

# Jane Addams (1860-1935)

Jane Addams was born in 1860 in the small town of Cedarville, Illinois. She was the eighth of nine children. Her father was a state senator and a friend of Abraham Lincoln. He also ran a profitable grain mill and provided well for his children.

Addams graduated in 1881 from the Rockford Female Seminary (a seminary is a school that prepares people for religious work) as valedictorian of her class of seventeen. That same year, her father died of a ruptured appendix. Grieving his death and troubled by her own health problems (depression and chronic back pain), she spent the next six years seeking a direction for her life. She took up the study of medicine in Philadelphia but came to realize that she didn't care for it. She also toured Europe twice.

During an 1887 visit to London with her lifelong friend Ellen Starr, Addams came upon the Whitechapel District's Toynbee Hall, where activists worked to improve life in that impoverished area. What she saw there inspired her.

In 1889, she and Miss Starr leased a large, vacant home in a working-class immigrant district of Chicago. They called it Hull House. The two women worked hard to raise money and were joined by prominent social reformers and wealthy local women who simply wanted to help. Within two years, Hull House routinely served two thousand people a week. There were kindergarten classes for the young, supervised social activities for older children, and college-level courses for adults in the evenings, along with various clubs for all ages and housing for single, working women.

Eventually "Hull House" became a complex of thirteen buildings, including an art gallery, a public kitchen, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, and a playground. An outdoor camp was also established near Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

In the wake of Jane's success, her influence and activism expanded. She worked to improve the education system and in 1909 became the first woman president of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections. She also fought for labor reform and workers' rights, sponsored research into the causes of poverty and crime, and pressed for health and housing regulation. In 1910, she was the first woman to receive an honorary degree from Yale University. During that same year, she became president of the National Conference of Social Work—another first for a woman.

She supported the interests of African Americans, women, and immigrants and campaigned for progressive causes both nationally and internationally. She also chaired The Hague's International Congress of Women in 1915 and helped found the American Civil Liberties Union in 1920. In 1931, she was co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Sadly, her health had greatly deteriorated by then, and she was hospitalized in Baltimore on the very day her award was announced in Oslo, Norway.

She died of cancer in 1935, and her funeral was held in Hull House's courtyard. Most of that complex's

buildings are gone today, but Hull House itself is preserved and maintained in her memory.

**Questions**

1. How would you describe Jane Addams's life after graduating from the seminary?
2. What did Addams do to help the disadvantaged?
3. How did Addams's influence reach beyond the United States?
4. Why did the author write this passage? Support your response with details from the passage.

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**Vocabulary List**

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. profitable
2. valedictorian
3. ruptured
4. chronic
5. activists
6. impoverished
7. prominent
8. routinely
9. progressive
10. deteriorated

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**Context Clues**

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "He also ran a **profitable** grain mill and provided well for his children."

- a. modern or new    b. successful    c. large; vast    d. mechanized; having machines

2) "as **valedictorian** of her class of seventeen"

- a. president    b. treasurer    c. student teacher    d. student with the highest grades

3) "That same year, her father died of a **ruptured** appendix"

- a. broke open; burst    b. cancerous    c. infected    d. transplanted

4) "troubled by her own health problems (depression and **chronic** back pain)"

- a. lower; at the end    b. continuous or constant    c. spinal; of the bone    d. sharp or intense

5) "where **activists** worked to improve life in that impoverished area"

- a. residents    b. hired workers    c. those who work for a cause; advocates    d. volunteers

6) "where activists worked to improve life in that **impoverished** area"

- a. rural or remote    b. newly built    c. poor; needy    d. stricken with disease

7) "The two women worked hard to raise money and were joined by **prominent** social reformers"

- a. friendly; welcoming   b. foreign   c. hard-working   d. famous or respected

8) Hull House **routinely** served two thousand people a week

- a. often; frequently   b. occasionally   c. carefully   d. happily

9) campaigned for **progressive** causes both nationally and internationally

- a. forward-looking; reformist   b. various or many   c. competitive   d. objective

10) Sadly, her health had greatly **deteriorated** by then, and she was hospitalized in Baltimore

- a. improved; recovered   b. calculated   c. became important   d. declined; worsened