



Dumbarton House Family Book Club





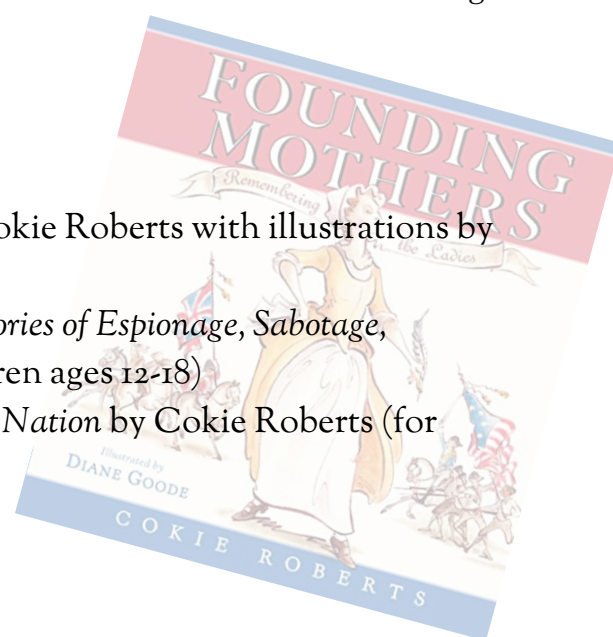
Book Club: Founding Mothers

Dumbarton House is a Federal period house museum and headquarters of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of American (NSCDA). Founded in 1891, the NSCDA is dedicated to inspiring patriotism, preserving history, and promoting education. The NSCDA invites you to explore the rich history of our nation and reflect on the wisdom and bravery of those who contributed to our country's founding.

This multigenerational bookclub is designed to allow participation from all members of a household. After reading any or all of the books listed below, use the guiding questions and specific questions for each book to lead a discussion among your friends and family.

Books

- *Founding Mothers: Remembering the Ladies* by Cokie Roberts with illustrations by Diane Goode (for children ages 5-10)
- *Women Heroes of the American Revolution: 20 Stories of Espionage, Sabotage, Defiance, and Rescue* by Susan Casey (for children ages 12-18)
- *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation* by Cokie Roberts (for adults)



Guiding Question 1

List three different ways women contributed to the Revolutionary War effort within their limited position in society. How do you think their contributions affected how people viewed them and their role in society? Even after the United States became a nation with a democratic form of government (meaning representation by the people), women were not given the right to vote. However, they still had influence - how?

Women were given the right to vote by the 19th amendment, which went into effect in 1920, partly because people were impressed by women's contributions during the first World War (1914-1918). How many years after the Revolution is that?



Guiding Question 2

The American Patriots fought to earn freedom from the British, but who was given freedom after the war was over? Phillis Wheatley, an enslaved African American poet, wrote poems supporting the Revolution and its fight for freedom, but enslaved people were not given freedom when the United States won the war. It wasn't until the Civil War (1861-1865) that enslaved people were freed by President Lincoln.

Questions for *Founding Mothers: Remembering the Ladies*

1. Sally and John Jay traveled on a boat to Europe. How long did it take? Why did they take that dangerous and long journey? How do we travel long distances now? What would you travel a long distance for?

(Hint: It took 2 months. They went to Europe so John could represent the new American country as the ambassador to Spain.)

2. List three other ways life was different back during the Revolutionary War. What would have been the hardest change to your life compared to now? What would you have liked to try?

(Hint: writing letters, people had to grow all their own food, women weren't allowed to wear pants, page 30.)

3. Two of the women in this book hosted many parties. But the purpose of the parties wasn't always to celebrate something fun. What else did the parties accomplish?

(Hint: Martha Washington and Dolley Madison helped their husbands careers by hosting parties, page 22.)

What do you see happening in this painting of a Federal period party?



The Splendid Mrs. Madison by Peter Waddell, 2012. Historical depiction, 1810-1814. Collection of the White House Historical Association.



