Worksheet #5
Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman or the Cult of True Womanhood?

Mary Cassatt. **Modern Woman.** 1893.

Read *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman or the Cult of True Womanhood?* in *Reclaiming Female Agency* and answer the following questions.

Mary Cassatt was an American, but lived most of her life in France. Why did she prefer to live in France over the United States? How did living abroad help her career as an artist?

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Under what circumstance was education permitted to women in the Victorian era? Why was education such a “forbidden fruit” for women?

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In what way was Cassatt’s depiction of her mother and sister reading unconventional?
Why was it more acceptable for women artists in the Victorian era to work in the Impressionist style than in others?

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Why did Cassatt repeatedly paint images of mothers with their children? Did the artist seem to have any interest in children or motherhood outside of art? What “social problem” did Cassatt’s images of mothers and children address? In what way does she take a very traditional, well covered subject and turn it into a new theme that reflects modern life?

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In the author’s opinion, what is the “strong feminist message” that is conveyed by Cassatt’s Woman’s Building mural? Discuss how Cassatt “inverts the gendered meanings of familiar imagery” in the center panel of this work.

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How did the breaking of boundaries by the Impressionists as a group open new doors for women artists? How did the Impressionists as a group neglect the contributions of women and continue the traditional oppression of women artists?

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