



THINK FOR YOURSELF, ACT FOR EVERYONE

Four amazing humanists
who changed the world



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Understanding
Humanism

Humanist
Heritage

Think for yourself, act for everyone tells the stories of four amazing humanist women who each changed the world for the better. You'll also find additional information and questions to help you explore and discuss the women and their stories.

WHAT IS A HUMANIST?

Humanists are non-religious people who do not believe in a god. They believe that the world is a natural place, that human beings have natural origins, and that this is the one life we have. They believe it is possible to lead a good, happy, and meaningful life without religion.

Humanists recognise that we have many different natural capacities and believe we have a responsibility to make the most of them to build a fairer and kinder society. We can ask and answer questions about the world around us. We can use empathy and imagination to consider how other people might feel, and think about how to treat them well. We can make choices about how we want to live and take action to improve our own lives and the lives of others. Humanists believe we should think about the consequences of our actions on other people and animals and try to promote happiness and wellbeing. They celebrate these human capacities and the way different people have used them to make the world a better place.

Think for yourself, act for everyone

After you have read each of the stories, think about and discuss the following questions.

A very short summary of humanism is 'Think for yourself, act for everyone.'

QUESTION:

What do you think this means?

QUESTION:

In what ways did each historic humanist think for herself and act for everyone?

FLORENCE DIXIE:

the Exceptional Explorer

Florence Dixie was a bold adventurer and brave explorer.

She lived in Scotland in Victorian times. Back then, girls and women were often not allowed to do the same things as boys and men. They were not supposed to play sports or travel alone as this was considered 'unladylike'. Florence thought that this was very unfair.

Determined to do the things that interested her, Florence set up a football team for women. She wrote passionate poetry to put across the message that girls could do the same things as boys. She even went on amazing adventures. Just because things have always been done a certain way doesn't mean it cannot change. *There are exceptions.*



Let's travel back a hundred and fifty years to the time of Queen Victoria. Now let's imagine that we've just arrived on a football pitch. The bracing whip of the wind as players charge across the pitch, the sound of heavy rain beats like drums, the ball shoots through the air and a player shouts... goal! What a lively and boisterous scene. Florence is very proud to see her dream of a women's football team come to life.

'Lady Florence Dixie, Lady Florence Dixie, I have a question for you!'



Packed around the football pitch journalists wave notebooks and tap pens, impatient to talk to Florence. The press think it is very unusual to see women play football. Some even say that this is... a scandal! But Florence will not be put off by the pushy press and voices her opinions.

'There is no reason why football should not be played by women, and played well too.'

Now back then ladies were supposed to wear elegant dresses with corsets. A corset was a tight piece of fabric worn around the waist. It was made to hold women back from doing freeing activities and felt very uncomfortable to wear. Florence thought football presented a chance for women to rebel against the corset. On Florence's football team women wore clothes that were more comfortable so that they could move around. Just because things have always been done a certain way doesn't mean they cannot change. *There are exceptions.*

Football was not the only way that Florence expressed her opinions. She also wrote poetry with imaginative flair, drawing on the natural world to explore how nature made her think and feel. Her vivid writing carried a powerful message that girls could do the same things as boys. Just because things have always been done a certain way that doesn't mean they cannot change. *There are exceptions.*

Florence travelled to Patagonia, a region on the tip of South America. Compared to life in Scotland, imagine how different it was for Florence to be in Patagonia. The land was vast and covered with enormous mountains, forests and lakes. Florence relished the challenge of the unpredictable land and ever-changing winds. It was here that she made an exciting discovery about an animal.

Florence had read all about this animal in a book called *Journals of Research* by a man called Charles Darwin. Darwin was a scientist and explorer. He watched animals and wrote about their behaviour. These discoveries helped him to learn interesting things about the natural world. Darwin wrote about an animal that lived in Patagonia called a tuco-tuco. A tuco-tuco is a small, round creature with brown fur and sharp little claws. It has a pointy nose and two sharp teeth at the front of its mouth. Darwin watched the tuco-tuco and found that it lived underground. He wrote in his book that the tuco-tuco rarely ventured above ground. Was he right? Florence was keen to find out.



