

Genre Narrative Nonfiction



Who Says Women Can't Be Doctors?

The Story of Elizabeth Blackwell

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AUDIO

Audio with
Highlighting



ANNOTATE



allowed told you could do or have something

- 1 I'll bet you've met plenty of doctors in your life. And I'll bet lots of them were women.
- 2 Well, you might find this hard to believe, but there once was a time when girls weren't *allowed* to become doctors.





- 3 Back in the 1830s, there were lots of things girls couldn't be. Girls were only supposed to become wives and mothers. Or maybe teachers, or seamstresses.
- 4 Being a doctor was definitely not an option.
- 5 What do you think changed all that? Or should I say ... WHO?

CLOSE READ

Identify Text Structure

A biography is written in time, or chronological, order. The author starts when the person is young. Underline the words that tell when this biography begins.



- 6 Elizabeth Blackwell, that's who. A tiny wisp of a girl who wanted to explore around every corner and who never walked away from a challenge.

challenge

something difficult that requires extra work





Ask and Answer Questions

Highlight any text that you can ask questions about. What is one question you might ask about the text you highlighted?



- 7 This was a girl who had once carried her brother over her head until he backed down from their fight.
- 8 A girl who tried sleeping on the hard floor with no covers, just to toughen herself up.
- 9 A girl who climbed up to her roof and stretched out as far as possible with a spyglass to see what was happening on the other side of town.





10 But she hadn't always wanted to be a doctor. Actually, blood made her queasy. One time, her teacher used a bull's eyeball to show students how eyes work. Elizabeth was repulsed.

11 And she hadn't always wanted to help the sick. She had no patience for being sick herself. Whenever she felt ill, she simply went outside for a walk. Once, when she was little, she hid in a closet until she felt better. She hated anyone fussing over her.



- 12 So why did she become the first woman doctor? Because one person believed she could and told Elizabeth she was just the kind of smart, determined girl who would change the world.
- 13 That person was Mary Donaldson. When Elizabeth was twenty-four, she went to visit her friend who was very ill. Mary told Elizabeth that she would have much preferred being examined by a woman. She urged Elizabeth to consider becoming a doctor.

Identify Text Structure

Underline the words that tell why Elizabeth Blackwell decided to become a doctor.

determined
showing strong purpose; unwilling to quit







14 At first, Elizabeth could not believe her ears. Even if a girl *could* be a doctor, why would *she* want to be one?

15 But Mary's idea gnawed at Elizabeth.

16 A female doctor.



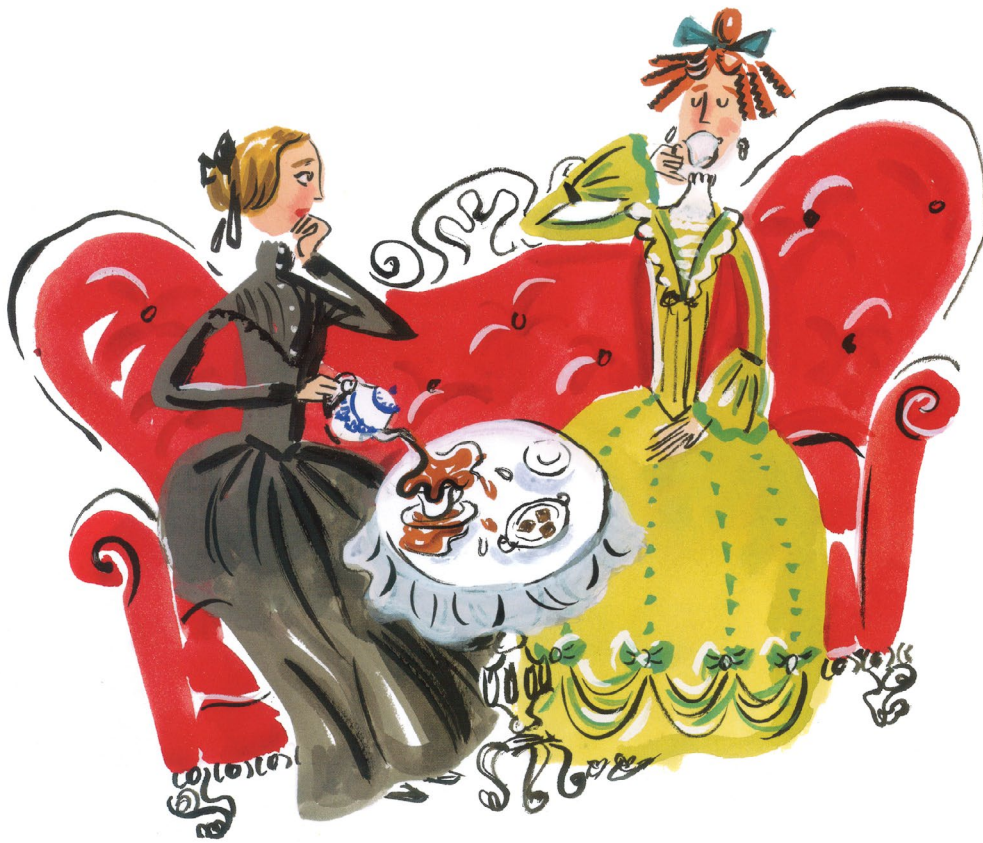
17 Elizabeth thought about it the second she got up in the morning.

