



Betty Friedan: Feminist by Justine Blau

BETTY FRIEDAN: FEMINIST ©1990 by Justine Blau, published by Chelsea House Publishers.

Summary

Betty Friedan: Feminist is a biographical account of Betty Friedan's life from editorialist for a labor newspaper in Greenwich Village (NY) and author of the 1963 ground-breaking book, [The Feminine Mystique](#) (which challenged the traditional role of women as homemakers), to political activist in the fight for equal rights and federal protections for women and the elderly in the U.S. Friedan was co-founder of two major national women's organizations, both of which lobbied to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, and won key legislation protecting women from sex discrimination in the workplace.

History Standards

- Standard 28: Understands domestic policies in the post-World War II period
- Standard 29: Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties
- Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States

Grade Level: Grades 6 & Up

Vocabulary

Amendment
Congress
Constitution
Conventional
Democracy
Domestic
Economy
Employment
Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)
Feminism
Lobbying
National Organization for Women (NOW)
19th amendment
Oppression
Ostracism
Picketing
Sex discrimination
Sexism
Suffrage
World War II

Questions for Discussion & Essay Writing

After reading [Betty Friedan: Feminist](#), use the following for small or large group discussion, and guide for reflective essay writing.

1. What did Betty Friedan write about in her book, [The Feminine Mystique](#), in 1963? Why did she write this book?

2. How did Betty Friedan's book, [The Feminine Mystique](#), inspire women across the country to organize for equal rights? What were some of the rights that women began campaigning for after Betty Friedan's book was published?
3. How did the lives of women change during World War II? How were the lives of women changed again right after World War II ended?
4. What was the drop in percentage of women employed and attending college from 1930 (before World War II) to the 1950s (right after World War II)? (*See Chapter 3, page 57, for calculations of percentage changes in female employment and college attendance.*)
5. What were the images of women portrayed in the media - on TV, in advertisements, and in magazine articles – after World War II? How did these images influence how women were treated and perceived?
6. What forms of exclusion and segregation did women experience prior to the women's rights movement? What forms of discrimination were women subjected to in the workplace prior to the women's rights movement?
7. What did Betty Friedan mean by the term "the feminine mystique"?
8. What is feminism? What were some of the traditional roles and stereotypes about women that feminists were working to challenge in the 1960s and 1970s?
9. What types of campaign actions did feminists like Betty Friedan take to gain equality and rights for women?
10. What were the goals of the March for Equality (August 26, 1970)? What were the demands that women made during the march?
11. Do you feel that the demands that feminists made on behalf of women were fair and just? Why or why not? If you had lived in the 1960s and 1970s, would you have joined alongside Betty Friedan in the fight for women's rights? Why or why not?
12. What other rights movements were taking place in the U.S. at the time Betty Friedan wrote her book, [The Feminine Mystique](#), in the early 1960s?
13. What led Betty Friedan to start the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966?
14. What were some of the changes in marriage and divorce laws that happened as a result of the lobbying efforts of Betty Friedan and NOW? What other changes in the equal treatment and protection of women did NOW lobby for – what changes did they want to see made in how women were portrayed in textbooks? What changes did they want to see made in the images of women portrayed on TV and in advertisements? Why did they feel all of these changes were important?
15. What were some of the reasons given by opponents to the women's rights movement?
16. What other types of challenges did feminists and women rights activists face in gaining equality for women?
17. What did Betty Friedan go on to accomplish in her work for women's rights in the 1970s and 1980s after she stepped down as president of NOW in 1970?
18. What was the Equal Rights Amendment, and why did Betty Friedan work so hard to have it amended to the U.S. Constitution? (*Note: Students can research more about the Equal Rights Amendment online, and find out whether their state has ratified the ERA, by visiting the Equal Rights Amendment website: www.equalrightsamendment.org.*)
19. What were some of the laws passed in the 1970s and 1980s to achieve equal rights for women?
20. Now that women have gained several rights equal to men, do you think that girls are treated equally to boys today? Why or why not? Are there ways that girls are treated differently from boys today? If so, how?

