

Study Guide, by Stephanie Wood,
for the Primary Source:

[Memorial from the ladies of Steubenville, Ohio, protesting Indian removal, 2/15/1830,
https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/memorial-from-the-ladies-of-steubenville-ohio-protesting-indian-removal](https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/memorial-from-the-ladies-of-steubenville-ohio-protesting-indian-removal)

Introduction for Teachers and Students: When you follow the link to this document, be sure to use the magnification symbol at the bottom of the image of the document, so that the text can more easily be read. We will approach our close study of the document with questions that include observations and reflections, as recommended by the Library of Congress. You will note that a big part of this document was printed mechanically, but it still has some writing by hand (especially the signatures). It might be worth discussing with students that handwritten documents are called “manuscripts,” and that learning to read handwritten documents sometimes requires “paleography,” or the decipherment of handwriting. The type of handwriting found on this document was called “cursive” writing, but it is falling out of use today, and some students might not be able to read it. The DocsTeach website provides a [“transcription”](#) of both the printed and handwritten material in this document.

Vocabulary for Review: Reviewing vocabulary can help us get at perspectives that are embedded in language and give us a flavor for the period. The meaning of terms can evolve over time, so that what was originally meant by a term can be very different from the meaning we associate with it today. Language can also be offensive, especially when we are studying a primary source that does not come from a tribal community but rather from the settler-colonial point of view. It is our hope that terminology can be discussed in as sensitive a way as possible.

- **Sheweth** (top part of the page): i.e. “shows”; note how this is language that we no longer use; we should not let such language alienate us from reading further.
- **Your honorable body** (in the first full paragraph): this legalistic language refers to Congress, as an honorable group of people.
- **Memorialists** (first full paragraph): this refers to the signers of the Memorial, i.e. the women whose names appear at the bottom of the page, those who are protesting the Indian Removal Act.
- **A hapless people** (fourth full paragraph): this is a reference to Native people, whom the document aims to defend or protect, but what does it also suggest to us about social and cultural differentiation between settler women and Native peoples?

The Primary Source Under Study:

1) **Observe:** Toward the top of this document the word “Pennsylvania” has been crossed out, and someone has written by hand: “Ohio and Town of Steubenville.” Note also that the document was authored by “American Females” (second full paragraph).

Reflect: What does the crossing out of Pennsylvania tell about how printed documents could be recycled and spread from one state to another? Can we assume that there may have been

many such protest documents? Since this one emphasizes Steubenville, perhaps other Ohio towns in Ohio circulated the document for signatures.

2) **Observe:** This document could be studied simply for its rhetorical elements, its effort to be persuasive, to win the Senators and Representatives in Congress over to the signers' point of view in opposition to the Indian Removal Act that was under consideration.

Reflect: Which words are being used that are especially meant to impress the reader? How are italics used? How is the capitalization of words possibly related to emphasis?

3) **Observe:** This document conveys much about the differences between Euro-American men and women in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Reflect: How do the signers (women) try to get their audience (men) to listen to their arguments and not discount the points they are making as coming from inferior people? Why would the women refer to themselves "the feeblest of the feeble" (in the fourth full paragraph)? Why would they refer to themselves as "American Females" and "the mothers and daughters of America" (emphasizing the name of the nation and emphasizing their gender)? In this period, and judging from this document, can we assume that settler-colonial women had less power than women of other nations (third full paragraph)? And what about less power than middle-class "white" women have today?

4) **Observe:** The document refers to a "crisis in the affairs of the Indian nations" and the potential well being of "more than fifty thousand of our fellow Christians" (first full paragraph) within our borders (fourth full paragraph).

Reflect: Apparently, the people of the Indian nations within the occupied territories are here called Christians. Is the use of the term "nations" significant here? What does the term "Christians" imply? Why would these terms be used in a letter meant to persuade to a Congressional audience to feel sympathy for the signers' point of view?

5) **Observe:** The author(s) of this document refer to "the *undoubted natural right*, which the Indians have, to the land of their forefathers, and in the face of solemn treaties." It protests the idea "to force them from their native soil, and to compel them to seek new homes in a distant and dreary wilderness," which, they believe, will result in their "annihilation." The authors argue that this would be "cruel and ungrateful" and bring a "lasting dishonor" to the "American character" (fourth full paragraph).

Reflect: We now know that these protest-petitions did not end up convincing Congress to reject the Indian Removal Act, so we might ask what were the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments? Would you be convinced by their arguments?

6) **Observe:** The final line says that the "petitioners" (women signers) "will ever pray."

Reflect: Why would they add this last line about praying? Might they have hoped that this line would have had a persuasive power? Why?

7) **Observe:** Take a look at the signatures.

Reflect: Were all the women signing their own names, or do you notice that some handwriting repeats, suggesting that one woman might have signed for others? What is suggested by the way some last names repeat? What ethnicities might be especially well represented by these names? Given that the ink is almost all the same across the list of names, does this suggest that the quill pen and ink were shared among the group all upon one occasion? In what settings might settler women have found large numbers of other women to approach to sign the document?