

The Amelia Bloomer Project

Named for 19th century women's rights activist and editor for the first newspaper by and for women, *The Lily*, the American Library Association's Feminist Task Force's *Amelia Bloomer Project* aims to offer young readers (ages 0-18 years) a wide array of feminine voices that defy oppressive gender norms and to help them learn to empower themselves and others through examples of fiction and nonfiction children's literature.



Amelia Bloomer was a strong voice in the Temperance Movement, contributing her opinion frequently in publications such as the *Temperance Star* and the *Water Bucket*. Once Bloomer and her feminist peers established *The Lily* she became entirely devoted to it and took it entirely upon herself to make the paper succeed. Arguably, the most important contribution Amelia Bloomer made to the feminist movement was to help put writing at the center of political change. She explains that writing “was a needed instrumentality to spread abroad the truth of the new gospel to woman” (Bloomer 45). Acting as publisher and editor of *The Lily* exposed Bloomer to the more radical ideas of her peers and she eventually converted strongly to the notion that laws suppressing and supporting the oppressive patriarchal paradigm require concrete political action on the part of women, which would command women's suffrage.



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Feminist Task Force of the American Library Association's Social Responsibility Round Table.

The best feminist books
for young readers, birth through age 18

The American Library Association, the umbrella organization under which the Amelia Bloomer Project falls, was founded in 1876 with the intent to “provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all” (“About ALA”). In order to achieve this goal effectively for the public, the ALA created a committee called the Feminist Task Force (FTF) in 1970. Founded by women who desired to tackle sexism in libraries, the FTF became responsible for focusing on an ever-evolving set of women’s issues within the context of libraries, librarianship, and circulating literature. A subset of the FTF is the Amelia Bloomer Project (ABP), founded by women 50 years later in 2002. The creation of the ABP was inspired by the publication of Shana Carey’s *You Forgot Your Skirt, Amelia Bloomer!* Carey’s picture-book brought attention to the budding need for feminist-positive children’s literature for young readers that “spur the imagination and expand the limits of dreams while confronting traditional female stereotypes” (Baltes par. 4). This is the mission of the Amelia Bloomer Project and has remained as such over the past 12 years of its publication.

Project Criteria

In order to be selected as an Amelia Bloomer Project book, it must meet a vital set of four criteria:

1. Significant Feminist Content
2. Excellence in Writing
3. Appealing Format
4. Age Appropriateness for Young Readers

The Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature and The Amelia Bloomer Project

The Baldwin Library, curated by Suzan Alteri, not only houses many of the books selected by the American Library Association's Amelia Bloomer Project's Round Table, but in its collection of over 100,000 books, The Baldwin contains a wide variety of pre-Amelia Bloomer Project (c. 2002) books that meet the criteria for feminist content.

The Amelia Bloomer Project and First Wave Feminism: An Annotated Bibliography of Historical Children’s Literature

Adams, Jean, Margaret Kimball, and Jeanette Eaton. *Heroines of the Sky*. Garden City:
Doubleday, Doran &, 1942. Print.

This work of nonfiction celebrates the lives and heroism of women air pilots who defied the strict conventions of their day that aimed to exclude them from pioneering flight. These heroines of the sky broke records and showed incredible determination in making history in the face of exclusionary tradition.

Alcott, Louisa M. *Little Women*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869. Print.

Written during the First Wave Feminist movement, Alcott's novel provided a model for nontraditional womanhood and femininity. When their father Mr. March leaves his wife and children to serve in the Union Army, sisters Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy strive to balance their domestic duties with self-exploration; through trial and tribulation, the sisters attempt to push back against the strict boundaries set for women and girls in American society in the 19th century.

Baker, Rachel. *The First Woman Doctor: The Story of Elizabeth Blackwell*. New York: J. Messner, 1944. Print.

A history of Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to receive a medical degree in the United States. This biography focuses on Dr. Blackwell's ambition and desire to overcome a non-inclusive professional environment and the belief in herself and self-determination it took to achieve her goals.

Bremer, Fredrika. "The Little Girl Who Is Worth Her Weight in Gold." Trans. Margaret Howitt. *The Butterfly's Gospel*. London: Jackson, Walford, and Hodder, 1865. 50-61. Print.

A little girl is praised and prized for her "clear insight of what she has to do in the world" (54). She performs her domestic duties and chores, but dreams of what she may become someday beyond that.

Burnett, Frances H. *The Secret Garden*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1911. Print.

When her parents die of cholera in India, Mary, now an orphan, is sent to England to live with her uncle. While living mostly alone in his large mansion, Mary takes it upon herself to find adventure. Mary is a character that defies the literary tradition of the self-sacrificing angelic heroine of her time.

Garst, Shannon. *Amelia Earhart, Heroine of the Skies*. New York: J. Messner, 1947. Print.

Published less than 30 years after the passage of the 19th amendment that granted women's suffrage, this work of nonfiction tells a pointed story of a very individualistic Amelia Earhart who broke solo flight records and shared her passion for science.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1850. Print.

Written at the beginning of the growing feminist movement, Hawthorne's protagonist breaks the cultural bounds and expectations of patriarchal society, exercises autonomy, and gains personal power in the face of the conflicting predicaments placed upon women in the 17th (and 19th) century.

Macdonald, George. *The Princess and the Goblin*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1879.

Princess Irene and her friend Curdie, a miner's son, go on a quest to stop a terrible plan of the goblins who live underground in the mountains surrounding Irene's palace. Macdonald's turn of the century text poses Irene as a strong heroine with her own thoughts, mind, and feminist voice, even rescuing her male counterpart.

Montgomery, L. M. *Anne of Green Gables*. Boston: L.C. Page, 1906. Print.

A young orphan girl, Anne Shirley, is accidentally sent to living with a farming family in a small village in lieu of a young boy. In a very strictly conservative and traditional society of gender roles and norms of Avonlea, Anne fights against gender constrictions. Through her protagonist's thoughts and actions, Montgomery's text challenges these confining roles through Anne's sense of adventure and struggle with domesticity.

Porter, Gene S. *A Girl of the Limberlost*. New York: Doubleday, Page, 1909. Print.

Elnora Comstock, the story's main character, is an atypical early 20th century female protagonist; she is portrayed as self-motivated, hardworking, resolute, and unabashedly interested and successful in science.

Rossetti, Christina. *Goblin Market*. First ed. Boston: David R. Godine, 1981. Print.

Filled only with female characters, Rossetti's long poem explores the exclusively female world of sisters Laura and Lizzie, living on their own and battling against temptation and the villainy and treachery of the goblins.