Imagine Florence waiting to spot a tuco-tuco. She sits on the ground beneath a basking sun. According to Darwin there will be no sign of a tuco-tuco above ground. But what's this? This little tuco-tuco is different from the rest. He has a mischievous face and seems determined to explore the world around him. Unlike the other tuco-tucos he has gone against the grain and ventured above ground. What a daring little creature.

Florence wrote a letter to Darwin to disagree with his point that the tuco-tuco rarely ventures above ground.

'I am sure it will be interesting to you to know,' Florence wrote, 'that tho' this may be the usual habits of the tuco-tuco that there are exceptions'.

Florence found a tuco-tuco who was exceptional... just like her!

Florence was a humanist because of her strong sense of fairness and justice and her belief that we should make the most of our lives. Florence's fight for women to play football helped to build a better future for girls and women. Her spark for adventure inspired explorers for years to come.



FLORENCE DIXIE: the Exceptional Explorer

- 1 Florence Dixie was **brave**. In a time when many people expected women not to do certain things, she was courageous enough to disagree. She didn't conform to what was expected of her.

When have you been brave? How did it feel? Can you imagine something you would like to do in the future that would require you to be brave?

Humanists believe we should be brave. They believe we should stand up for the things we believe in, even if other people disagree. Florence Dixie wanted men and women to be treated equally. This is called **equality**. Humanists believe that we should work for equality. That means that everyone should have the same opportunities and be treated the same way, regardless of their gender, skin colour, sexuality, religion or belief, or disabilities.

Florence also used her bravery to speak up when she learned something new about the world (when she discovered something about the behaviour of the tuco-tuco). Humanists believe we should speak up when we disagree with something and listen to other people if they disagree with us. We can do this politely and can learn from each other.

Have you ever disagreed with someone? Did you speak up?

- 2 Florence had a sense of adventure. She **made the most of her life** and the opportunities she was given. This was what led her to travel to South America

What kind of adventures would you like to go on? How might you make the most of your life?

Humanists think that life is an adventure. They believe that this is the **one life** we have and so we should make the most of it in the here and now. That means trying to find and do the things that make us **happy**. It also means supporting other people to do the same.

Humanists believe human beings can change the world for the better if they are brave and make the most of their lives in the here and now.

GEORGE ELIOT (MARY ANN EVANS):

the Imaginative Freethinker

Mary Ann Evans was an imaginative writer and passionate poet.

She lived in Victorian times. Mary Ann was a freethinker. This means that she asked questions about the world around her, made up her own mind and formed her own opinions. She thought freely.

Mary Ann wrote stories under a different name, a 'pen name': George Eliot. The pen name gave her the freedom to write about the things she wanted to write about. *Anything is possible with the power of imagination.*



Under the name George Eliot, Mary Ann wrote stories about ordinary people living ordinary lives in a way that made them interesting. Her characters were people who did both good things and bad things. They were ordinary people doing their best in life. Mary Ann's readers could see themselves in the characters, they could relate to the characters and this is what made her writing so popular. At the time it was quite unusual to write stories about ordinary people.

Imagine Mary Ann busy at her writing desk. Mary Ann writes with a pen and ink. She dips her pen into a little pot of ink. Mary Ann writes on special paper known as blotting paper. The blotting paper is made to soak up the ink. Mary Ann's writing is bold, daring and adventurous. As she writes, Mary Ann is excited to see her imagined worlds and characters come to life on the page through the words she uses. *Anything is possible with the power of imagination.*

Mary Ann's stories often featured small towns and the countryside. She explored places through her stories and the way it felt for her characters to be in those places.

Imagine Mary Ann going on a walk through a small town to get inspiration for a story. She walks along a cobbled path, a spring in her step. All around are red houses, shops and trees. A gentle breeze rustles the leaves of the trees. Mary Ann can smell apples hanging from the tree branches. She can taste the sweetness of the apples in the air. In the distance Mary Ann can hear horse's hooves beat against the path, clip clop, clip clop. Clouds rumble in skies of faded blue, it's going to rain! Mary Ann hurries home, her mind full of ideas for stories. *Anything is possible with the power of imagination.*

Mary Ann's writing became so popular that the public wanted to know who George Eliot really was. Soon enough, Mary Ann's true identity was revealed to her readers. However, Mary Ann kept her pen name George Eliot, even though her readers knew who she really was. Her readers had got used to the name George Eliot and so it made sense to keep it that way.



