

A Teacher's Guide for *Jane Against the World* *Roe v. Wade and the Fight for Reproductive Rights* by Karen Blumenthal



ABOUT THE BOOK

Since the controversial Supreme Court decision known as *Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal in the United States, issues around women's reproductive rights has continued to stir passion and controversy in every corner of the country. In *Jane Against the World: Roe v. Wade and the Fight for Reproductive Rights*, Karen Blumenthal provides an exhaustive, journalistic look at the decades leading up to the historic decision. As the decision of *Roe v. Wade* continues to be challenged, the fight for reproductive rights is becoming more and more urgent—making Blumenthal's eye-opening work even more crucial. Tracing the path to the landmark decision and the continuing battle for women's rights, Blumenthal examines, in a straightforward tone, the root causes of the current debate around abortion and the repercussions that have affected generations of American women. *Jane Against the World* will help to facilitate difficult discussions and raise awareness of a topic that is rarely touched on in school but affects every young person.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Blumenthal (1959–2020) was an award-winning author of narrative nonfiction whose work focused on controversial topics and social change. In addition to *Jane Against the World*, she is the author of *Steve Jobs: The Man Who Thought Different*, *Tommy: The Gun That Changed America*, *Hillary Rodham Clinton: A Woman Living History*, and *Let Me Play: The Story of Title IX*. She was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Sibert Honor and a Jane Addams Children's Book Award. Blumenthal lived in Dallas, Texas, where the case for *Roe v. Wade* originated.

BEFORE READING

1. Discuss the Supreme Court tradition of considering precedents when deciding whether or not to overturn a law. Research and select an important case in which the court upheld a precedent, and another case in which the court ignored precedent. In each of these cases, what were the initial and long-term outcomes of the decisions?
2. On the opening page, the author presents a hypothetical situation followed by a series of questions: "Imagine that you're sixteen years old and still in school. Now imagine that you have just discovered that you're pregnant-or your girlfriend is pregnant." Consider these statements and the questions that follow them carefully. If you comfortable doing so, share your thoughts in a small group or as part of a larger class discussion.

DURING READING

PART I: RESTRICTIONS

1. Discuss the key figures, events, attitudes, and beliefs around abortion that are presented in Part I. What were some of the dominant attitudes offered in defense of abortion restrictions? Based on the history presented in this section of the book, explain how the values and attitudes of a single person can influence societal attitudes.
2. What are morals? How do morals differ from faith and personal values? What is meant by a personal moral code? Discuss Tom Emerson's argument before the Supreme Court in *Griswold v. Connecticut* that "the state shouldn't have the power to tell married couples, in their most private, personal moments, whether they could use birth control. Nor should the moral views of one religion be forced on everyone." (See page 71.)
3. Discuss how race and class were and still are factors in a woman's ability to receive a (safe or unsafe) abortion, or to be able to receive the procedure at all. Discuss the statement on page 41 that "The rich get richer and the poor get children," and cite examples from the text that illustrate what this means.
4. List the various restrictions to abortion cited in Part I. Which ones seem unfair? Which ones seem reasonable, if any? Explain your reasoning.

PART II: REFORM

1. For those who sought to overturn abortion laws, what were some of their most compelling arguments? How did antiabortion supporters counter these arguments?
2. Larry Lader's 1966 book, *Abortion*, opens with the statement: "Abortion is the dread secret of our society." (See page 84.) Why do you think abortion (and sometimes pregnancy) has historically been shrouded in shame and guilt? How did abortion opponents in the 1960s and 1970s leverage the emotions that can accompany abortion for their cause?
3. Throughout the text, the majority of actions and decisions both for and against birth control and abortion were and continue to be made by men. Discuss the irony of this fact. Why do you think it was important for Jane to be an organization founded and run by women? During a 1969 conference on abortion rights, the feminist leader Betty Friedan said, "What right has any man to say to any woman: 'You must bear a child'?" (See page 112.) Do you agree with her position? Why or why not? What did the political leader Shirley Chisholm mean when she said, "To label family planning and legal abortion programs as 'genocide' is male rhetoric, for male ears." (See page 113.) What is rhetoric? How have both sides of the abortion debate used rhetoric to their advantage?
4. Discuss the growth of the feminist movement of the 1960s and how it relates to advances in the movement to repeal the right to an abortion.
5. What does privacy mean to you? How does the United States Constitution protect the privacy of United States citizens? How did the issues related to a woman's right to privacy become a key factor in the abortion cases leading up to the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision?

