

## Coming of Age as a Female in Turn-of-the-Century Illinois:

### Comparing Fiction and Primary Sources



This lesson explores the roles of females in the family and in society by comparing the pictorial lives of Mary and Phoebe Sadorus in the **Sadorus Photograph Collection** and the fictional live of the characters Euterpe, Adelaide, Lottie, and Rosie in **Richard Peck's novel *Fair Weather***. The setting of the novel is within 50 miles of the Sadorus farm and the time frame, 1893, is only a decade earlier.

*Left: Mary Sadorus*

**Objective:** Students will be able to collect, compare, and discuss information about the social system and its changes from these sources and others, making inferences, assertions, and arguments about them in the lives of the people and characters.

**Grade Level:** Early High School, Late High School

**Time Required:** Students will read the novel and discuss and make notes on the female characters. Students will examine the Sadorus Collection photos looking for clues about the lives of the women and discuss these same topics. Then students will research other print and Web resources on turn-of-the-century rural and urban life in the Midwest to find facts that support or refute what they have

found in the novel and the photograph collection.

Students will read the novel, discussing and making notes on the female characters about the topics of female choices and opportunities regarding:

- Role in the family
- Marriage
- Jobs
- Role in society
- Rural vs. urban society and roles
- Economic independence
- Education

### Questions to guide study and discussion:

1. Growing up and becoming ladylike was often mentioned by Rosie and was a theme of the novel. How is leaving childhood things behind scary and exciting at the same time? How did this affect Lottie? Rosie? Looking back over her life, how had it affected Adelaide? Euterpe? Any regrets? Why do you think Adelaide refused to go on the trip to Chicago?

2. How did the novel's female characters (Lottie and Rosie) 'improve' their lives compared to the previous generation's characters (Euterpe and Adelaide)?
3. What choices might Lottie have had if she had stayed on the farm? Was it common for young rural women to move to the cities? How might life have been different for Mary Sadorus when she moved to town after the farm was sold?
4. What choices might Mary Sadorus have had or not had for education, marriage, and economic independence?
5. How was Mary Sadorus' life different from or similar to her mother's?
6. What changes in technology would alter the lives of women at the turn of the century?
7. In the novel, were the opportunities Euterpe thought she had in the city any wider than those she thought the girls had in the country? How had the death of her husband revealed Euterpe's lack of coping skills? How did the girls, with their younger attitudes and lack of social inhibitions, help Euterpe see new opportunities for herself?
8. Describe the difference in attitudes toward people and society that Grandpa and Euterpe displayed? How much could be attributed to their gender roles? How much to their upbringing and life experience?
9. What prejudices did rural people seem to have about the people of Chicago? What prejudices did the residents of Chicago have about rural people? Were these perceptions true? How different were the two sets of people? In what ways?
10. How realistic is the plot and denouement of the novel? Why?

#### **ISBE Standards for Social Studies:**

**Early High School: 18.A.4** Analyze the influence of cultural factors including customs, traditions, language, media, art and architecture in developing pluralistic societies.

**Late High School: 18.A.5** Compare ways in which social systems are affected by political, environmental, economic and technological changes.

#### **Literature:**

##### **Early High School:**

**2.B.4b** Analyze form, content, purpose, and major themes of American literature (and literature of other countries) in their historical perspectives. (Identify the major themes in *Fair Weather*.)

**2.B.4c** Discuss and evaluate motive, resulting behavior, and consequences demonstrated in literature. (Evaluate the motives of the characters in *Fair Weather* and compare them with the actual motives, actions and consequences of the Sadorus women)

**Late High School: 2.B.5b** Apply knowledge gained from literature as a means of understanding contemporary and historical economic, social and political issues and perspectives. (What were the issues addressed in the novel? How were they addressed? How were they addressed in the lives of the Sadorus family members?)