

Famous Speeches: Amelia Earhart's "A Woman's Place Is in Science"

By Adapted by Newsela staff on 04.15.16

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Informal portrait of Amelia Earhart standing under nose of her Lockheed Model 10-E Electra, likely taken before her attempted flight around the world, March 1937. Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Editor's Note: Amelia Earhart was born in Kansas. She was a pioneering aviator who became famous for being the first woman to make a trans-Atlantic flight by herself. Earhart made the following speech in a radio broadcast in 1935, two years before she would go missing in a flight over the Pacific.

This modern world of science and invention is of particular interest to women, for the lives of women have been more affected by its new horizons than those of any other group. The accomplishments in the more distant fields of pure research have been profound and stirring. And yet it is in the home that the applications of scientific achievement have perhaps been most far-reaching. It is through changing conditions in the home, that women have become the people who have benefited the most in the modern world.

Science has released women from much of the age-old drudgery connected with the process of living. Candle dipping, weaving and crude methods of manufacturing necessities are things of the past for an increasing majority. Today, light, heat and power

may be obtained by pushing buttons. Cleverly manufactured and appealing products of all the world are available at the housewife's door. Indeed, she does not need to go beyond that door, thanks to the miracles of modern communication and transportation.

Applied science has not only decreased the work in the home. It has provided undreamed of job opportunities for women. Today, millions of them are earning their living under conditions made possible only through a substantially changed industrial system. Probably no scientific development is more startling than the effect of this new and growing economic independence upon women themselves. When the history of our times is written, it must record as supremely significant the physical, psychic and social changes women have undergone in these exciting decades.

The credit for the driving force of the sociological advances of the last half century should be given to two groups of people. They are those who have worked long and hard in laboratories, and those who have translated the results of that work into practical uses for the world. One hears a complaint that a mechanized world would not be a pleasant one in which to live. Quite the contrary should be true. And it can be true if the fine minds who have accomplished so much in the realms of applied science will unite with the same enthusiasm to make sure their inventions are not misused in society.

Obviously, research concerning job loss because of new technology is important today. It is as important as further refinement or production of labor-saving and comfort-giving devices. Among all the marvels of modern invention, the one I am most interested in is air transportation, of course. Flying is perhaps the most dramatic of recent scientific achievements. In the brief span of around 30 years, the world has seen an inventor's dream come true. It was first materialized by the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk. Today it has become an everyday occurrence. Perhaps I'm prejudiced, but to me, it seems that no other phase of modern progress strives to maintain such a brimming measure of romance and beauty, combined with usefulness, as aviation does.

Within itself, this industry embraces many of those scientific accomplishments which yesterday seemed fantastic impossibilities. When the pilot is way above the earth, flying at 200 miles an hour, he talks by radio telephone to ground stations or to other planes in the air. In bad or foggy weather, he is guided by radio beam. He receives detailed reports of conditions ahead that are gathered through special instruments and new methods of meteorological calculations. The engines he sits behind are extremely reliable. In fact, their degree of reliability would be all but unbelievable when measured by the expectations of the past.

I myself still fly a WASP motor, which has carried me over the North Atlantic, part of the Pacific, to and from Mexico City, and many times across this continent. Aviation, this young modern giant, exemplified the possible relationship between women and the creations of science. Although women as yet have not taken full advantage of its use and benefits, air travel is as available to them as it is to men. As so often happens in introducing the new or changing the old, public acceptance depends peculiarly upon women's friendly attitude.

In aviation, women are the decision makers of whether or not their families shall fly. As such, they are a powerful influence. And lastly, there is a place within the industry itself, for women who work. While still greatly outnumbered, they are finding more and more opportunities for employment in the ranks of this latest form of transportation. May I hope this movement will spread throughout all branches of applied science and industry and that women may come to share with men the joy of doing. People can appreciate rewards most when they helped in the creation of them.

Quiz

1 Which of the following selections from the speech BEST explains how women benefit from technological advances?

- (A) Cleverly manufactured and appealing products of all the world are available at the housewife's door.
- (B) When the history of our times is written, it must record as supremely significant the physical, psychic and social changes women have undergone in these exciting decades.
- (C) And it can be true if the fine minds who have accomplished so much in the realms of applied science will unite with the same enthusiasm to make sure their inventions are not misused in society.
- (D) When the pilot is way above the earth, flying at 200 miles an hour, he talks by radio telephone to ground stations or to other planes in the air.

2 Read the following selection from the speech.

Science has released women from much of the age-old drudgery connected with the process of living. Candle dipping, weaving and crude methods of manufacturing necessities are things of the past for an increasing majority. Today, light, heat and power may be obtained by pushing buttons. Cleverly manufactured and appealing products of all the world are available at the housewife's door. Indeed, she does not need to go beyond that door, thanks to the miracles of modern communication and transportation.

Which idea is BEST supported by the selection above?

- (A) Women's jobs are easier than men's jobs.
- (B) Science has decreased job opportunities for women.
- (C) Women are less dependent on men.
- (D) Women have better jobs than men.

3 Read the following sentence from the speech.

Science has released women from much of the age-old drudgery connected with the process of living.

Which of the following words from the speech provides context clues as to the meaning of the word "drudgery?"

- (A) crude
- (B) modern
- (C) profound
- (D) miracles

4 Read the following sentence from the speech.

Aviation, this young modern giant, exemplified the possible relationship between women and the creations of science.

How does using the phrase "modern giant" affect the tone of the sentence above?

- (A) It gives a bold, excited tone.
- (B) It gives a hopeful, positive tone.
- (C) It gives an unenthusiastic, bland tone.
- (D) It gives a hopeless, despairing tone.

Answer Key

1 Which of the following selections from the speech BEST explains how women benefit from technological advances?

- (A) **Cleverly manufactured and appealing products of all the world are available at the housewife's door.**
- (B) When the history of our times is written, it must record as supremely significant the physical, psychic and social changes women have undergone in these exciting decades.
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