

JULIETTE GORDON LOW

Written by: Amanda Reid-Cossentino | Garnet Valley High School | Glen Mills, Pennsylvania

BASIC BIOGRAPHY

Juliette Gordon Low (1860–1927) was nicknamed “Daisy” as an infant and the moniker stuck; her friends and family used it her whole life. Low’s childhood was marred by the outbreak of the Civil War; her mother’s family fought for the Union while her father served as a Confederate soldier. She enjoyed adventures in the Georgia countryside and her love of nature, wildlife, and sports shaped the organization she founded. A series of childhood ear infections and a botched operation left her with significant hearing loss. She married William Low in 1886 and set up homes in Georgia and England. Searching for purpose after her husband’s 1905 death, a chance 1911 meeting with Sir Robert Baden-Powell in London changed her life. Baden-Powell, the founder of Boy Scouts, recommended that Low become involved with the Girl Guides, the female equivalent of his organization. After working with female troops in England and Scotland, Low returned to Georgia to replicate the organization in America. On March 12, 1912, Low hosted the inaugural meeting of Girl Scouts USA. Low spent the rest of her life leading the organization, stressing leadership, community involvement, and outdoor activities. The Girl Scouts thrive today, boasting 2.6 million participants in 92 countries and an alumnae network of over 50 million women.

KEY EVENTS

Founding of the Girl Scouts (1912), World War I, Progressive Movement, Suffrage Movement

KEY PEOPLE

Lou Hoover, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, Edith Wilson

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Girl Scouts was founded in 1912 in the midst of the Progressive Era, a period of time marked by reformers’ attempts to address issues created by urbanization, economic and demographic change, business monopolies, and government corruption in political machines. The Girl Scouts reflected progressive impulses to organize communities to foster social good. Juliette Gordon Low sought to welcome a culturally and ethnically diverse group of young ladies into her troops, ensuring opportunities for all girls, even those with different abilities. In 1917, the United States became enmeshed in World War I; Low and her Girl Scouts stepped up to assist the war effort, earning accolades from Herbert Hoover for assisting in the Food Administration food conservation efforts as well as sewing on behalf of the Red Cross. The suffrage movement also intensified around this time culminating with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Although Low



Harris & Ewing, Girl Scouts of the U.S., April 1923, Library of Congress (2016892230), <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016892230/>

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

- Make one copy of the primary document for each student.
- Divide students into groups of three or four students each.
- Ask students to read the excerpt and answer the prompt questions together.
- Lead the class in a discussion of Progressive Era themes they detected in the reading.

Teacher Tip: Themes to consider for discussion include the role of women, Americanism, efficiency, morality, and education.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

- Just as *How Girls Can Help Their Country* reflected Juliette Gordon Low’s concerns for young women of the Progressive Era, ask your students to identify issues that girls and young women must be equipped to deal with today.
- Give students a few minutes to brainstorm their ideas and then ask a few volunteers to share their thoughts.
- The Girl Scouts organization awards merit badges to members when they complete certain requirements as outward manifestations of new skills developed and new areas of interest explored. Ask students to develop a new merit badge to offer to Girl Scouts in 2018. Students should identify an area of concern for contemporary young women and then develop three requirements for a young lady to earn the badge.



Frances Benjamin Johnston, Low House, 325 Abercorn Street, Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia, c. 1939–1944, Library of Congress (csas200800670), <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/csas.00668/>

sought to keep the Girl Scouts neutral and out of the suffrage debate, her efforts to cultivate strong, independent-thinking women were indisputable.

FUN FACT

Juliette Gordon Low has received numerous posthumous honors including the commissioning of a World War II Liberty Ship in her name in 1944 and the release of a three cent stamp with her likeness by the U.S. Postal Service in 1948. President Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012. Find a complete list of her honors here: <http://www.girlscouts.org/en/about-girl-scouts/our-history/juliette-gordon-low.html>.

LOCAL CONNECTION

You can visit the birthplace of Juliette Gordon Low in Savannah, Georgia. In addition to touring the home (a National Historic Landmark) and learning about Low's life, visitors may also be interested in an interactive exhibit offered in the home's library, *Girls Writing the World*. To learn more, go to <http://www.juliettegordonlowbirthplace.org/>.

