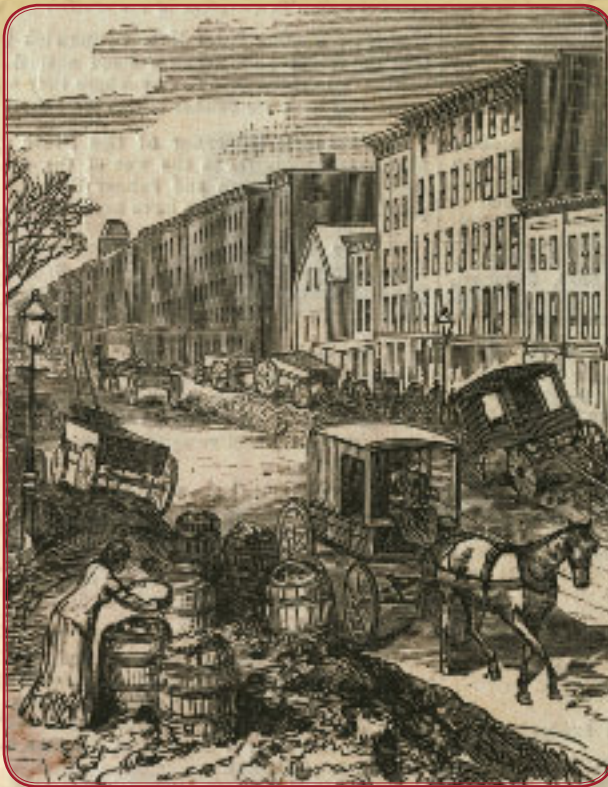




# *The First Woman Doctor*

by Joanne Mattern



**HOUGHTON MIFFLIN**

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

BOSTON

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**E**lizabeth Blackwell wanted to be a doctor. At the time, very few women went to college, especially not medical school. But Elizabeth did not give up. In 1849, she became the first woman to graduate from medical school in the United States. Elizabeth's strength and courage helped pave the way for other women to pursue the same goal.

**Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman to attend medical school in the United States.**



## 🔊 *An Up-and-Down Childhood*

Elizabeth Blackwell was born on February 3, 1821, in Bristol, England. Her parents believed in equal rights for men and women. This was very unusual at the time.

🔊 Elizabeth's parents made sure she had a good education. As a result, she grew up to be an **intelligent** and **informed** young woman.



🔊 Elizabeth was the third of nine children born to Samuel and Hannah Blackwell.



Elizabeth became a teacher at the school her family opened in Cincinnati, Ohio.

In 1832, the Blackwells moved to the United States—to Cincinnati, Ohio. Then, just five years later, in 1838, Elizabeth's father died.

The Blackwells did not have much money. To help pay the bills, Elizabeth, her mother, and two of Elizabeth's sisters started a boarding school for girls.



Until the 1840s, all doctors were men.

### ▶ *The Role of Women*

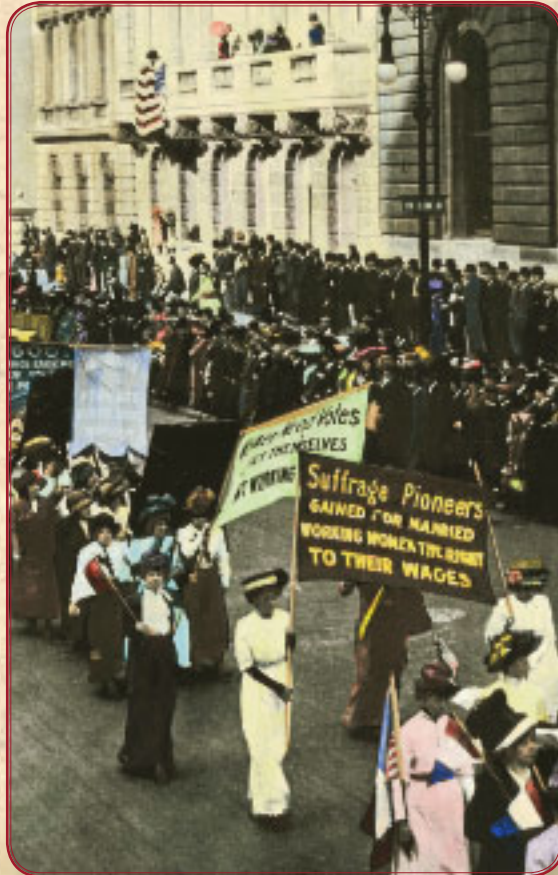
One day, Elizabeth went to visit her friend Mary Donaldson. Mary was very sick. She told Elizabeth that she disliked going to male doctors, but all the doctors at that time were men.

Then Mary said something surprising. She told Elizabeth that she should study medicine.

Elizabeth did not want to become a doctor. She did not even like the sight of blood!

However, Elizabeth could not forget Mary's words. Maybe she could make a difference for other women. At that time, women and men were not treated equally. Women were even denied the right to vote.


Women fought for many years until an amendment was passed to give them the right to vote.



## *Is This a Joke?*

Elizabeth continued to think about Mary's suggestion. She knew that it was almost impossible for a woman to become a doctor.

Elizabeth did not give up. She read medical books and saved as much money as she could. She applied to many medical schools, but every school rejected her.

 Then, in 1847, Elizabeth got a surprising letter. It was from the Geneva Medical School in Geneva, New York. The letter said Elizabeth was accepted to the school!


Later, Elizabeth found out that the students at Geneva had taken a vote on whether to accept her. The students all thought that Elizabeth's application was a joke. As a result, all the men voted yes. They were very surprised when Elizabeth showed up!



