

ACTIVITY SHEET

ORDINARY WOMEN: IDA B. WELLS

SUMMARY

"Few stories are as dramatic as that of of Ida B. Wells, a woman who was born a slave in Mississippi in the midst of the Civil War, and became a daring investigative reporter and civil rights crusader who would one day be called the "loudest and most persistent voice for truth" in an era of injustice."

STOPPING POINTS/VIDEO BREAKDOWN

- 0:10** Introduction to Ida B. Wells
- 0:40** Mississippi to Memphis
- 1:00** Launching her career as a journalist
- 1:20** Anti-lynching movement
- 1:55** Journalism as activism
- 2:30** Speaking events in Britain
- 2:45** Characteristics as a reformer
- 3:25** At odds with white suffragists
- 3:45** At odds with the black community
- 3:55** Marriage
- 4:25** A life of reform

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & THEMES

1. Ida B. Wells' experience on the train from Mississippi to Memphis is not uncommon in the history of segregation. What other similar experiences have you heard of? How does reflecting on instances such as this allow us to identify patterns of racial and social injustice?
2. Although segregation has officially been rejected in contemporary society, the echo of segregation still exists in various forms today. How might we consider contemporary society to still be a segregated one?
3. Ida B. Wells challenged institutional inequities instead of individual misdeeds. What benefits are there in this kind of approach? How might one go about seeking institutional or systemic change in contemporary society?
4. Members of the press and press organizations are often the subject of attacks based on the subject matter they commonly address. Why is the press often subject to such threats? How do we see an attack on journalism and the press occurring today in both physical and intellectual ways?
5. Ida B. Wells was quoted as saying, "The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them." How might we see this philosophy being acted upon in contemporary politics and society today?
6. "Caught between the struggles of her race and her gender, Wells often felt like she fought alone." Considering this point, why might Wells' contemporaries have been hesitant to advocate for both causes? What are the risks of not being intersectional in activism?



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ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES (SCHOOL-BASED OR EXTRA-CURRICULAR)

1. Research the anti-lynching movement and the work that Ida B. Wells did in more detail. Compare these efforts in the late 19th and early 20th century to a contemporary movement today, and consider how Ida B. Wells' activism might have inspired certain forms of contemporary activism.
2. "Like so many civil rights leaders who would follow in her footsteps — including the civil rights leaders of today — her criticisms were powerful because they took aim not just at the misdeeds of individuals, but at the unexamined institutions of racism and power behind them." Exploring an example of civil rights activism, consider how movements might take aim at systemic issues of racism and the inequitable distribution of power. This might involve researching a specific movement's goals, their manifesto, or explicit statements they have made regarding their hopes for change.
3. Ida B. Wells often felt alone in her activism as her approach was too intersectional for many of her contemporaries – Wells felt both race and sexism needed to be prioritized in conversations of societal change. Compare her intersectional philosophies with that of a contemporary activist, and reflect upon the need for movements to be intersectional in approach.

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES (COMMUNITY GROUPS, YOUTH CAMPS, WRITING GROUPS, MUSEUMS)

1. Consider how print publication and other methods of communication might help encourage conversations within your community regarding issues of social justice. Collaborate internally as an organization or externally with other organizations to create a method of discourse (a zine, contributions to a local newspaper, the creation of a blog or website) using Ida B. Wells' journalism as inspiration.
2. **GENERAL COMMUNITY GROUP ACTIVITY:** Ida B. Wells "transformed herself from a slave who was regarded as property to someone once described as a woman who "walked as if she owned the world." Using her education, her ability to write and her passion to speak publically about her beliefs, Wells contributed to significant cultural and societal shifts during her life. Lead a discussion on this topic, where members will consider their own concerns and how they too can use their voices in various ways to spark change regarding problems that matter to them.
3. Ida B. Wells often felt alone in her goals for reform as white suffragists ignored issues of race and black male community leaders didn't make women's issues a priority. As a collective, consider your own community organization's goals and approaches to issues of social justice. Using Ida B. Wells as inspiration, consider how you can expand upon your goals to make your organization intersectional and therefore increasingly more inclusive.