

Women's empowerment through education, resilience, and gender roles in *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery

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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 30 June 2025 Approved 30 July 2025 Published 31 July 2025 Keywords: Education, Gender Roles, Liberal Feminism, Resilience, Women's Empowerment	This study explores the theme of women's empowerment in <i>Anne of Green Gables</i> by L.M. Montgomery through the lenses of education, resilience, and gender roles using a liberal feminism. The analysis focuses on how the protagonist, Anne Shirley, navigates a patriarchal society and asserts her agency through academic ambition, personal strength, and the rejection of traditional gender expectations. The study also examines the influence of supporting characters, such as Marilla Cuthbert, Diana Barry, Miss Stacy and Gilbert Blythe in shaping and reflecting changing gender norms. By analyzing the dialogues in the novel, this research demonstrates that education and resilience not only foster Anne's and the others character personal growth and independence but also challenge societal norms and promote gender equality. The study concludes that literature, as seen in Montgomery's work, can be a powerful tool for feminist critique and social transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is a key concept in gender studies and social development. It reflects the process by which women gain the strength to make important decisions in their lives and free themselves from structural oppression. According to Kabeer (1999), empowerment is the process through which individuals who previously lacked power gain the ability to make strategic life choices. This includes access to resources, control over personal life, and the capacity to challenge restrictive social norms.

Similarly, Rowlands (1997) emphasizes that empowerment consists of personal, relational, and collective dimensions. The personal dimension relates to the development of self-confidence and

individual self-worth. The relational dimension involves the ability to negotiate and build equitable relationships. Meanwhile, the collective dimension highlights the importance of organization and collective action to transform unjust power structures.

In today's world, the relevance of women's empowerment remains highly significant, as many women around the world still experience unequal access to education, discrimination in the workplace, and restrictive cultural expectations about domestic roles (UNESCO, 2020). Education has long been recognized as a powerful tool for combating gender inequality, as it enables women to gain knowledge, independence, and the confidence to challenge oppressive norms

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(Ahmad, 2011). Feminist theorists argue that literature plays a dual role in society, it reflects existing social realities and acts as a transformative force that raises critical awareness of issues like gender inequality (Hooks, 2000; Showalter, 1979). Through the representation of strong and empowered female characters, literature can inspire readers, challenge patriarchal values, and even contribute to social change (Moi, 1985; James, 2022).

In the literary context, the representation of women's empowerment is often embodied through female characters who defy traditional roles or exhibit independence, courage, and resilience in overcoming social obstacles. Gilbert and Gubar (1979), in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, assert that literary works featuring women with voice, desire, and agency serve as resistance against the dominant patriarchal narrative in the literary canon.

In this study, a novel of Lucy Maud Montgomery entitled *Anne and the Green Gables* becomes the object of the analysis.

The novel *Anne of Green Gables* portrays the struggles of a young orphan girl, Anne Shirley, as she seeks to transcend social and gender limitations in a conservative environment. Anne's character becomes a symbol of a determined woman pursuing education, preserving her identity, and actively challenging female stereotypes. The novel is a beloved Canadian classic that has gained global recognition (Devereux, 2001). As a coming-of-age story, the novel portrays Anne's psychological and moral growth, resonating with readers through themes of culture, identity, and imagination (Banu & Priscilla, 2023). Additionally, the novel explores women's empowerment and self-discovery within a patriarchal society. Anne's journey reflects communication theory by demonstrating how her rhetorical skills help her build connections and overcome social barriers (Jeevitha & V. Paul Thomas Raj, 2024).

Ahmad (2011) explains that women's empowerment is a complex idea that involves improving women's positions in economic, social, and political areas so they can be equal to men. This view is supported by James (2022), who adds that empowerment also means helping women become more independent and confident in

making decisions, both in their personal lives and in public spaces.

In the area of education, Kabeer (1999) and Lange (1887) argue that giving women access to formal education is very important so they can become independent and improve their social position. These studies show that when women receive education, they not only have better chances of getting good jobs, but they also become stronger in challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

Resilience, or the ability to stay strong through challenges, is also seen as a key quality of empowered women. A study by Colvin and colleagues (2013) found that resilience helped female students from disadvantaged backgrounds overcome social and structural barriers. Similarly, Sultana (2012) emphasized that resilience is important for women to deal with strict gender roles, especially in traditional societies.

When it comes to gender roles, Eagly and Karau (2002) shows that society's stereotypes often limit women's chances to take on leadership roles or make public decisions. Brekke (2008) adds that literature—especially children's books—can both reflect and challenge these gender expectations, making literature a powerful tool for promoting gender equality.

However, most of these studies have yet to specifically examine how education, resilience, and gender roles contribute to women's empowerment within the novel. Additionally, characters such as Marilla Cuthbert, who plays a crucial role in the story, have rarely been analyzed from a feminist perspective. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how Anne and other characters navigate challenges as women in a patriarchal society, how they demonstrate strength, independence, and shifts in gender roles through education, and perseverance, and how these experiences of empowerment affect their personal development, relationships, and roles within the community.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method, which means it tries to understand the content and meaning of a story in a deep way. As Creswell (2017) explains, this method fits well when studying social issues in texts. This research focuses on two main objects; the material object

which is the novel *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) by L.M. Montgomery, and the formal object which is the way the novel explores women's empowerment through the themes of education, resilience, and gender roles. Although several characters are discussed, the main focus is on Anne Shirley, whose personal growth and resistance to gender expectations strongly reflect the core themes of this study.

The main data in this study were taken from the novel in the forms of words, sentences, and dialogues. Meanwhile, the supporting data were collected from books, journal articles that discuss Montgomery's work, women empowerment and feminist literary theory.