At medical school, the students would learn how to use many instruments like the stethoscope.

## *Rising to the Challenge*

At first, Elizabeth had a difficult time at school. Classes became **disorderly** when she was there. In addition, some teachers did not think Elizabeth was strong enough to do the difficult and sometimes bloody work.

 Elizabeth did not worry what other people thought. She worked hard and soon everyone began to respect her.

### *A Doctor's Course of Study*

What did medical students study in the 1840s?  
Classes included the following:

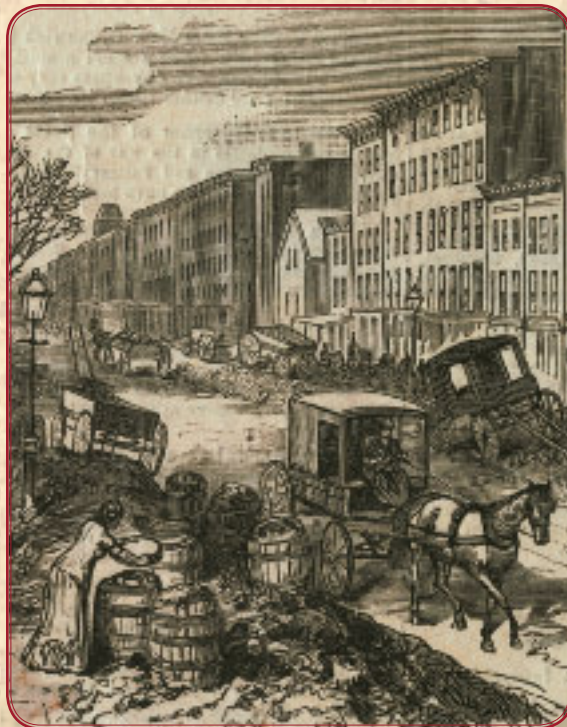
- **Anatomy: the study of the human body**
- **Surgery: operating on a patient**
- **Midwifery: delivering babies**
- **Botany: the study of plants used for medicine**
- **Chemistry: the study of what things are made of**
- **Physiology: the study of the body's many organs**

## 🔊 *Helping the Poor*

In 1849, Elizabeth graduated first in her class from Geneva. She decided to continue her studies in France and England. Then she came back to work in New York City.

🔊 Many medical offices did not want Elizabeth working there, so she opened a clinic in her home.

🔊 Elizabeth brought medical care to many poor women and children in New York City.



## Education for All

Elizabeth wanted to educate other women so that they could become doctors too. A famous nurse named Florence Nightingale shared the same dream. Together, they opened the Women's Medical College in New York City in 1868.

Florence Nightingale helped nurse many injured soldiers in Europe during the Crimean War.






Elizabeth Blackwell helped pave the way for more women to study medicine.

Elizabeth's determination to help women grew. She knew that women in England still faced many challenges. So, in 1869, Elizabeth moved to London, where she helped start the London School of Medicine for Women.

Elizabeth also wrote many articles. In 1895, she wrote a book about her life.

## *Elizabeth Blackwell's Life*

- 1821** • Elizabeth is born on February 3.
- 1847** • Elizabeth applies to medical schools. Only the Geneva Medical School accepts her.
- 1849** • Elizabeth graduates first in her class.
- 1849–1851** • Elizabeth studies in France and England.
- 1851** • Elizabeth opens a small clinic in New York City.
- 1868** • Elizabeth and Florence Nightingale start the Women's Medical College.
- 1869** • Elizabeth helps start the London School of Medicine for Women.
- 1895** • Elizabeth publishes her autobiography.
- 1910** • Elizabeth dies on May 31.

 Elizabeth died in 1910. Thanks to her work, many women around the world have received better medical care, while others have attended medical school and become doctors.

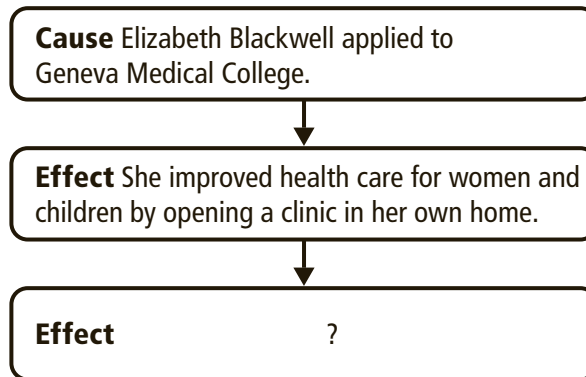
## Responding



### TARGET SKILL

### Cause and Effect

What were some effects of Elizabeth Blackwell's decision to apply to Geneva Medical College? Copy and complete the chart below.





### Write About It



**Text to Self** Think of one event or decision in your life that caused other things to happen as a result. Write a paragraph in which you describe the decision or event, and the effect it had on yourself or others.


  **TARGET VOCABULARY**

amendment  
approve  
candidates  
denied  
disorderly

informed  
intelligent  
legislature  
politics  
polls

  **TARGET SKILL** **Cause and Effect** Tell how events are related and how one event causes another.

  **TARGET STRATEGY** **Infer/Predict** Use text clues to figure out what isn't directly stated by the author.

 **GENRE Biography** tells about events in a person's life, written by another person.

**Level:** P  
**DRA:** 38  
**Genre:**  
Biography  
**Strategy:**  
Infer/Predict  
**Skill:**  
Cause and Effect  
**Word Count:** 880

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