

## Investigate This Document Further #4: Susan B. Anthony Letter to Albion Winegar Tourgee (June 22, 1890, #6339)

### “What Did They Mean?” How Language Changes Over Time

**Background:** Hand out or show students copies of the handwritten letter from Susan B. Anthony to Albion Winegar Tourgee, from June 22, 1893. Explain that Anthony was inviting Tourgee to speak at the Suffrage Congress of the Women’s Branch of the World’s Congress Auxiliary at the 1893 Columbian Exposition, in Chicago, Illinois. Have students observe, question, reflect on the document: the letterhead, writing style, people and things described in the document and so on. \*Use Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>)

Provide students with information about Susan B. Anthony, focusing on the times she was born into, her family influences and, her friends. Also discuss what kinds of different activities she supported in her lifetime (abolition, temperance, equal pay, suffrage, education, labor). Be sure to describe the part played by Anthony at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention and the 1869 formation of the National Woman Suffrage Association to amend the Constitution.

**Lesson activity:** Explain to students how **time**, **background** and **context** are all factors that shape the kind of language we use and the meaning we give to words and phrases when communicating with others. Tell them that these are the clues they must think about when reading documents from the past.

*Model some examples of how:*

Words or phrases can have different meanings in different contexts (convert, translate, reduce)

Words or phrases no longer in frequent use (thee, thou, ere, hither, nigh, etc.)

Words or phrases that mean one thing in one place and something else in another (“pinch” often means *to steal* in England, but in America it can mean to grab someone sharply with your fingers or, it can be a small amount of an ingredient in baking)

Give students the list of words in the box below and ask them to look up or define what they think the words mean. Then ask them to use one or two in a sentence to demonstrate their understanding.

Once again, show students the letter (and transcription) written by Susan B. Anthony to Albion Tourgee in 1892 (#6339), where she is asking him to speak at the upcoming annual Women’s Suffrage Congress in Chicago, Illinois. Read the letter together.

Now ask students to decide what those words mean in the context of the letter.

Discuss how use of words can change our meaning and understanding of what is happening in a text. Remind students that when they read texts from the past, they must look for clues such as time, author, context, back ground and audience in order to better understand the meaning of the text.

These are some words used in correspondence and publications of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What do you think they mean?

<b>Words Used in Our Community in 1800s</b>	<b>What YOU Think They Mean</b>	<b>What They DID Mean Back Then!</b>
secure		
able		
ballot		
suffrage		
trenching		
congress		
treat		
deputize		
unfitted		
testify		

Sentence:

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Sentence:

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**For extended study or students at higher grade levels:** Have students explore further the history of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, including its predecessor organizations (the American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Women Suffrage Association) and leaders (Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Elizabeth Smith Miller, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, and others). Describe the early connections between the abolitionist movement and women's suffrage movement.

Have students explore further the 1893 Columbian Exposition that was held in Chicago, Illinois. The World's Congress Auxiliary included a Women's Branch with a Suffrage Congress (see document #7222). Describe how the Exposition was one of several similar events (the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition and the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, NY are other examples), designed to highlight progress and achievements of America in various fields, most notably at this time, electricity. The Columbian Exposition was also a successful marketing operation for consumer products and entertainment. What it did not accomplish, was to fairly represent the African American citizen, as evidenced in the publication by Ida B. Wells, "The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World's Columbian Exposition" (in the Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfd.25023>)

*Extension:* This activity can also be used with the following documents to introduce different meanings, new vocabulary and phrases

#7786 (Ida B. Wells letter): address, scurrilous, unpalatable, palliate, chattel, importunities

#198 (Albion W. Tourgee): concluded, taking, chirography, amamunsis

#2254 (Albion W. Tourgee): lately read, blind scoundrel, cannot conjecture, far from commonplace

#### **Resources:**

[Browse by Topic \(Library of Congress\) - American History - Women's History](#)

Susan B. Anthony House: <http://susanbanthonyhouse.org/index.php>

Western New York Suffragists: Winning the Vote: <http://winningthevote.org/>

Susan B. Anthony: Fighter for Freedom and Equality (Suzanne Slade)

The Ballot Box Battle (Emily Arnold McCully)

*\*Could employ same teaching strategy with primary and secondary sources that connect to other Grade 2 suggested texts under "Fighting for a Cause" in the Common Core Text List for P-12 ELA:*

<http://engageny.org/resource/text-list-for-p-12-ela>