LEARN MORE

PRIMARY SOURCES

Juliette Gordon Low, *How Girls Can Help Their Country*, 1917 (excerpts)
Project Gutenberg
http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/28983?msg=welcome_stranger

Photograph, Harris & Ewing, *Girl Scout Group with Mrs. Nicholas Longworth, Selling Liberty Bonds*, 1918
Library of Congress (2016869091)
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2016869091/>

Photograph, Harris & Ewing, *Girl Scouts. War Sewing with Red Cross*, 1917
Library of Congress (hec2008006686)
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2016868397/>

SECONDARY SOURCES

Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace
<http://www.juliettegordonlowbirthplace.org/>

Juliette Gordon Low Curriculum Guide
Georgia Historical Society
<http://georgiahistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Juliette-Gordon-Low-Teacher-Guide.pdf>

Juliette Gordon Low Online Exhibit
Georgia Historical Society
<http://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/online-exhibits/featured-historical-figures/juliette-gordon-low/>

Our History
Girl Scouts of America
<http://www.girlscouts.org/en/about-girl-scouts/our-history.html>

JULIETTE GORDON LOW, *HOW GIRLS CAN HELP THEIR COUNTRY*, 1917 (EXCERPTS)

BE STRONG

Have you ever stopped to think that your most constant companion throughout life will be yourself... in order to live well, in order to possess the joy of life, and to be helpful to others, a Scout needs to apply her motto "Be prepared" to herself. Strength and beauty should be hers in body, mind, and spirit...The body and mind are very closely related. Things that are good for one are good for the other. A girl who develops a strong agile body, at the same time improves her brain. A girl with weak, flabby muscles cannot have the strength of character that goes with normal physical power.

BE HELPFUL

To make others happy is the Scout's first wish. When you come home from work or school turn your thoughts to those you love at home and try to see what you can do to lighten their burdens or cheer them...DO A GOOD TURN to some one every day. That is one of the Scout laws.

HABITS

...We tend to do the things we have already done. By selecting the right things to do and always doing them, we actually are making our destiny. Each one of us has her character made by her habits...

MODESTY

Girl Scouts have often been complimented for their modest bearing. One does not hear them talk about what they have done, or what they are going to do. They just do the thing and say nothing about it...

READING

Wherever you go you will have the choice of good or bad reading, and as reading has such a lasting effect on the mind, you should try to read only good things...

ECONOMY

More women are engaged in housekeeping than in all the other professions and employments combined. This is a difficult profession and requires knowledge and training, if good results are to be secured. Housekeepers need to have a plan, and especially a budget of expenses...The real orderly Girl Scout has a place for everything and keeps everything in its place. She has a time for performing each of her duties and does it at that time.

THRIFT

It seems easy to learn how to spend money, but it is an art to learn how best to spend...You will remember that one of the Scout laws is to BE THRIFTY. The girl who begins making money young will go on making it as she grows older. It may be difficult at first, but it will come easier later on, especially if you earn money by hard work...

EMPLOYMENT

...CHOOSE A CAREER: "Be prepared" for what is going to happen to you in the future. Try to master one trade so that you will be independent. Being punctual is a most important thing. This counts for a great deal in filling any kind of position.

BE OBSERVANT

...This is a very valuable kind of training which city people miss. This knowledge of the woods, of animals and their habits, and of all the other phases of nature necessary for life in the open is called "Wood-craft"... It is a part of the duty of Scouts to see and appreciate the beauties of nature, and not be blind to them as so many people are...Try to see everything...

CAREERS

Well educated women can make a good income by taking up translating, library work, architecture, and many professions which formerly have been open only to men...The medical profession offers a great opportunity to women. Nursing is more easily learned, and is of the greatest advantage at the same time, for every woman is a better wife and mother for having been a nurse first...

STUDY

Each one of us has her own destiny in her control, and has her own personal problems in life to settle. Thus, we all need all the knowledge and wisdom that we can secure. Each one of us should be a student, ever growing in power of thought and in usefulness to others ...

PATRIOTISM

You belong to the great United States of America, one of the great world powers for enlightenment and liberty. It did not just grow as circumstances chanced to form it. It is the work of your forefathers who spent brains and blood to complete it. Even when brothers fought they fought with the wrath of conviction, and when menaced by a foreign foe they swung into line shoulder to shoulder with no thought but for their country. In all that you do think of your country first...

Juliette Gordon Low, How Girls Can Help Their Country, 1917 (excerpts), Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/28983?msg=welcome_stranger

In your team, look through the document and find evidence of the social and cultural impulses that characterized the Progressive movement. Identify key themes below and cite evidence from the text to substantiate your claim.

THEME	EVIDENCE FROM TEXT