

The Remedial Herstory Project

INQUIRY-BASED LESSON PLAN

STAGING THE INQUIRY

For this inquiry, teachers should consider opening with an intriguing and open ended question, then provide some background on this topic generally in the form of a video, brief lecture, or presentation. Close the introduction by asking students what questions they have, guide them in discussion to the question for the inquiry, highlighted at the top of the next page.

ACTIVITY TASKS

- Pose a broad open ended question. Provide background information.
- Students respond to questions in this packet independently or with a partner.
- Consider doing one of the following to extend the exercise:
 - Facilitate student discussion of the compelling question.
 - Facilitate a 4-corner debate.
 - Facilitate a structured academic controversy.
 - Students assume the characters involved and discuss the compelling question in character.
- Students craft an argument.

C3 FRAMEWORK

D1.1.9-12. Explain how a question reflects an enduring issue in the field.

D1.2.9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.

D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations.

D2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

Inquiry Activity: How did the Byzantine's portray Mary of Egypt?

In this inquiry students will examine portrayals of Mary of Egypt to discuss perceptions of gender and sexuality as portrayed in the Byzantine Empire.

Background: Mary of Egypt is an honored Coptic and Orthodox saint who abandoned her life of prostitution for a virtuous life. She fled to the desert where she almost starved, by some accounts to protect men from her lust. She likely lived between 344 and 421 CE in Egypt and Palestine. Below are some Byzantine accounts of Mary's life and a Byzantine painting of Mary.

Account 1: Zomias narrative from Saint Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, over 100 years after the life of Mary

Zosima... went far, far into the desert with a secret hope of finding some father who might be living there and who might be able to satisfy his thirst and longing. And he wandered on tireless, as if hurrying on to some definite place... he suddenly saw... the semblance of a human body. At first he was confused thinking he beheld a vision of the devil, and even started with fear... It was naked, the skin dark as if burned up by the heat of the sun; the hair on its head was white as a fleece, and not long, falling just below its neck. Zosima was so overjoyed at beholding a human form that he ran after it in pursuit, but the form fled from him. He followed. At length, when he was near enough to be heard, he shouted: "Why do you run from an old man and a sinner?... "Forgive me for God's sake, but I cannot turn towards you and show you my face, Abba Zosima. For I am a woman and naked as you see with the uncovered shame of my body. But if you would like to fulfil one wish of a sinful woman, throw me your cloak so that I can cover my body and can turn to you and ask for your blessing." Here terror seized Zosima, for he heard that she called him by name. But he realized that she could not have done so without knowing anything of him if she had not had the power of spiritual insight. He at once did as he was asked. He took off his old, tattered cloak and threw it to her, turning away as he did so. she picked it up and was able to cover at least a part of her body.

Then she turned to Zosima and said: "Why did you wish, Abba Zosima, to see a sinful woman? ... Know, holy father, that I am only a sinful woman, though I am guarded by Holy baptism. And I am no spirit but earth and ashes, and flesh alone." And with these words she guarded herself with the sign of the Cross on her forehead, eyes, mouth and breast...

[T]he elder fell to the ground and, embracing her feet, he said with tears: "I beg you, by the Name of Christ our God... Tell me all, I implore you..."

"I am ashamed, Abba, to speak to you of my disgraceful life, forgive me for God's sake! But as you have already seen my naked body I shall likewise lay bare before you my work, so that you may know with what shame and obscenity my soul is filled..."

"My native land, holy father, was Egypt. Already during the lifetime of my parents, when I was twelve years old, I renounced their love and went to Alexandria. I am ashamed to recall how there I at first ruined my maidenhood and then unrestrainedly and insatiably gave myself up to sensuality... And it was not for the sake of gain -- here I speak the pure truth. Often when they wished to pay me, I refused the

money. I acted in this way so as to make as many men as possible to try to obtain me, doing free of charge what gave me pleasure... Then one summer I saw a large crowd... running towards the sea... I was suddenly filled with a desire to go, Abba, to have more lovers who could satisfy my passion. I told you, Abba Zosima, not to force me to tell you of my disgrace. God is my witness, I am afraid of defiling you and the very air with my words."

Zosima, weeping, replied to her: "Speak on for God's sake, mother, speak and do not break the thread of such an edifying tale."

And, resuming her story, she went on: "...Shamelessly, as usual, I mixed with the crowd, saying, 'Take me with you to the place you are going to; you will not find me superfluous.'... At daybreak I saw that everyone was hurrying to the church, so I ran with the rest. When the hour for the holy elevation approached, I was trying to make my way in with the crowd which was struggling to get through the church doors.

"I had at last squeezed through with great difficulty almost to the entrance of the temple... But when I trod on the doorstep which everyone passed, I was stopped by some force which prevented by entering... Thinking that this had happened because of my woman's weakness, I again began to work my way into the crowd, trying to elbow myself forward. But in vain I struggled. Again my feet trod on the doorstep over which others were entering the church without encountering any obstacle. I alone seemed to remain unaccepted by the church. It was as if there was a detachment of soldiers standing there to oppose my entrance... The word of salvation gently touched the eyes of my heart and revealed to me that it was my unclean life which barred the entrance to me. I began to weep and lament and beat my breast, and to sigh from the depths of my heart.

"And so I stood weeping when I saw above me the ikon of the most holy Mother of God. Not taking my eyes off her, I said, 'O Lady, Mother of God, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word, I know, O how well I know, that it is no honour or praise to thee when one so impure and depraved as I look up to thy icon, O ever-virgin, who didst keep thy body and soul in purity...

"As I was leaving the church a stranger glanced at me and gave me three coins, saying: 'Sister, take these.' And, taking the money, I bought three loaves and took them with me on my journey, as a blessed gift... I lay down and passed the night on the ground. In the morning I found a small boat and crossed to the opposite bank. I again prayed to Our Lady to lead me whither she wished. Then I found myself in this desert and since then up to this very day I am estranged from all, keeping away from people and running away from everyone. And I live here clinging to my God Who saves all who turn to Him from faintheartedness and storms."

Zosima asked her: "How many years have gone by since you began to live in this desert?" She replied: "Forty-seven years have already gone by, I think, since I left the holy city."

Zosima asked: "Can it be that you did not need food and clothing?" She answered: "After finishing the loaves I had... I have fed on herbs and all that can be found in the desert. The clothes I had when I crossed the Jordan became torn and worn out. I suffered greatly from the cold and greatly from the extreme heat..."

Thus concluding her tale she bowed down before him... For the whole year he kept silent, not daring to tell anyone of what he had seen... And when another year had

Visual Accounts:



3 Mary of Egypt and Zosimas. London, British Library, Theodore Psalter (Add. Ms. 19352), fol. 68r. (photo: © The British Library Board. Add. Ms. 19352 is reproduced by permission of the British Library Board, with all rights reserved)



John the Baptist and Virgin Mary. Church of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou, Cyprus. (photo: The Byzantine Institute and Dumbarton Oaks fieldwork records and papers, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C.)

Betancourt, Roland. "Fragment: Toward a Critical Trans History of Bizantium." *Ancient Jew Review*. January 15, 2020.
<https://www.ancientjewreview.com/articles/2020/1/9/fragment-toward-a-critical-trans-history-of-bizantium>.

1. Does the image of Mary align with the description of Mary in Account 1?
2. Putting Mary next to the image of John the Baptiste and the Virgin Mary, is Mary of Egypt more similar to John the Baptiste or the Virgin Mary?
3. Why do you think Mary becomes more masculine during her transition to sainthood?
4. What do these accounts suggest about gender, sexuality, and a virtuous life according to the Byzantines?