

Worksheet 4.1

Student Name _____ Date _____

Questions for Directed Reading of Speech Suggested Answers

“Violence against Women and the Example of the Mirabal Sisters”

Directions: As you read the speech by Minou Tavárez Mirabal, answer the following questions. Be sure that you provide evidence from the speech for your answers.

1. What is the earliest example that the speaker gives of women’s political participation in what would become the Dominican Republic?

Taina women (the indigenous women of Hispaniola) committed suicide rather than become mothers of children fathered by Spaniards.

Does this event show up in history book(s) that your school uses? If not, why do you think it is omitted?

(Answers will vary)

2. Why does she say women can be described as “the invisible half of history?” What task does Minou set before us to rectify that situation?

Primary sources generally have recorded the deeds of men, and thus historians using primary sources are more likely to write the history of men. Women (and non-literate males, for that matter) did not leave written records.

Minou wants us to rescue them from oblivion, make the world see women’s contributions, and hold them up as examples for us to follow.

3. Name a central focus of the political dynamic in democratic countries and those striving for democracy. What special difficulties do women face in achieving this special focus?

The focus has been political participation —giving women the right to vote and to hold public office. Women need formal machinery (such as laws widening suffrage and their enforcement), leadership experience, and the ability to forge alliances to gain political power.

Courage “*In the Time of the Butterflies*”: A Common Core Exemplar

4. Consider forces in the 21st century that enhance that central focus. What forces existing in the 21st century detract from that central focus? Would it be easier or more difficult for women to lead a revolutionary movement today?

Forces that enhance focus: Students may suggest greater educational opportunities for women, availability of birth control to limit family size, the communications revolution, including the Internet.

Forces that detract from that focus: Laws in certain countries that limit women’s freedom or access to the vote; the prevalence of AIDS, especially in sub-Saharan Africa; the growing problem of violence against women.

5. Give examples of how violence against women has shaped the political evolution in the Dominican Republic.

Women are demanding more legal protections and solutions to the problem of gender violence and intra-family (i.e. domestic) violence.

6. How serious a problem is violence against women in the Dominican Republic?

Minou cited statistics showing the high level of violence there:

- *Nearly 911 women killed by husbands and boyfriends;*
- *8000 cases of domestic violence reported during the calendar year (not yet concluded);*
- *A woman is raped every five and a half hours;*
- *40% of Dominican children have suffered abuse of some kind.*

7. What was the reason Minou gave for Minerva and her sisters taking on political leadership in the 1940s and 1950s—at a time when the collective imagination envisaged women as confined to domestic roles? Do you agree this was the reason?

Minou said that their leadership may have come from the fact that they were from a family comprised mainly of women, so they assumed less conventional roles. They were educated women as well. Minerva, Minou’s mother, resisted seduction by Trujillo and joined with other young people to oppose him. They wanted to overthrow his tyrannical and corrupt regime and bring democracy to the Dominican Republic. The sisters’ arrest and those of their husbands generated popular sympathy for their cause. Students may also point out that Minerva was frustrated in her career by Trujillo’s refusal to grant her a license to practice law; a woman with such intelligence and strength would look for another outlet for her energies.

Courage “*In the Time of the Butterflies*”: A Common Core Exemplar

8. According to Minou Tavárez Mirabal, what role did her mother play in shaping political events? How was her participation limited? Her father was named president of the movement and not her mother. Why?

“[S]he was the person who showed the most leadership, firmness, organizational ability and political acumen to guide the group.” In those days, a woman could not assume leadership over an organization made up mainly of men. She had to serve as an inspiration, but could not hold an official leadership position.

9. What qualities do the women pushing for representation have that has led to the progress made in the Dominican Republic?

Minou cited the “ability to seek consensus, to develop strategies and set priorities and timetables, to agree with each other over and above partisan factions or controversies...”

10. Minou Tavárez Mirabal is speaking about the women of the Dominican Republic. Do you think her words have relevance for women in the United States? Give evidence to support your answer.

(Answers will vary)

Students may feel that women in the United States have achieved equality and that women’s participation in voting is the equal of men’s. However, other students may point to the small number of women holding high elective office, such as governorships or positions in Congress. There has not yet been a woman president.

Students may also point to the existence of violence against women, in terms of both the frequency of reported rapes and the level of domestic violence. Some may cite women’s increased participation in the workforce; others may point to discrepancies in pay for the same work.