's responsibilities to the household and marriage – often reluctantly placing women in the background. As she matured during the late 19th century, so do her views of women's roles. She bemoaned being in the background and began to write more assertively about women's rights in her personal correspondence, but not on a public stage as her mother-in-law chose to do. Writing to her friend, Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, a suffragist, in 1873, she states, "My private opinion is the women of Ind. are domesticated to death."

Susan moved through life as a woman of great intellect, as the wife of a famous American, and as an observer of human history. With great wit and eloquence, she was Lew's editor, companion, and inspiration. In the end she was his ghost writer as she finished his Autobiography after his death in 1905. She followed him two years later and silenced her pen forever.

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Biography for Zerelda Sanders Wallace

Name Origin: Teutonic, "Battle-armored maiden"

Zerelda Gray Sanders benefited from being the first born of five daughters as she often accompanied her father, a frontier physician, on his rounds and gained an extensive education in medicine. This "apprenticeship" led to a life of independent learning whether it was schooling from a "cultured Baptist clergyman" or alongside her stepsons as they readied for law careers. Born in 1817, Zerelda was described a curious child who wore her hair short so that she could groom herself quickly and spend more time reading. Her family moved to Indianapolis from Kentucky in 1830 and became charter members of the Central Christian Church, the inspiration for her future temperance and suffrage work.

Married to Indiana's Lt. Governor, David Wallace, at age nineteen, Zerelda quickly changed the landscape of her life as she raised three stepchildren and became the First Lady of Indiana the next year when David became Indiana's sixth governor. Having six more children and later raising four grandchildren, she was a model mother who was the inspiration for Lew Wallace's depiction of Ben-Hur's mother. When he asked Zerelda for her opinion of the book, she replied, "O, my son, it is a nonesuch of a story, but how did you ever invent that magnificent character, the Mother?" Answering with a kiss, "Why, you dear, simple heart, how could you fail to know that the original of that picture is your own blessed self?"

In the second half of her life, Zerelda used her considerable intelligence, faith, and societal skills to become a leader for reform. A fervent supporter of temperance, Zerelda was elected as the first president of the Indiana chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and persuaded her own church, the first to do so, to offer un-fermented grape juice for communion. It was during one of her appearances before the Indiana State Senate that her activism began to change course. Zerelda presented 10,000 women's signatures in support of temperance reform, and was met with "open contempt" by the assembled male legislators. One senator told her that her petition "might as well have been signed by 10,000 mice" and denied these women as constituents. Not comprehending how she was not considered a constituent, "a light broke over" Zerelda and she thanked the senator for making her a suffragist. At age 56, Zerelda embarked on this new crusade, traveled around the nation, worked alongside Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and spoke publicly and passionately about her views. A proponent of working the government system to get results rather than more radical tactics such as public demonstrations, her efforts were marked with many milestones, namely appearing before the U.S. Congress in 1880 stating that "the ballot is the most potent means of all moral and social reforms." Zerelda died in 1901 without casting her first vote as a recognized constituent, but helped launch the women's rights movement which forever changed opportunities for American women.

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Susan Wallace



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Zerelda Wallace