Mary Ann wrote a poem called '*O May I join the Choir Invisible*'. The poem explores how humans can make the world a better place for other people and how our actions and influence can continue after we are gone.

'So shall I join the choir invisible whose music is the gladness of the world'



Mary Ann believed that it was important to help make the world a better place for other people.

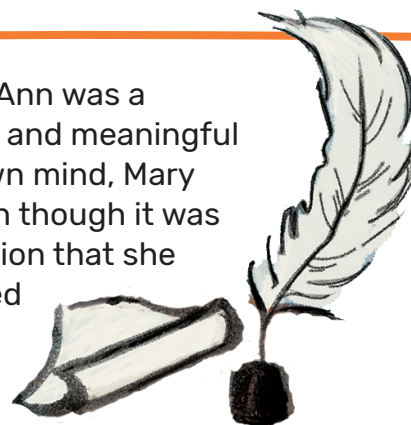


'What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?'

Mary Ann's stories helped people to see that other people were like them. We all sometimes behave well and sometimes behave badly. We might have differences from each other but we are all human beings trying to make the best of life. We should try to see the best in other people. Everyone has their own story to tell. Everyone is interesting.



Many people were religious when she was alive but Mary Ann was a humanist. She believed that it was possible to live a good and meaningful life without religion. As a freethinker who made up her own mind, Mary Ann decided that she did not need to attend church, even though it was expected of her. She thought freely and came to the opinion that she could live her life outside of religion. Mary Ann has inspired writers and freethinkers to this very day. **Anything is possible with the power of imagination.**



GEORGE ELIOT (MARY ANN EVANS): the Imaginative Freethinker

1 Mary Ann Evans wrote many novels, using her **imagination** to create her stories.

When have you used your imagination? How did it feel? Have you ever created your own story?

Humanists believe our imagination is one of the things that makes human beings special. The human imagination is the source of art and music and stories and many of the things that bring **wonder** and joy to our lives. Mary Ann Evans was fascinated and inspired by other people and the world around her.

What fascinates you about other people and the world around you?

Humanists are fascinated about the world around them. They believe through asking questions and observing the world we can learn more about other people. We can also learn from stories.

How can stories help us to understand other people?

Stories give us the chance to imagine what it might be like to be somebody else and imagine how they might feel. This is called **empathy**. Thinking about the feelings of others can help to make us kinder. Many of Mary Ann Evans' characters were people who did good things and bad things. Humanists think it's important to recognise that we can all be good but we also have our flaws. We should try to see the best in other people and recognise what we all share.

When have you thought about how someone else might feel and used that to help you decide what to do?

2 Mary Ann Evans was a **freethinker**. When she was alive it was difficult for women to get noticed as writers (that was why she wrote under a man's name). She didn't agree with the conventions of her time. She wanted to make her own decisions about how she lived her life. She also wanted to decide for herself what she wanted to write about.

What would you like to do with your life? Is there anything that stops you from doing the things you want to do?

Humanists believe everyone should be the authors of their own lives. That means we should all be allowed to choose what we believe and how we live. We should all have the **freedom** to find what makes us happy.

Humanists believe human beings can change the world for the better if they use their imagination and think freely.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN:

the Determined Discoverer

Rosalind Elsie Franklin was a determined discoverer.

Driven by curiosity, Rosalind asked questions about the world around her and the way things worked. To find truthful answers to her questions Rosalind used science. Science does not provide quick or easy answers. If you want to find an answer to your question through science, then the task ahead can be long and full of challenges. Rosalind was determined. Even when it was difficult, she kept going and made some amazing scientific discoveries that helped people for years to come.

Rosalind was born in 1920 in Notting Hill, London. She grew up in a Jewish family. From a young age, Rosalind was encouraged to be thoughtful, curious and to respect other people. Rosalind enjoyed playing with her family, she was bright and intelligent with a mischievous sense of humour. At school she excelled at her subjects, especially science.



Rosalind went to Newnham College at the University of Cambridge in England, where she studied natural sciences. She went on to become a crystallographer. She made X-ray images. An X-ray is like a photograph that helps scientists to see more than we can see with just our eyes. Rosalind used X-rays to understand more about DNA. DNA is information in our body. Scientists can learn about people by studying their DNA. To take an X-Ray of DNA, Rosalind needed a very special machine called a microscope.

