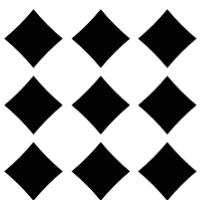


# ACTIVITY GUIDE

Activity Ideas for All Ages

Enjoy learning by doing? Explore themes from the museum's first digital exhibition, *Becoming Visible: Bringing American Women's History into Focus*, through hands on activities, field trips, and conversation prompts. This is a versatile resource that can be used by families, clubs, classrooms, and more!

Great for all ages.



SMITHSONIAN  
AMERICAN  
WOMEN'S HISTORY  
MUSEUM

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## Getting Started

This Activity Guide is a companion resource for the digital exhibition, *Becoming Visible: Bringing American Women's History into Focus*, by the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum. This is intended as a versatile tool that can be used to help kids, teens, and adults engage with the exhibition in fun and meaningful ways. Before doing these activities, participants should visit [BecomingVisible.si.edu](http://BecomingVisible.si.edu) to experience the exhibition. Additional resources on the exhibition's themes and topics can be found at [womenshistory.si.edu/becomingvisible/](http://womenshistory.si.edu/becomingvisible/).

### Activity #1 Memory Box

#### Background

This exhibition uses the metaphor of “disappearing ink” to show how, even when women's work and lives have been written down, their stories don't make it into the histories we are taught in school, or see in monuments, museums, or popular media.

#### Activity

Have children create a “memory box”: a shoebox filled with 10 items they think would help somebody in the future understand them and their life.

- Discuss how they chose the items they placed in the box. How did they decide what was important? What did they want to highlight, and what did they want to hide?
- Imagine somebody found the box 100 years from now; what do you think they would understand or learn about you?
- Do you think a museum or an archive would be interested in your box of stuff? Why or why not? What do you think those institutions consider important? Why do you think that; where do you think you get those ideas from?
- What do you wish museums and libraries considered important? If you were a curator or an archivist, how might you do things differently?

**This activity is great for kids, families, and classrooms.**

## Activity #2

### Elizabeth Keckly & Images of Class

#### Background

Elizabeth Keckly's memoir told the story of her enslavement and provided a glimpse into the lives of President Abraham Lincoln and First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln.

*Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* was published in 1868.

#### Activity

Listen to the exhibition interview with archivist Dorothy Berry about Elizabeth Keckly, and [read Keckly's full biography](#). View the portrait of Mary Todd Lincoln referenced in the interview and examine one or two other portraits of famous or well-off Americans. Then discuss the following:

- Portraits are meant to showcase one person; but think about whose work or contributions those portraits obscure (i.e., the furniture maker of the chair they are sitting on, the dressmaker, the person who cleaned the room, etc.).
- Does this matter? Make an argument for why or why not.

**This activity is great for teens and adults.**

## Activity #3

### Margaret E. Knight & The Patent Process

#### Background

A patent is a legal property right granted to an inventor for their invention or design. The process for applying for a patent involves many steps. The United States Patent and Trademark Office [provides an overview of the process](#). Many people don't know how the patent system works, and it would have been especially unusual for a young, working-class woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to have that knowledge.

#### Activity

Have students re-enact the courtroom drama over Margaret Knight's patent when a man who had tried to steal Knight's plans for the paper bag machine argued to the judge that Knight could not have invented it because a woman "could not possibly understand the complexities of the machine." Then discuss the following:

- What would have happened if Knight had lost that case? Who would have gotten credit for the invention?
- Grocery stores all over the country still use flat-bottomed paper bags. Why isn't Margaret Knight more famous than she is?
- Knight didn't have a lot of education, and her family didn't have a lot of money. What does her story tell us about who might be smart, innovative, and important?

**This activity is great for teens, families, and classrooms.**

## Activity #4

### Hisako Hibi's Lost Artwork

#### Background

Hisako Hibi and her family were incarcerated in the Utah desert from 1942 to 1945. During this time, she made 72 paintings and taught art classes. Though examples of Hibi's artwork still exist, many were lost or displaced due to her incarceration.

#### Activity

Listen to the exhibition interview with curator Melissa Ho about Hisako Hibi, and [read Hibi's full biography](#). Go on a field trip to a local museum or visit a museum's website. Count how many paintings or works of art are by women. How many are by women of color? How many are by Asian American women? Then discuss the following:

- What does curator Melissa Ho's recounting of Hisako Hibi's story teach us about the barriers to Hibi's finding success in the art world?
- What can her story teach us about the wider world of art and whose paintings end up on museum walls?

**This activity is great for families, teens, and adults.**

## Activity #5

### The Erasure of Hazel Fellows & the ILC Dover Seamstresses

#### Background

Hazel Fellows and her fellow seamstresses at ILC Dover made an important contribution to American history and the Space Race. Fellows was a skilled seamstress and a member of a team that stitched spacesuits for NASA's Apollo 11 mission.

#### Activity

Listen to the exhibition interview with curator Emily Margolis about Hazel Fellows and the other seamstresses, and [read their full biography](#). Write a journal entry from the point of view of Hazel Fellows or one of the other seamstresses on the day that the video was filmed. Then discuss:

- What do you imagine the seamstresses felt and thought during the filming of that video? When the film came out? How do you think they felt about their role in the Apollo 11 mission?
- Have you ever contributed to an important project or event and felt like you didn't get enough credit? Did it bother you? Why or why not?
- Have you seen the movie *Hidden Figures*? How are these stories similar or different?
- How does recognizing the role that these women played in space exploration change the way we see that field?

**This activity is great for kids, teens, families, and classrooms.**

## Activity #6

### Dr. Isabel Morgan's Scientific Research

#### Background

Dr. Isabel Morgan was a scientist who studied viruses. Her research contributed to the polio vaccine. Isabel Morgan and her team made key discoveries in polio research from 1944 to 1949, but most attention goes to the vaccine developed by Jonas Salk in 1953.

#### Activity

Listen to the exhibition interview with curator Katherine Ott about Isabel Mogan, [and read Morgan's full biography](#). Choose another scientific discovery—perhaps a different vaccine, medical device, or procedure. Read about it on Wikipedia. Then discuss:

- How is the invention you chose described? Is there one inventor named, or many? Are the earlier scientific building blocks included in the story of the invention? What would you need to know to tell a fuller story of this invention?
- How might museums and textbooks talk about science differently to include a broader picture of the process and to recognize the contributions of more women and people of color?

**This activity is great for teens, classrooms, and adults.**