18 She thought about it during sewing circles.



Vocabulary in Context

Underline the words on this page that help you know what **gnawed at** means.



- 19 She thought about it over tea.
- 20 She even dreamed about it at night.





21 Finally, Elizabeth asked doctors and friends. Some thought it was a good idea, but didn't think there was any way it could be done. Others said it wasn't right.

Ask and Answer Questions

Highlight any text on this page that you can ask a question about.





Identify Text Structure

Underline the words that tell the reason why Elizabeth became a teacher.



24 Some people actually laughed at her. They thought she was joking! Elizabeth didn't see *anything* funny about a woman becoming a doctor.

25 Elizabeth thought it was a fine idea, and her family supported her. She worked as a teacher to earn money and applied to a handful of medical schools. But they all sent back the same answer:

NO.

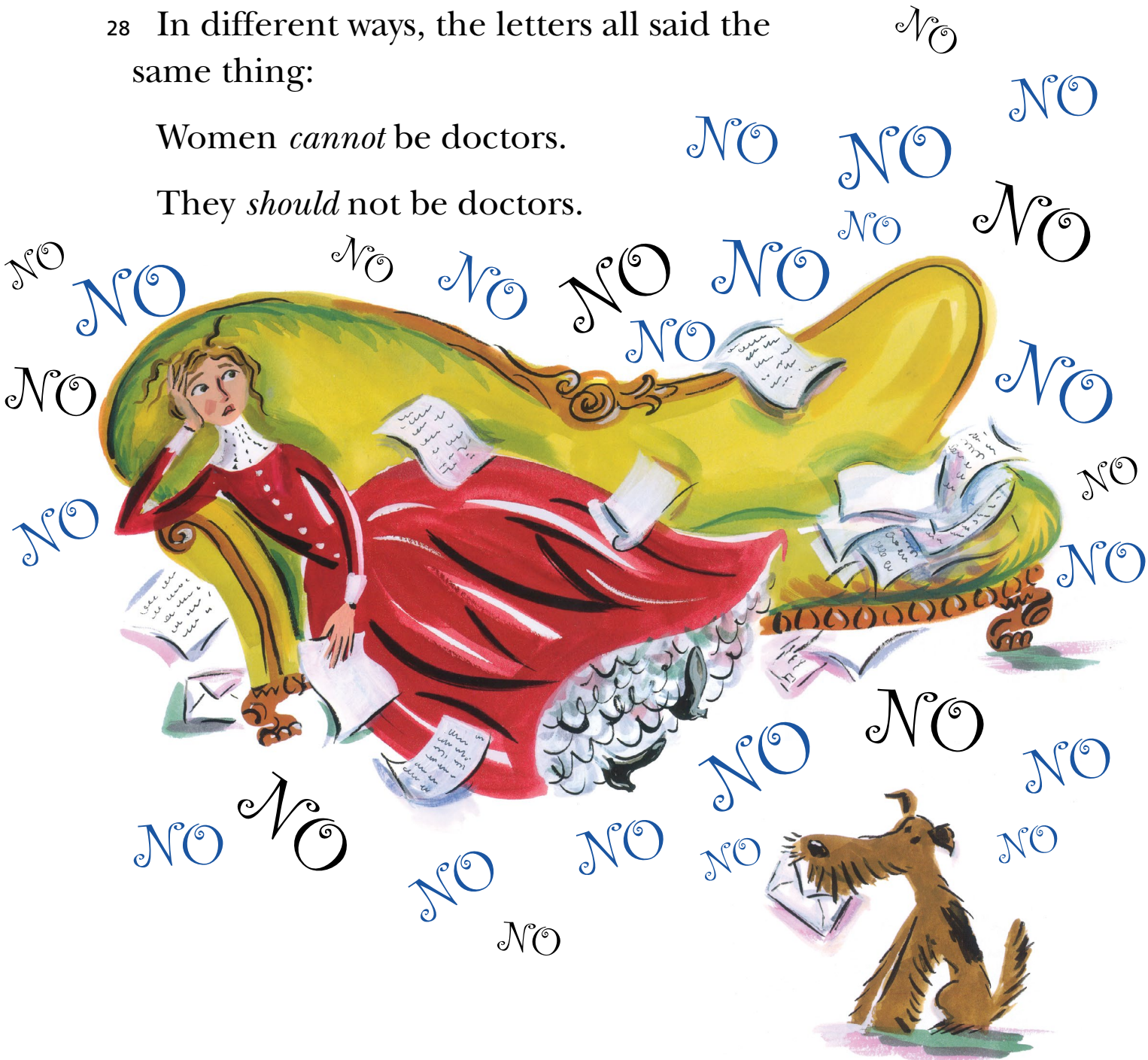
26 No women allowed. She tried other schools. More letters arrived at her door. One by one, the answer was always the same.

27 Twenty-eight NOs in all.

28 In different ways, the letters all said the same thing:

Women *cannot* be doctors.

