

Process Paper

I have always had a passion for science and STEM related topics, so I thought that a natural transition would be to do a project on a scientist that broke barriers. I found Maria Mitchell while I was considering doing a project on one of her students, Ellen Swallow Richards, and Maria's amazing life story fascinated me. Her life story, and her career especially, was full of her breaking barriers that society had enforced upon women, and she seemed like a natural fit for this year's theme of breaking barriers in history.

I initially started off my research with secondary sources in order to get an idea of Maria's life as well as places where she broke barriers. Once I had established a good background through secondary sources, my research turned to focusing on primary sources. My research heavily centered around the online Vassar College Archives, the Maria Mitchell Association, the Nantucket Historical Association, and the book *Maria Mitchell: Life, Letters, and Journals*. The Vassar College Archives were very helpful in providing me primary sources, especially photographs, as well as articles discussing her life. The Maria Mitchell Association was also very helpful because they had an in-depth biography of Maria Mitchell that provided me details about her life. The Nantucket Historical Association was very useful due to their extensive online archives that held many primary sources that allowed me to see the greater context surrounding Maria's childhood as well as her legacy and impact. The book *Maria Mitchell: Life, Letters, and Journals* by Phebe Kendall was extremely valuable in bringing Maria to life through her writings. This book was where I sourced many of my quotes from and helped me understand Maria through her own words.

I decided to create a website because I have a passion for STEM as well as the fact that I had created websites for previous National History Day competitions. When designing my website, I decided to have the primary colors be grey, black, and white because I wanted to pay homage to Maria's Quaker roots, the humility that she had throughout her life, and compliment the photographs I used extensively throughout the site. I decided to accent the titles with pink to draw on the fact that Maria brought a feminine touch to male dominated tasks as well as break up the monotony of the grey, black, and white.

Maria Mitchell fits perfectly with the theme breaking barriers in history. Her career as an astronomer and a professor broke through many of the 19th century's societal expectations. She challenged the idea that women couldn't pursue scientific paths and that women couldn't seek higher education. She broke barriers by partnering with Dr. Alida Avery to fight for, and win, equal pay, a move that was unprecedented at the time. She also was one of the founders of one of the first women's clubs which brought about change by providing a way for women to leave the domestic setting and invoke societal change.