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Study Guide for:

MARY LYON: PRECIOUS TIME

— Producer, Director, Writer - Jean Mudge



Julie Harris restores Mary Lyon to her historic fame as one of America's leading educational pioneers. From rural Buckland, Massachusetts, Lyon, a gifted student, vowed first to educate herself and then help all able women be educated. She would focus on their "precious time" between girlhood and a teaching career or marriage. Inspired by the model of Amherst College, she took her hopes first to Ipswich Academy near Boston, all the while planning for her dream – the first institution of higher learning for women. Mount Holyoke Seminary opened its doors in South Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1837. As missionary wives or single women, Lyon's graduates immediately went to China, Japan, the Middle East and Africa as well as to Native Americans and blacks in America's West and South. Her influence touched, and still touches, the globe.

Topics for Discussion

1. Mary Lyon's humble origins didn't prevent her from having high ambitions. What gave her the strength to pursue her goals? In priority, what were those goals?
2. The decisive role of male mentors in Lyon's story, like Edward Hitchcock of Amherst College, is evident. Why were they drawn to her mission? How crucial were they to her success?
3. How did Lyon's experiences at Ipswich Academy lead her to design Mount Holyoke along similar but different lines? What role did Zilpah Grant play?
4. What curricular models did Lyon use as she prepared to open Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1837?

Related Areas of Study

1. A number of female academies were available in America in Lyon's day. Why did she choose a different sort of education for young women?
2. In Lyon's day, what careers were open to women for work outside of marriage?

Film Facts

Today, Mount Holyoke College is noted for its record of distinguished graduates in the sciences, its equestrian program, and the excellence of its oarswomen. How are these contemporary virtues of the College reflected in this historical profile of its founder?