Questions for *Women Heroes of the American Revolution*

1. Look at the cartoon on page 11: cartoons are humorous drawings that exaggerate certain features to make an argument about something.

Using the guiding notes on page 10, what do you think this British cartoon is arguing?



2. Some of the stories in this book are based on true stories but exaggerated into legends and folklore. What does the legend of Molly Pitcher tell us about why the community admired her? Does your family or community have a story about a hero who did something very impressive?

3. This book features 20 women who supported the American Revolution. Only 2 of them are women of color and 3 of them are from a lower socioeconomic status. Why do you think that is? Why do we know less about women who were enslaved or poor? Can you imagine all the details we don't know about how enslaved or poor women participated in the war effort?

(Hint: all women could protest the British by boycotting their goods and making their own tea and clothing, but wealthy women had more influence in society and opportunities for education so they left more written records that were saved)

Questions for *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation*

1. What unique role did women play in the growth of the new country? Roberts argues that they played a vitally “civilizing role.” The scholar Linda Kerber put forth the concept of “republican motherhood,” arguing that during this period, women politicized the household and contributed to democracy by raising children to further their political ideologies. Do you agree? Are such roles necessary?
2. What did you learn about our Founding Fathers, including Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton, seeing them from the perspective of their female contemporaries?
 - Was Franklin a hypocrite when he told his daughter Sally that it was necessary for her to be “extremely circumspect in all your behavior” because she was a politician’s child? (pg. 31)
 - Would Washington have been as popular a General if not for Martha’s care of soldiers in camp? (pg. 94)
3. George Washington wrote to Catharine Macaulay (who is introduced on page 49),

“In our progress towards political happiness my station is new; and, if I may use the expression, I walk on untrodden ground. There is scarcely any action, whose motives may not be subject to a double interpretation. There is scarcely any part of my conduct which may not hereafter be drawn into precedent” (January 9, 1790).

In what ways were the Founding Fathers and Mothers concerned about their public image and legacy? Does this surprise you? How did Martha Washington walk “untrodden ground” and define the role of First Lady? Are her influences still evident today?

(Hint: George Washington hesitated to praise Phillis Wheatley publicly because he did not want to appear vain, John Adams worried about his letters being intercepted and published by newspapers, Ben Franklin admonished his daughter to be careful what she said.)

Craft Activities

Design a postage stamp featuring one of the women you read about.



Image from the Smithsonian Magazine

How did women argue for change in society during the Revolutionary period?

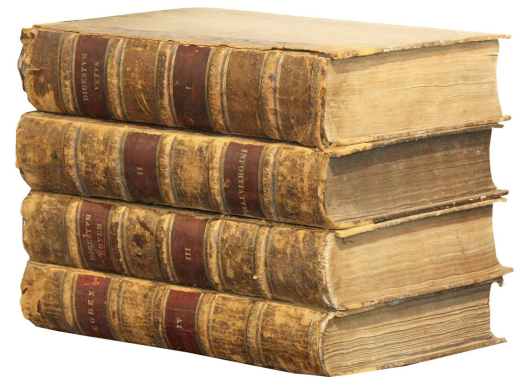
By signing petitions and going door to door. Join a family member or friend in writing a letter to your elected representative! Find yours at www.house.gov/representatives/find-you-representative)



Write a letter in code and have a family member or friend decipher it!

For a code idea: write the alphabet out. Below it, write the alphabet backwards. A becomes Z, B becomes Y, C becomes X, and so on. Write your letter normally, then translate it using your code. Hand the coded version to your family member or friend to decipher!

Mary Katherine Goddard ran a book bindery in addition to being a postmaster and publisher of newspapers and journals. Go to our website to find instructions on how to make your own book out of paper bags!



For adults: write an editorial from one of the women's perspectives, making an argument for the roles women could play in the military and political arena to help further the cause of the American Revolution. Are those same points valid today?