6. Discuss the role of the clergy and medical professionals in the advancement of access to safe and legal abortion. What strategies did these people employ that were most effective?
7. How did a minority of Americans who opposed abortion become the pro-life movement? How did they use language (such as “abortion on demand”) and imagery to further their cause?
8. Reread page 155 and discuss Norma McCorvey’s reasons for wanting to have an abortion, which cite economic hardship, social stigma, and risk to her life from an unsafe abortion procedure. Dive more deeply into these three points, citing evidence from the text to guide your discussion.
9. In describing Jane, Jeanne Galatzer-Levy once said, “We were ordinary women, but we did extraordinary things.” Discuss how this advocacy group not only helped individual women but furthered the legalization of abortion in the United States?

PART III: ROE V. WADE

1. Discuss the politicization of the Supreme Court throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Why is this contradictory to what the framers of the Constitution envisioned?
2. Reread the opinion of Judge Don J. Young of Ohio on page 184. How is this a sexist and judgmental position?
3. What is meant by “undue burden”? How can the various barriers to abortion cited in this section be considered undue burdens?
4. Discuss the issue of the rights of the fetus versus the privacy and reproductive rights of a pregnant woman. Discuss the importance of the Fourteenth Amendment in regard to this issue (see page 191). Share your opinion on the following statement by the National Right to Life Committee volunteer Martin McKernan Jr.: “I came to the conclusion that the preborn child was a being separate and distinct from its host.” How did his actions further inflame the abortion issue in the United States?
5. Discuss the following statements from each side’s opening arguments to the Supreme Court. Sarah Weddington said, “It [pregnancy] disrupts her body, it disrupts her education, it disrupts her employment, and it often disrupts her entire family life . . . [and] she should be allowed to make the choice as to whether to continue or to terminate her pregnancy.” (See page 205.) Jay Floyd argued, “There are situations in which . . . no remedy is provided. Now I think she makes her choice prior to the time she becomes pregnant. That is the time of her choice.” (See page 208.) Focus on the word “choice” and what it refers to in each statement. Think about the underlying meaning of Floyd’s statement, and put it into your own words.
6. Discuss the 7 to 2 ruling that made abortion legal in the United States and the opinions of the majority. What aspects of the arguments ultimately swayed the majority to rule that the Texas law was unconstitutional?

PART IV: AFTER ROE

1. Discuss the repercussions of Roe v. Wade immediately after the decision and up to the present day, including states’ attempts at obstructing and overturning the decision, violence against abortion providers, and how the abortion issue has contributed to the political polarization of the United States.

2. Discuss how the *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* decision “was essentially an invitation to conservative state legislatures to pass new laws to test *Roe* again.” (See page 286.) How has this “invitation” been accepted by conservative states in the last decade?
3. How are lawmakers who oppose abortion continuing to erect barriers to a woman’s constitutional right to an abortion?

AFTER READING

1. In 1970, after abortion became legal in New York State, the *New York Times* reporter Linda Greenhouse wrote, “But the day when an abortion carries with it no more bureaucratic or emotional baggage than a tonsillectomy will be a long time coming.” (See page 121.) Research the current issues surrounding abortion in the United States and around the world. How have American women’s reproductive rights increased since *Roe v. Wade*, and how are they still being threatened?
2. Reread the chapter “Opinions” (pages 245–268). Outline the issues that the justices raised in their opinions, and how these issues are still relevant today in the current abortion debate.
3. Discuss how abortion rights advocates are pushing back against restrictions and increasingly conservative attempts to restrict legal access to abortion. Predict what the future might hold for women’s reproductive freedoms if the Supreme Court were to gut or overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Base your prediction on text evidence.

COMMON CORE CORRELATIONS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. The standards listed throughout are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for grade 9–10, but the activities and questions can be applied to multiple grade levels. Please adapt the activities and questions to meet the needs of your students.

Credit: This guide was created by Colleen Carroll, a literacy specialist, curriculum developer, reading teacher, and author of the *How Artists See* series. Learn more about her at about.me/colleencarroll.