Further Research Questions & Project Ideas

1. In what ways was the women's rights movement similar or different to the women's suffrage movement? How were the roles of women in the 1950s and 1960s similar or different to the roles of women in the early 1900s, when women were campaigning for the right to vote? How have the lives of women changed since the 1960s since the rise of feminism and the women's rights movement?
2. In what ways was the women's rights movement similar or different to the black civil rights movement? How were the goals of these two movements similar? How were the goals of these

two movements different? How were the tactics and strategies used by the leaders of these two movements similar? How were they different?

3. What do you think was Betty Friedan's greatest achievement? What do you think was her greatest failure?
4. How did Betty Friedan's relationship with her mother influence Betty's life? How did Betty Friedan describe her relationship with her mother? How did this relationship shape Betty Friedan's life and career as a women's rights activist?

Extension Activities

- Have students work collaboratively in small groups to research the history of the women rights movement beginning with women's suffrage, and distribute chart paper for students to chart a timeline of the women rights movement. The timeline should include primary documents, such as articles, photographs, and quotations from leaders of women's rights. Students can then post the timeline around the walls of the classroom, or in the hallway for other students and families to learn about the full history of women's rights.
- Have students interview two to three women in their families and/or communities using the questions that Betty Friedan used to survey women in the early 1960s before she wrote her famous book, [The Feminine Mystique](#) (see below). Ask students to compare and contrast the opinions and perspectives of the women they interview. Have students share some of their findings in class, and hold a group discussion about some of the similarities and differences in their interview reports.
 - ⌘ What difficulties have you found in working out your role as a woman?
 - ⌘ What are the chief satisfactions and frustrations of your life today?
 - ⌘ Has your education adequately prepared you for adulthood?
 - ⌘ Have you lived up to your own expectations?
- Have students work in groups to research and compile an array of current day images and messages about women in TV, magazines and songs, and see how they compare with images and messages about women from the 1940s and 1950s.
- Have students learn more about the life of [Shirley Chisholm](#), a notable black women's rights activist and first black woman elected to Congress, and compare to the life of Betty Friedan. Students can write an essay noting at least three similarities and differences in the careers and lives of both women.
- Have students learn more about current day economic inequities between men and women. For a Grade 6 - 12 lesson plan that explores the disparities in annual earnings between men and women, refer to "Exploring Economic Inequities" by Jan M. Goodman, [Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development](#), Teaching for Change, 2002, pg. 303 – 307.

Glossary

Amendment: the process of formally altering or adding to a document or record.

Congress: the national legislative body of the United States, consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Constitution: the fundamental law of the United States, framed in 1787, ratified in 1789, and variously amended since then.

Conventional: traditional, conforming to established or accepted standards.

Democracy: government by the people exercised either directly or through elected representatives.

Domestic: relating to family, home life and household affairs.

Economy: the system of money-related affairs in a country, region, or community.

Employment: a person's work or occupation.

*Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)*ⁱ: written in 1923 by Alice Paul, suffragist leader and founder of the National Woman's Party (NWP). Section 1 of the ERA states, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Alice Paul and the NWP considered the ERA to be the next necessary step after the 19th Amendment in guaranteeing "equal justice under law" to all citizens. The ERA was introduced into every session of Congress between 1923 and 1972, when it was passed and sent to the states for ratification. The seven-year time limit in the ERA's proposing clause was extended by Congress to June 30, 1982, but at the deadline, the ERA had been ratified by [35 states](#), leaving it [three states](#) short of the 38 required for ratification. It has been reintroduced into every Congress since that time.

Feminism: belief in the social, political, and economic equality of women and men.

Lobbying: the act of persons engaged in trying to influence legislators or other public officials in favor of a specific cause.

National Organization for Women (NOW): the largest organization of feminist activists in the United States. Since its founding in 1966, NOW's goal has been to take action to bring about equality for all women.

19th amendment: the 19th Amendment to the Constitution gave women the right to vote.

Oppression: the act or feeling of being heavily weighed down in mind or body.

Ostracism: the act of banishment or exclusion.

Picketing: a person or group of persons stationed outside a place, usually during a strike, to express protest.

Sex discrimination: discrimination based on sex (male or female).

Sexism: prejudice or discrimination based on gender.

Suffrage: the right or privilege of voting.

World War II: A war fought from 1939 to 1945, in which Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, the United States, China, and other allies defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan.

ⁱ Source: www.equalrightsamendment.org