Rosalind was a perfectionist. She put time and effort into the preparation of her X-Rays. All that effort paid off and she became well known for her excellent work. Her friend, Anne Sayre, wrote this of Rosalind:

Her choice was science. Her commitment to this choice was total; it was also joyful. Few people ever have taken more pure delight in what they did with their time and their talents and their energies than Rosalind took in her work.

Imagine Rosalind hard at work in a laboratory. Rosalind has put thought and care into preparing her work space. A lamp shines over the microscope so that she can see clearly. The laboratory is very quiet so as not to distract Rosalind from her important work. Rosalind stares down the microscope with sharp focus and precision. She takes delight in this work, it makes her feel happy and joyful. Rosalind makes careful notes of each new finding in a notebook, right down to the last tiny detail. A clock ticks gently to mark the passing of time. With each hour Rosalind remains dedicated. Science does not provide quick or easy answers and the task ahead is long and complicated. Rosalind is determined, even when it is difficult she keeps going. Imagine, after so much time and effort, how it may feel to make an exciting discovery!

Rosalind is best known for a photograph called *Photo 51*. It is considered a very important X-Ray image that helped scientists better understand the shape and structure of DNA and so better understand living things like plants and animals, including human beings.

Behind this image lies another powerful story: the story of the difference one person can make when they use their interests to help people. Rosalind was determined, even when it was difficult she kept going. Now her name lives on through her discoveries. Many schools, museums, galleries and laboratories have been named after Rosalind. Humanists UK has a Rosalind Franklin Lecture that takes place every March on International Women's Day.



Rosalind was a humanist because of her desire to make the world a better place using science. She identified as 'culturally' Jewish. This means that she adopted the traditions of being Jewish, but not in a religious sense. Rosalind did not believe in an afterlife. She believed that humans have one life and she intended to make the most of her time. As well as science, Rosalind enjoyed travelling, walking, cycling and climbing. Rosalind's passion and talent for science will continue to inspire scientists for years to come.



ROSALIND FRANKLIN: the Determined Discoverer

1 Rosalind Franklin was driven by **curiosity**.

What does curiosity mean?

To be curious means that you are interested in learning more about something. Perhaps you have questions about the world or about other people that you want to know the answer to.

What are you curious about? What questions do you have about human beings and the world?

Humanists believe our curiosity is one of the things that makes human beings special. They believe that we should never stop asking questions and that we should look for evidence to help us find the answers. For humanists, **science** gives us the best way of understanding the world: asking questions, testing our theories, and looking for evidence. Using science, Rosalind Franklin was able to make exciting discoveries that have helped us to better understand life.

How do you think it feels to make a big discovery? What discoveries have you made?

2 Rosalind Franklin was **determined** to find answers to big questions about life even when it was hard work.

When have you been determined?

Humanists celebrate the many discoveries that human beings have made through their determination. Our understanding of human beings and the world through science has led us to create many things (like technology and medicine) that have helped to make the world a better place.

What things can you think of that human beings have discovered or invented that makes life better today than it was in the past?

Humanists believe human beings can change the world for the better if they are curious and determined.

LORRAINE HANSBERRY:

the Passionate Playwright

Lorraine Hansberry was a passionate playwright and courageous activist.

She was writing in the 1950s. Lorraine grew up in Chicago and moved to New York City to be a writer. Her writing was very successful and she was the first African American woman to have a play on Broadway. Broadway is the name for a variety of special theatres in New York City that put on exciting performances. To have a play on Broadway was considered an outstanding achievement.

Lorraine's play was called *A Raisin in the Sun*. At the heart of the play is a message of how people can come together to make positive changes that will help each other. She wrote articles for newspapers to put across the message that we should challenge and put a stop to racism. Lorraine wrote poetry to express her ideas of how we can make the world a better place. Lorraine is known as a progressive because, by expressing her ideas through writing, she helped people to think in new and different ways about society. Through passion, plays, and poetry Lorraine made the progress she wanted to see.



When she was a young writer, Lorraine worked for a black progressive newspaper called *Freedom*. She wrote about the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement wanted everyone to have equal rights in society and argued against racism.

