**"Elizabeth Blackwell: Medical Pioneer"
by Joanna Halpert Kraus**

Student Edition
Unit 3, pp. 376–395

A drama, or play, is written to be acted for an audience. Think about the ways in which a play is different from other forms of fiction.

The Cast of Characters includes a Narrator; Elizabeth Blackwell, a premedical student; Dr. Barnes, her teacher; Dean Snyder, Dean of Admissions; Dean Richards, Geneva Medical College Dean; Raymond, a Geneva colleague; John, Student Council president; and two other students, Elmer and Phillip.

*(Elizabeth has traveled to Philadelphia in the early 1840s. She is in her mid-20s and appears to be in a hurry. She stops and raises both arms wide.)*

ELIZABETH: Someday, I will become the first lady surgeon in America!

NARRATOR: *(Reading from a book)* *The Lady's Book of Proper Conduct* says a lady should be "obedient, passive, and meek." *(Shuts the book firmly.)*

*(*DR. BARNES *enters. In his 40s, he is practical and wise.)*

DR. BARNES: No woman can ever be admitted to a medical school!

ELIZABETH: Can't you send a letter on my behalf?

DR. BARNES: I'll write a letter to my friend who is dean of admissions here in Philadelphia. You must not expect miracles though.

*(At a medical school in Philadelphia)*

DEAN SNYDER: *(Waving Elizabeth's application)* This application is absurd. If I admit a woman, male students won't enroll in our medical school. Even though Dr. Barnes recommended her, I must reject her application.

*(Back at home)*

ELIZABETH: Rejection from Philadelphia. And here's a rejection from New York.

NARRATOR: That makes twenty-five rejections all together.

ELIZABETH: For so many years, I've prepared for medical school. I've worked hard studying Greek and anatomy. The only reason they turn me away is because I'm a female.

*(At Geneva Medical College in New York)*

DEAN RICHARDS: We have an unusual request, Raymond. An excellent applicant comes recommended by Dr. Barnes.

RAYMOND: Must be an excellent candidate if Dr. Barnes has recommended him.

DEAN RICHARDS: I'm afraid the *him* is a *her*!

RAYMOND: A her? No chance!

DEAN RICHARDS: How do we reject a candidate from Dr. Barnes?

RAYMOND: Why not let the medical students decide?

DEAN RICHARDS: A perfect solution! That way we can tell him the students rejected her, and not us.

*(Three students enter center stage. JOHN, Student Council President, 18, is very smart and open-minded. ELMER, 17, loves to joke. PHILLIP, 17, is excitable.)*

JOHN: *(Bangs gavel)* I call this meeting to order. As the Student Council we have been asked to decide on an important matter. A young lady wishes to attend the Geneva Medical College.

ELMER: What kind of lady would want to apply to this institution?

PHILLIP: This is a serious matter, indeed.

ELMER: Why not let her attend? Then Phillip here might have someone he can outwit!

*(SOUND: Laughter. Pounding on desks.)*

PHILLIP: If we let her come, she could ruin our honorable reputation.

JOHN: I believe everyone should be able to have a scientific education. I say Aye. Cast your votes. What say you?

ELMER: I say Aye!

PHILLIP: I say Aye, but let's hope we don't soon regret our decision!

*(Back at home)*

ELIZABETH: *(Holding the letter from Geneva Medical College, she runs down the stairs to the parlor, delirious with happiness.)* Good news, everyone! I've been accepted to medical college!

*(The year is 1849. SOUND: Graduation procession music plays. Applause. ELIZABETH steps to center stage.)*

ELIZABETH: This diploma is a great honor. I promise to do everything I possibly can to bring honor to it and to the field of medicine!

NARRATOR: *(Hovers in the background)* Elizabeth Blackwell overcame the obstacles of prejudice to pursue her dream to become a doctor, though not a surgeon. Because no hospital would hire her, she opened a clinic on her own. She devoted the rest of her life to the care of poor immigrants to New York City. She lived to be 89 years old.

From *Ms. Courageous: Women of Science* by Joanna Halpert Kraus. Copyright © 1997 Joanna Halpert Kraus. Used by permission of New Plays Incorporated, P.O. Box 5074, Charlottesville, VA 22905.