

MARY BRECKENRIDGE **UNTOLD**

Mother of American Midwifery

Why is healthcare important?

How have women contributed to changes in healthcare practices that we now take for granted?

This activity will look at the story and historical significance of Mary Breckenridge, and explore the legacy and impact of her actions.

STRAND:

The Rise of Industrial America
(1877 - 1918)

THEMES:

Women's history, STEM, health and medicine, working class stories

VIDEO SUMMARY:

Did you know that more women have been lost in childbirth than men in war? Maternity is the young woman's battlefield," wrote Mary Breckenridge in 1927. "It is more dangerous, more painful, more mutilating than war, and as inexorable as all the laws of God." Born in 1881, Mary Carson Breckenridge changed the face of US midwifery.

VIDEO LINK



BACKGROUND RESOURCES:

[The life of Mary Breckenridge](#)

[National Women's Hall of Fame - Mary Carson Breckenridge](#)

[Midwives on horseback: Saddlebags and science](#)

[Extensive annotated bibliography - Mary Breckenridge](#)

[Mary Breckenridge \(February 17, 1881 - May 16, 1965\)](#)

Following are 3 activities that you can use to engage with the video before watching, explore the story whilst watching and explore its wider meaning after watching.

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PRE-VIEWING: ENGAGE WITH THE STORY

KEY VOCABULARY: infant mortality, pioneer, midwifery, remedies

DID YOU KNOW?

- Did you know that in the early 1900s, many women in rural areas of the United States had no access to health care?
- They gave birth at home, with only the help of neighbors and family members. In fact, for every 100,000 live births over 800 results in maternal death, and 100 out of every 1000 (10%) dies before their first birthday. The maternal mortality rate was the highest in the developed world, nearly twice that recorded in England at the time.

INQUIRY QUESTIONS:

- What types of healthcare do you take for granted? Dentistry? GPs? Pharmacy drugs?
- Imagine what life would be like without healthcare. How would your life be different?

**ALTERNATIVE PRE-VIEWING
ACTIVITIES [HERE](#)**

WHILST VIEWING: EXPLORE THE STORY

THINKING ROUTINE: STORIES

Whilst watching the video, students will consider accounts of issues, events, people and society that are presented; what has been left out, and how might they want to present the account.

Ask your students to consider the following questions whilst watching the video. You may need to watch the video twice with time for reflection in between.

Students can discuss their responses with a partner before sharing their responses to the entire class.

- What is the story that is presented? What is the account that is told?
- What is left out in the account? What other angles are missing in the account?
- What is your story? What is the account that you think should be the one told?

CHECK OUT ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES [HERE](#).

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POST VIEWING: THE STORY UNCOVERED

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- While fewer mothers are dying during childbirth in other developed countries – amazingly, today, in the US, maternal mortality rates are on the rise. Why do you think that is?
- How can we ensure that mortality rates decrease?
- Why is healthcare important?
- Should all healthcare be free?
- How have women contributed to changes in healthcare practices that we now take for granted?
- What other stories do you know of women who have done incredible things? Why are their stories often untold?

EXPLORE FURTHER

SELF-DISCOVERY

Your students can explore other [Women's stories](#) from the Untold collection, and report back to the class what they've learned.

If it's STEM stories you are after here are some STEM Women stories from the Untold collection: [Marie Van Brittan-Brown](#), [Hedi Lamar](#), [Frances Oldham-Kelsey](#), [Chien-Shiung Wu](#), [The Windshield Wiper](#)

TELLING STORIES ABOUT WOMEN'S HISTORY

Is there a story about Women's history that you think we should be told? You or your students can share your idea [here](#). If it's chosen to be included in a future series of [Untold](#), we'll be in touch.

We'd love to get some feedback on this resource.
Click [here](#) to share your thoughts.