Writers

Famous female writers like Louisa May Alcott used male names when they submitted their first pieces to be considered for publication, because writing was not considered a ladylike profession. Today, some female authors still write under names that hide their genders. Susan "S. E." Hinton wrote The Outsiders, That Was Then—This Is Now, and Rumble Fish. These stories have strong male protagonists. Joanne Rowling is famous as J. K. Rowling and wrote the Harry Potter series. Both women were told that they would sell more books if they hid their gender. Ask students if they think there still is a gender bias in this profession.

Other writers you may wish to research include:
- the Bronte sisters
- Jane Austen
- Toni Morrison
- Georges Sand

Journalists

Few women were accepted as reporters 150 years ago. Jane Croly, who wrote under the pen name "Jennie June," was the first syndicated female reporter. She wrote magazine and newspaper columns on women's issues. Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman, also known as "Nelly Bly" became an investigative reporter for the New York World in 1887. In 1889, she beat the record of the fictitious Jules Verne character, Phineas Fogg by going around the world in 72 days instead of his eighty. What obstacles do today's reporters face? Does their gender limit what they can report?

Other journalists you may wish to research include:
- Ethel L. Payne
- Barbara Walters
- Christianne Amanpour
- Jane Pauley

Artists

In the past, female artists were often anonymous. Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot broke gender bias in France, when their work was displayed alongside the works of male artists in the late 1800s. Art exhibitions today feature works by both men and women, but the work of male artists is more often found in museums than female artists. Ask students the following: When a famous artist comes to mind, is the person male or female? Does anyone know a professional artist? What is the artist's gender? What is his/her specialty?

Artists to research include:
- Rachel Ruysch
- Elizabeth Catlett
- Camille Claudel
- Georgia O'Keeffe
Nurses

Clara Barton, Dorothea Dix, and Florence Nightingale nursed injured and dying soldiers during wartime. At the time, it was thought that women were not strong enough emotionally (or physically) to do this kind of work. Yet Barton, Dix, Nightingale, and other women found ways to prove their emotional and physical strength to the male doctors and officers. Over time, nursing came to be thought of as a woman's profession. Now, more and more men are entering the profession.

Topics for research:
- What kind of biases and prejudices do male nurses face today?
- How has the profession of nursing changed over time (in terms of education, duties, pay, etc.)?

Secretaries and Clerks

Secretaries and clerks were both "male" jobs 150 years ago. Technology, in the form of typewriters and adding machines, changed the way companies did business. Women were offered the lower-paying job of typing up reports and men rose higher up the company ladder.

Topics for research:
- How has the secretarial profession changed over time?
- What percentage of secretaries today are women? What about 20 years ago? 50 years ago?

Elementary School Teachers

Most elementary school teachers were male in the early 1800s. Women were tutors for the rich. As people moved west in America, many teachers also moved. The first to move were men; however, many men moved on to other jobs. Soon, the need for teachers was so great that "Go West Young Woman" was posted in major newspapers in the East. The women could be teachers only if they were unmarried. Once they married, another teacher was hired. Married female teachers are quite common in today's elementary schools, but what about male teachers?

Topics for research include:
- What percentage of teachers is female in your elementary school?
- What percentage of the administrators and principals in your school district are female?
- Interview a female and (if possible) a male elementary school teacher and ask them why they chose their careers.

Athletes

By far, male athletes dominate the sports pages, but this trend is changing. Tennis players Venus and Serena Williams, figure skater Michelle Kwan, track star Marion Jones, and golfer Annika Sorenson have all excelled in their respective sports. In the past, women like Babe Didrikson Zaharias, Althea Gibson, Billie Jean King, and Wilma Rudolph helped to break down gender bias in sports.

Topics for research include:
- Who are the most influential female athletes today, and what (if any) obstacles have they overcome in terms of gender bias?
- What is Title IX and how has it affected women's sports?
• Who is the top athlete at your school? Is the athlete male or female?
• Investigate the record books at your school and find out whether there were any dominant female athletes during the recent past. If possible, interview them.

Scientists

You have most likely heard of Albert Einstein, but what about Marie Curie or Rachel Carson? What kind of impact did these women have on their chosen fields?

Topics for research include:
• What are the achievements of the women listed above?
• Why don’t more women go into science as a profession?

Doctors

When Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell graduated from medical school in 1849, 20,000 people watched. No American hospital would hire her and she went to work in France and England. Upon her return to the U.S., she set up her own hospital, treated injured Civil War soldiers, and established a medical college for women.

Topics for research include:
• What percentage of doctors today are women?
• What (if any) kind of bias or prejudice do female doctors face today?
• Are there any "typically female" or "typically male" medical specialties (pediatrics, surgery, obstetrics, etc.)?

Lawyers and Judges

Belva Lockwood was one of the first women to practice law in the United States in 1873. She lobbied Congress and won the right to argue before the Supreme Court. In 1981, Sandra Day O’Connor became the first woman to sit on the Supreme Court. Janet Reno was the first woman to become the United States Attorney General.

Topics for research include:
• Investigate the lives and careers of the women outlined in the paragraph above.
• Investigate important legal cases in which one or more attorneys are women.
• Many television shows and movies feature female characters that are lawyers. Why do you think this is the case?