Lorraine wrote a play about a black working class family living in 1950s Chicago trying to make their way in the world. The family were chasing 'the American Dream'. The American Dream is based on the idea that life, liberty, and happiness can become a reality for everyone. Liberty means that you are free within society. Lorraine drew on her own experiences to write the play. The people and personalities that she grew up with on the South Side of Chicago inspired her characters.

Lorraine understood that many of her African American ancestors had faced racial injustices, which made it difficult for their dreams to come true. She interwove the frustrations her ancestors felt into her writing. The depth of Lorraine's understanding sparked a gripping and powerful drama that explores the black experience in America. Through her writing she captured the hopes and dreams of the characters in a way that her audience could relate to.

Through passion, plays, and poetry Lorraine made the progress she wanted to see.

In the play, Lorraine based the character of Beneatha Younger on herself. Beneatha is a brave, brilliant, determined young woman. She dreams of going to medical school to become a doctor. At the time, a doctor was considered a man's profession. As a young black woman, Beneatha faces many challenges that she has to overcome to make her dream a reality.



Beneatha believes that people can change society for the better. She says she does not believe in a God, but she does believe that people can make miracles happen. People can change the world.

Imagine how it must have felt for Lorraine to see her dream become a reality. Imagine a sparkling star-lit evening in New York City. The street is lined with Broadway theatres. The buildings are enormous, sweeping up high to a majestic sky. Jazz music spills from the theatre doors, filling the streets with smooth beats. The theatres are covered with glittering lights revealing the names of plays and performances. People pass by, swept up in the buzz of Broadway. How exciting to visit the theatre on this magical evening! A cab pulls up to the curb. Lorraine steps outside onto the street outside a theatre. She looks up to see the play's title *A Raisin in the Sun* in bright lights. Imagine how it feels for Lorraine to see her dream become a reality.

A Raisin in the Sun was a huge success because it was truthful to life. The truthfulness of the play made an impression on people; they could relate to the struggles of the characters. Lorraine's success helped to pave the way for other black writers, artists and performers.

Through passion, plays, and poetry, Lorraine made the progress she wanted to see.



Lorraine was a humanist because of her commitment to social justice. Lorraine used her talent for writing to help to make the world a fairer, more equal place. She did not believe in a god and expressed through her play that it is the achievements of human beings that can be special and celebrated. Lorraine is remembered as an exciting person who helped to make important progressive changes. These changes helped to make people's dreams become reality.



LORRAINE HANSBERRY: the Passionate Playwright

- 1 Lorraine Hansberry believed in **equality**. She believed everybody should be free to live a happy life. That was the American dream. This dream was, however, not available to many people and Lorraine wanted to draw that to people's attention.

Have you ever been treated unfairly? If so, how did it feel? What did you do?

Humanists believe that this is the one life we have and so everyone should have the opportunity to live a **happy** life in the here and now. We should try to create a world in which everyone has that opportunity, regardless of their gender, skin colour, sexuality, religion or belief, or disabilities.

- 2 Lorraine Hansberry believed **we can use our words and voices to change the world**. She used the characters in her play as a way to put across powerful and positive messages. She believed these messages would help to make the world a fairer and better place.

What changes might you like to make to the world? How might you illustrate this in a story or play? Think about the characters you might use.

Humanists believe that human beings can change the world. That might not always be in a big way, but we can each make a difference. Our actions have an impact on other people and animals so humanists believe we should try to act in ways that support freedom, fairness, and kindness.

What do you think the character Beneatha means when she says that it is people who make miracles?

When Beneatha says people make miracles she means that those inventions that have made our lives better (e.g. medicine, democracy, the arts, etc.) are the work of human beings. Lorraine was interested in the way that people interact with each other because it revealed a lot about them as people. Lorraine's writing put across the message that when people talk to each other they can find **common interests and a shared purpose**.

How are you different from other people? How are you similar – what do you share?

Humanists believe we have many shared needs and values. They say we should remember that we are all human beings first. Lorraine's writing helped people to have **empathy** with other people, to imagine what it might be like to be somebody else. That helped people to understand each other and try to treat them more kindly.

Humanists believe human beings can change the world for the better if they support equality and use their voices to try to make things fairer for everyone.

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