



**2017 BE INSPIRED Essay Contest | Age Group: Grades 8-9**

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner: Rachel Bina  
Age: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade  
School: Ingomar Middle School (North Allegheny)

---

It is 1851, 10 years before the Civil War, and dissent is stirring. Americans are beginning to fight back against slavery. Many Northern states have outlawed slavery for decades. Black rights movements are trying to completely abolish slavery and give blacks civil rights. The same movements are beginning to make women question why they cannot have the right to vote as well. In Akron, Ohio there is a conference for women's suffrage that is attended by many well-known figures. Among them, a black woman who demands civil rights for all is speaking. She gives her most famous speech "Ain't I A Woman", talking about her struggles that came about as a slave even while being a 'delicate' woman, exposing the contradictions of society's view of women and the reality of women in slavery. Her speech showed those at the conference that women in slavery had to work just as hard as men, while white women were thought of as delicate and unable to work. That woman was Sojourner Truth.

Sojourner Truth worked towards two main issues during her life: abolishing slavery and women's suffrage. Although she could neither read nor write, Sojourner Truth spoke passionately about both subjects. In her most famous speech, "Ain't I A Woman", Sojourner Truth showed exemplary bravery by standing up and speaking in response to men at the conference who claimed that women were delicate and less intelligent than men and therefore could not vote. Even while she was discouraged to speak, for fear that she would talk about abolishing slavery, Truth spoke with great impact about women's suffrage. Even after slavery was outlawed in the U.S., Truth continued to work for women's suffrage until her death. She was not content with one of her goals being achieved, her sense of morality would not allow her to rest at just abolishing slavery.

Sojourner Truth persevered in her beliefs and causes even when it made her life become difficult. She endured the oppression of slavery, and gained her freedom. She lost her children to slavery, then gained them back by persevering through court, disadvantaged though she was. Neither did she give up when blacks gained freedom, but women did not gain the freedom to vote. Sojourner Truth, in addition to being perseverant, was courageous, and had an impeccable character. She showed immense courage throughout her life. She spoke in front of multitudes of people, some of whom were less than welcoming, in light of her race and gender. She escaped slavery when her master would not free her, even though he had agreed to. Sojourner Truth even had the courage to sue a white man. Sojourner Truth had such an admirable character that she only ran away from slavery when her master would not release her when he had promised to and slavery was abolished in the state she lived. Her sense of justice would not let her steal her children back, but instead she sued and got them back through a lawful process. She was the kind of person I aspire to be like now, and what we all should aspire to be like.

Sojourner Truth and Maya Angelou both faced many hardships and shared many important characteristics that allowed them to bring about the change they did. Both were strong, independent, women who persevered, and were faithful to their causes to the end. Angelou was faced with extreme racial divisions in the South, and Truth was faced with the blight that was slavery. However, neither woman conformed to the time's standards of African Americans. Their strength allowed them to work to change those standards. In addition to their strength, their independence allowed them to support themselves and their children in times when blacks were not readily accepted. Sojourner Truth worked for abolishment of slavery until it was achieved, and women's suffrage until her death. Later in her life, she proclaimed, "Now, if you want me to get out of the world, you had better get the women votin' soon. I shan't go till I can do that." Maya Angelou worked in Civil Rights movements in the U.S. and South Africa as well. They both were faithful to their causes until they died. All of these qualities allowed both women to survive their struggles and help bring about positive, radical change in how the world viewed African Americans and women.

Maya Angelou and Sojourner Truth were both exceedingly inspiring women. From researching their lives I can see how it is possible to achieve your goals, even when the situation is unfair and you are disadvantaged. Their lives have shown me how women are able to achieve even in times with harsher conditions than today. They both faced many terrible hardships all of which demonstrated how women can persevere and even thrive in societies dominated by men. Sojourner Truth and Maya Angelou deserve a place of honor among us, not only for their strength but their contributions to society by endeavoring to give equal rights to all.

Both of these women have inspired me to try to do what they did - to work towards equality and justice for all people. However, there must be equality before justice can be attained, for if there is no equality, there is no justice. They have inspired me to continue to pursue a career in STEM, even though there are issues in equality in most STEM fields, as there are few women. Sojourner Truth and Maya Angelou have also inspired me to continue to pursue my interests in the arts. Even though the arts are thought of as 'softer sciences' and for women, arts are a way to express emotion and ideas, no matter the language you speak. Sojourner Truth and Maya Angelou have shown me that I can pursue what I wish to, even if it's hard. They have shown me that I can pursue STEM and the arts, and prove that women can do as much as men, as they did.