**ELA 10-1 Final Assignment**

**Please read the assignment directly below, and then read the article/speech from Lady Aberdeen in 1894. When you are finished reading, come back to the questions and essay and complete the assignment. Read the article more than one time if necessary.**

1. **From your understanding of the speech given by Lady Aberdeen, what types of difficulties faced women in this time? (5 marks)**
2. **How do you think the role of women has changed in Canada in the last 150 years? (5 marks)**
3. **Write a five paragraph personal or critical essay answering the following question: How did Lady Aberdeen help shape the changing role of women in her time and subsequently throughout Canada’s history? (25 marks)**

[**Lady Aberdeen on the role of women, November 1894**](https://greatcanadianspeeches.ca/2017/09/09/lady-aberdeen-on-the-role-of-women-november-1894/)

Lady Aberdeen championed the role of women

*Lady Ishbel Aberdeen was a force of nature and just happened to be the wife of Canada’s governor-general. She pushed the envelope on the role of women in Canadian society. Here she spoke to the founding meeting of the Local Council of Women in Victoria in 1894.*

**“A golden link uniting women in bonds of sisterhood”**

I must thank you ladies, who have been good enough to come out and meet me this evening in such large numbers in response to the invitation of those who have asked me to tell you the aims and working of the National Council of Women of Canada. As for the gentlemen, will you forgive me if I ignore your presence here tonight, if I try, as best I can, to forget it? I look upon you only in the light of necessary evils in your capacity of escort to the ladies. But all the same that does not distract from the honour you have done me in being willing to be present in any capacity. Doubtless no movement affecting a considerable part of the community can prosper without the cordial support of both men and women. I trust that in this movement, the women of Victoria will be able to depend on the approval of their husbands, fathers, and brothers . . .

There is likely to be a good deal of criticism of this movement, and I would earnestly ask you gentlemen spectators, though you are our critics in general, to try to understand our objects and to weigh the matter well before you oppose the council or divide it.

You will agree with us as to our ultimate objects, I know—unity, an endeavour to communicate mutual strength and sympathy between all women workers, and to stimulate all work for the good of others. Some may say that they do not see how the council is going to do all this. Let me ask them if they have a scheme of their own. If not, it is surely a solemn responsibility to try to hinder those who are at heart trying to do God’s work and to reach after His idea of unity.

**National Council of Women**

But now, ladies, I must set myself to my work and try to explain to you something of this National Council of Women of Canada, which is intended by its authors and promoters to forge, as it were, a golden link uniting all the women workers from ocean to ocean in bonds of sisterhood for the high and holy work which they are called on to undertake by virtue of their common womanhood, and their common responsibilities in this fair country.

I am afraid I must ask you to bear with me while I go through the dry details of our organization. But before doing this, I would like to remove some misapprehensions concerning the council by stating what it is not.

It is not a political association. Some English newspapers stated at one time that I was organizing a political association of women throughout Canada for the purpose of turning out the present government . . . Quite apart from the fact that I myself have forgotten for some time what politics mean, this council has nothing to do with politics; if there existed a political association of women in the Dominion, they could be represented on it.

The council is not a trades union, although trades unions or friendly societies of women can be represented on it. It is not a temperance association, although temperance societies can be and are represented on it. It is not a society for revolutionizing the relation of mistresses and servants, although we hope that the present difficulties in connection with domestic service will receive much consideration. It is not a religious body only, nor a philanthropic body only, nor an educational body only. It is none of these things, and yet it is all of them, and that I think is the keynote of the object of this meeting. We desire to form a body which will, as it were, focus the work and thought of women in Victoria, the work and thought of all the different activities being carried on. That is the object of the National Council of Women of Canada, and it is on the same principle that all the local councils throughout Canada are intended to be formed . . .

**Women’s first mission**

We all here agree that the home is woman’s first mission. But what does that involve? Sometimes it is spoken of as if home duties meant a narrow life, a circumscribed life, but if we ask ourselves what home means to each of us, what it should mean to each of us, we shall see that it by no means involves a narrow life. If we ask ourselves each of us to think out what would be the ideal for ourselves, each in our own position in our own home, of what we could do and be, and if we could rise to that idea of character and influence and life and self-sacrifice, you will at once see how much it means and how much we have to learn. Sometimes people speak as though the power to be homemakers came by instinct to women, but do not we know, we who are in our homes as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, that this is by no means the case? Do we not each of us realize our want of training and of knowledge in our contact with other lives, on which so much depends? Cannot we in these general conferences and meetings which are to bring us together as women who are wanting to fulfill their duty in the world, cannot we specially confer together on some of these matters which touch the very inmost springs of our lives? Do we not need to know much more of how to train our children, how to study our children, to understand the different characters of those little ones that have been confided to us, and whom we often damage because we do not understand and enter into the individuality, the different characteristics of each one, and the different training needed to fit them for their work in life? Cannot these subjects bearing upon the relations of parents and children be made, as I trust they will be, most important subjects in your councils . . .

**Social duties of women**

But springing up from these home duties come our social duties, which come to every woman, her duties to society. We sometimes lament the low tone of society, but if there is that low tone anywhere, whose fault is it? Is it not that of the women of the place? And is not a very grave responsibility lying upon us, and especially now in these days when every opportunity is given to woman for thorough education and for the use of her influence for the heightening of the whole tone of society. If we see the young people in our midst making pleasure the main object of life, whose fault is that? If there are two standards of morality expected, one for man and the other for woman, one for Sundays and the other for weekdays, one for religion and the other for business, whose fault is it? Is it not the fault of those who set the tone in the home and in the social life? In these matters also, can we not unite in our conferences those of all churches and sections of thought who desire a lofty standard of morality, whether from the secular or religious point of view?

Can we not help one another to lift higher the ideal of life, whether in the home or social life, or the life of the country? Does it not depend upon us women, and especially upon those whom God has called to be mothers, to see that the children grow up with a high ideal of public life, that they should deem it to be a high privilege that they belong to this country, deem it a high honour to be trained to serve their country any way, however humble? These matters come home to us mothers, although I am not sure that the women of any country have realized the duty incumbent upon them to bring up their children with a distinct idea of what that service means. That brings us again to the further thought of a woman’s duty to her country, and to mankind at large; to that wider idea of duty to which women are called in these days. The call comes to all of us in one way or another. There are few who can shroud themselves in the privacy of their homes without hearing in their hearts the summons to serve their fellow creatures in some way or another . . .

**The common good**

Let it be clearly understood that we are not demanding rights by this council; we are but seeking to help one another to perform our duties in a higher spirit and with a deeper motive than ever before, although, indeed, it may lead us to see duties where we never saw them before. But let us never seek to escape the discipline which has sanctified womanhood, but rather let us glorify in it. Let us make it yield us its full fruits, teaching us to give our very best and our very selves to whatever work for the common good God calls us . . .

♦♦♦♦♦

**Source**: National Council of Women of Canada, Victoria and Vancouver Island, November 8, 1894 (Victoria: The Colonist Printing and Publishing  Company Ltd., 1894). Pamphlet located on microfiche at Library and Archives Canada.  
**Photo credit**: Library and Archives Canada.