They *should* not be doctors.





Identify Text Structure

Underline the words that tell the effect, or result, of Elizabeth not giving up.

refused did not do something



29 But Elizabeth didn't believe in *couldn't* or *shouldn't*. She refused to give up. She was as stubborn as a mule. Quite rightly!

30 One day, an envelope arrived from a college. She opened it and everything changed. The answer was ...

YES!

31 Elizabeth packed her bags for Geneva Medical School in upstate New York.





- 32 The townspeople were expecting her.
- 33 As she walked down the street, some pointed and stared. They whispered to themselves that she must be wicked—or crazy.
- 34 Elizabeth thought that at least the students wanted her there.
- 35 Except they didn't.



Ask and Answer Questions

Highlight any details that you have questions about.

accept to take something that is offered; to see something as right or correct

36 The teachers had let the students vote on whether or not to allow Elizabeth to come. And the boys, figuring the school would never really accept a girl, said yes. They planned to turn the whole thing into a big joke.

37 But the joke was on them!



38 Their raucous laughter turned to
silence as the ladylike Elizabeth took her
seat.

39 They wondered what kind of girl she
was.

40 The kind of girl who wouldn't take
the bait.





41 Some thought a girl wouldn't be able to keep up.

42 Except Elizabeth did keep up, often studying past midnight.



43 Elizabeth proved she was as smart as any boy.

44 And soon the boys wanted to know what Elizabeth thought about this or that.

45 It took the townspeople longer to accept her. Some people are afraid of anything new or different.

46 Not Elizabeth.

Ask and Answer Questions

Highlight any detail you can ask a question about to deepen your understanding.

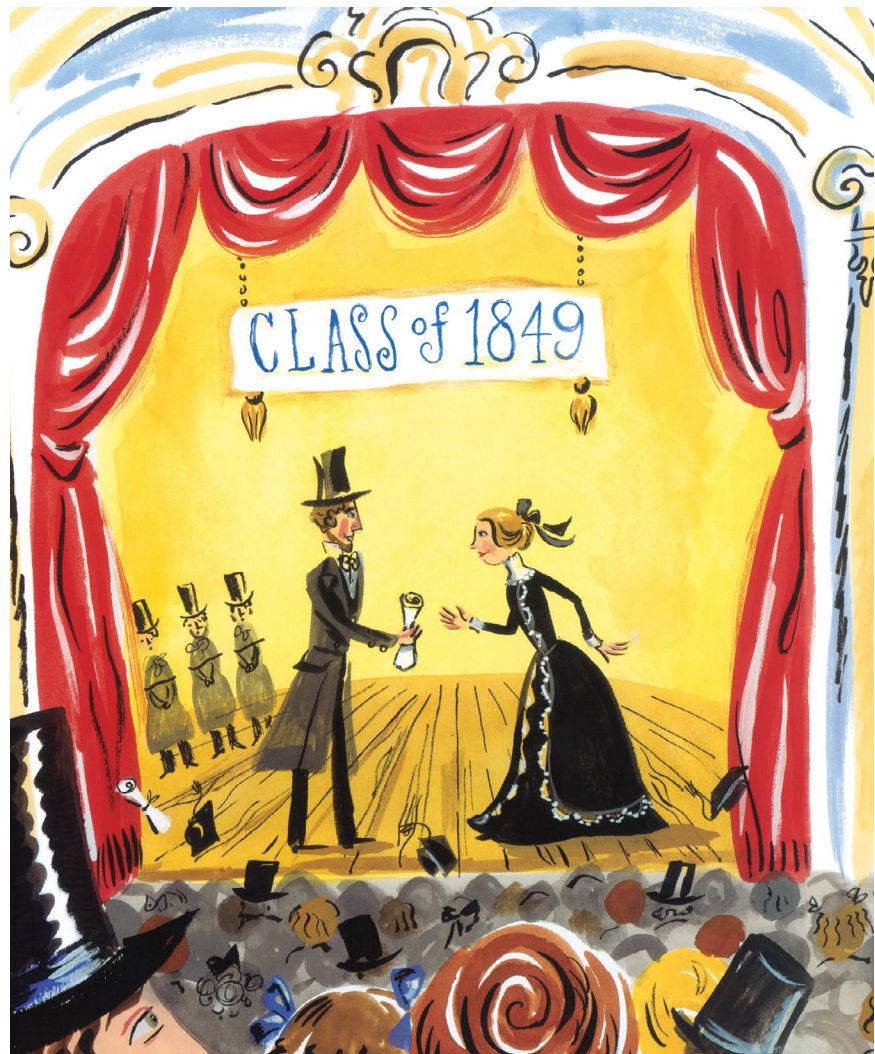




Identify Text Structure

Underline the part of the text that tells when Elizabeth became a doctor.

- 47 On January 23, 1849, Elizabeth graduated ... with the highest grades in the whole class!
- 48 She had become the first woman doctor in America.
- 49 Although many people were proud, others were angry. One doctor even wrote, “I hope, for the honor of humanity, that [she] will be the last.”





50 But as you know, she certainly was

NOT.

