

# Worksheet Teacher's Key

## Questions for the film 1977 National Women's Conference: A Question of Choices

*A Question of Choices* documents the National Women's Conference held at the Sam Houston Coliseum in Houston from November 18-21, 1977. Broadcast nationwide on the last day of the conference, this film describes the conference agenda, leaders, caucuses, and passed resolutions, as well as the protest against the conference at the Astro Arena. The first series of questions can be answered while viewing the film. The questions in "Thinking After" require additional research or critical thinking.

1. What are the reasons given at the beginning of the documentary for why the conference was organized?

The United Nations declared it International Women's Year and asked that all member countries examine women's rights. In the US, a commission appointed by the President and given a \$5 million budget and a Congressional mandate organized meetings in 56 states and territories to shape the agenda and elect delegates to the National Women's Conference. The conference was intended to develop a national platform on women's rights.

2. When and where was the first women's rights conference held?

1848, Seneca Falls, New York.

3. Why did international delegates attend the conference?

To share their experiences regarding the issues at hand.

4. The narrator states that the overriding concern of conference attendees was that women were not valued in society. This was explained through a comparison showing the level of representation of women in government, the wage differences between men and women, and the limited availability of childcare. Fill in the charts below with the statistics given:

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## Representation of Women in Elected Positions

- 5%       Percentage of women in elected positions  
      4%       Percentage of seats in the House of Representatives held by women  
      0%       Percentage of seats in the Senate held by women  
      9%       Percentage of seats in state legislatures held by women

## Comparative Wages

- \$1.00       men - WHITE - women       \$0.57        
      \$0.74       men - BLACK - women       \$0.55        
      \$0.72       men - HISPANIC - women       \$0.49

## Childcare

Childcare availability for children under 6:

**1 space for every 5 children**

Why is each of these particular issues a challenge and/or problem?

**\*\*Critical thinking\*\* Students should address inequalities in representation and in economic prospects.**

5. Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment was a key issue going into the conference. At the time of the conference, how many states had ratified the amendment?

**35. Three had rescinded their ratification, but it had not been determined if this was legal or not.**

6. The opening addresses focus on several themes. What do some of the speakers emphasize?

**The diversity**

**The women's movement belongs to women of all ages.**

**We can have different interests, but we shouldn't be dismayed by the clash of opinions and ideas.**

7. After the opening addresses, the delegates broke into dozens of caucuses that met around the clock. What was the function of the caucuses?

**To plan floor strategies to support, amend, or oppose the National Plan of Action. Also, to come up with recommendations for those amendments.**

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8. In the video, one of the delegates states that she does not believe that any group in the nation that will be totally happy with the National Plan of Action, but that they should not open that "Pandora's Box" because they would end up with nothing. What did she mean by this statement?

She was trying to get the delegates to understand that they may have to compromise because it would better than leaving with nothing.

9. What are some of the reasons given for why the delegates attended?

One felt like she needed to come because the Midwest was not well represented. One stated she attended because she felt light she was "at the bottom of the totem pole" and needed to do something. One stated that the decisions made were her whole future. One said that she wanted everyone to understand that we are all equal.

10. Some attendees are concerned that the delegates do not represent a "true cross-section" of the country. How do they think this could have been improved?

Organize to let people know that meetings were going on, publicize regarding what the meetings were about, and asking people to come out in a fair and equal process.

11. Each plank of the national plan of action has to move through a process to be ratified by the conference and included in the National Plan of Action. What steps do you see during the process for the childcare plank?

1. Moved that the plank be adopted
2. Motion is seconded
3. Start debates between delegates who are both for and against the plank
4. Take suggestions for amendments
5. Vote to end debate
6. Vote on substitutions in the plank
7. Vote on the resolution to adopt the plank

12. Provide a definition for *plank*.

\*\*Not explicitly defined in the movie\*\* Students should describe it as a position or stance taken on a particular issue

13. When the plank to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment comes to the floor for debate, delegates try to amend the plank. What change are these delegates asking for? Why might this request be good or bad?

That they should require that the Equal Rights Amendment be ratified within one year/within the seven-year period. \*\*Critical thinking\*\* - Students should think about why placing a time table might be important, but also, what negative effects it might have. The delegate argues that the enormous expenditure of energy and money and effort that brought them this point will be in vain and the ten years of movement will have been in vain.

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14. When the conference began, the draft of the National Plan of Action included a plank to address the issues of minority women, but many minority caucuses found the plank to be inadequate. What groups came together to revise the plank and what were some of the issues they said needed to be included?

United Minority Caucus of IWY Conference 1977 which was composed of:

First National Indian Women's And Alaskan Natives' Caucus

Asian Pacific American Women's Caucus

Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional

Black Women of America

15. Another conference held in the Houston Astrodome on the same weekend was organized to protest the National Women's Conference. What were their concerns about the National Women's Conference?

That they were supporting immoral behavior and they were doing it at tax-payer's expense.

16. During the adoption of the official position of the opposition conference, the speaker addresses the platform statement to "Mister Lawmakers." What do you think this indicates?

\*\*Critical thinking\*\* Students should respond that the speaker assumes that any lawmaker reading the response would be a man.

### Thinking after:

What exactly did the Equal Rights Amendment call for?

**SECTION 1.** Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

**SECTION 2.** The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

**SECTION 3.** This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

The conference closed without the adoption of a framework for measuring success or carrying the platform forward. Why would it be important to have a clear, attainable plan to accomplish the goals of the conference? Who would need to be involved in deciding how to accomplish the conference goals and determining if those conference goals were met? What do YOU think the appropriate next steps would have been to implement the National Plan of Action?

\*\*Critical thinking\*\*