

**"New Directions" by Maya Angelou
Enrichment: Women and Work**

Women's Work in the Late 1800s and Early 1900s

In "New Directions," Annie Johnson examines job possibilities for herself and realizes that her choices are limited. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, job opportunities for all women—and especially African American women—were quite limited. Many women married simply because they had no way to support themselves. Once they were married, they often found themselves controlled by strict standards of behavior that their husbands and their communities expected of them.

The lives of women had been severely limited for centuries, but a few American women began to shake the old stereotypes of a woman's role. Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) pioneered the fight to give women the right to vote, receive equal pay, and take part in political movements. Nellie Bly (1867–1922) became one of the country's first female newspaper reporters. She went undercover to write articles that exposed various social problems, and she traveled around the world. Writers such as Kate Chopin (1851–1904) and Mary Wilkins Freeman (1852–1930) caused a scandal when they wrote novels and stories about women characters who challenged traditional roles. Each of these women, like Annie Johnson, worked to cut new paths for themselves and for women everywhere.

A. DIRECTIONS: *Imagine that Annie Johnson or one of the other women mentioned above could walk down the streets of your community today. How do you think she would feel about the changes she sees in the lives of women today? Which aspects of today's world might seem like progress? Where might she find need for improvement? Write complete sentences.*

1. **Progress:** _____

2. **Needs improvement:** _____

B. DIRECTIONS: *On a separate piece of paper, write a letter to Annie Johnson or one of the other women mentioned above. Explain how you think the work done by the woman whom you have chosen has been beneficial to women as a group and to society as a whole. If necessary, use the Internet, an encyclopedia, or another library source to find out more details about the work of the woman whom you have chosen.*