To analyze the data, Liberal Feminism theory by John Stuart Mill is employed. In his book *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill says that gender equality can happen through equal access to education, freedom of choice, and the removal of social barriers that limit women. He believes that women should have the same rights as men in education, work, and social life. This theory highlights the importance of individual freedom and shows that gender roles are shaped by society, not by nature.

Using a feminist approach in literature, this study looks at how literary works can reflect, criticize, or support views on gender roles.

The goal of this research is to answer the question "How is women's empowerment described in the novel and what are its impacts on the characters?" This study aims to give a deeper understanding of how *Anne of Green Gables* adds to feminist views and encourages readers to think about gender justice and equality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

In *Anne of Green Gables*, education does not only give Anne knowledge, but also the opportunity to determine her own future. In the conservative and patriarchal Avonlea society, girls are often expected to play only the roles of wives and mothers. However, Anne shows that women too can think deeply, dream big and compete with boys. For her,

education is a way to fight stereotypes, prove her abilities and become independent.

In terms of liberal feminism, such as the ideas of John Stuart Mill, Anne is a symbol of a girl realizing her individual rights. This right includes the right to learn, to develop, and to resist institutions that try to limit her. Education plays an important role for Anne on her path to empowerment. In Avonlea's strict society, learning becomes a way for her to change her social status, create her own identity, and resist gender roles that try to limit her.

1.1 Anne's Passion for Learning as a Form of Gender Resistance

From the beginning, Anne shows a strong love for learning, which was unusual for girls in her society. This is clear when she stays determined even after Gilbert Blythe makes fun of her, and she decides to prove that girls can do just as well or even better—than boys in school.

"I'll show you," she said defiantly to herself, "I'll show you that I can be as good as any boy!" (Montgomery, 1908, p. 178)

This quote comes after Gilbert teases Anne in class. Instead of staying upset, Anne decides to fight back with effort. She works hard to succeed in her studies, not just for herself, but to prove that girls are equally capable. Her determination turns education into a quite form of resistance against the unfair roles given to women. She does not use anger or violence, she uses results. By refusing to believe that boys are naturally smarter, Anne challenges gender stereotypes and shows the power of persistence. This reflects the values of liberal feminism, which fights for equal opportunities, especially in education. As Mary Rubio (2008), notes that Anne "refuses to be limited by the roles society sets for girls." Feminist Simone de Beauvoir (1989), also says that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," which means that identity is shaped by action not biology. Anne proves this through her academic drive. As Khan (2020) explains, the competition between Anne and Gilbert highlights gender inequality in

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education and shows how girls push for fair treatment in school (pp. 8-9). Anne's story reminds us that learning can be a powerful tool for female empowerment.

1.2 The Avery Scholarship as a Symbol of Social Mobility

Anne's success in winning the Avery Scholarship becomes a turning point in her life. She proves that even an orphaned girl can be recognized for her intelligence and hard work. The scholarship gives Anne a chance to go to college—something that was rare for girls at that time.

“Oh, Diana, just think. I might win the Avery. It would mean college...and everything!” (Montgomery, 1908)

In this quote, Anne is full of hope and excitement. For her, the Avery is not just a prize, it is a path to independence and a freer future. She believes that education can give her control over her life. From a liberal feminist view, this shows how education opens equal opportunities for women. Scholar Beverley Lyon Clark (2004), writes that Montgomery “gives her heroine ambition without apology,” showing that female ambition should be accepted, not hidden. Feminist thinker bell hooks (1994), also says that “education is the practice of freedom,” especially for girls who want to escape traditional roles. Anne's dream of going to college reflect her deep desire to build her own future. She is not afraid to dream big, and that makes her a strong example of self empowerment through education.

“It seems like a dream—a wonderful dream come true,” she whispered. (Montgomery, 1908)

The Avery Scholarship is not just a personal achievement—it's also a real tool for social mobility. Education helps Anne rise from being an “unwanted orphan” to becoming a respected person in her community. A similar example can be seen in *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë. Like Anne, Jane also uses education to gain independence and build her identity as a woman

with strong values in a society that often holds women back.

1.3 Becoming a Teacher: Empowerment Through Economic Independence

Anne's decision to become a teacher is not just about getting a job—it's a powerful step toward women's independence. She chooses a professional path that allows her to stand on her own and give back to her community.

“When I grow up I'm going to be a teacher. I don't want to be anyone's wife. I want to be myself.” (Montgomery, 1908)

“I've come to the conclusion that I'm going to be a teacher.” (Montgomery, 1908)

From the view of liberal feminism, as Judith Lorber (1997) explains, women are empowered when they gain independent access to social and economic resources. For Anne, becoming a teacher lifts her social status and proves that women can have careers outside the home. She shows that marriage is not the only future for a woman. This is a strong example of women's empowerment—Anne refuses to let her future be controlled by men and chooses her own path in life.

1.4 Critique of Social Norms Through Anne's Narrative

Montgomery includes a quiet critique of traditional gender roles through Anne's journey in education. While other girls in Avonlea, like Diana Barry, are expected to get married and become housewives, Anne shows that women can have more choices in life.

“I'd rather be a teacher and live my own life than marry just for the sake of marrying.” (Montgomery, 1908)

This reflects the idea of agency in feminism, which means a woman's ability to make her own choices and take control of her life. Like Jo March in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1868), Anne

chooses a different path—she focuses on studying and working instead of giving in to pressure to marry. Both characters show how education can give women the strength to build their own identities outside of what society expects. Anne's story proves that education not only helps women grow personally, but also gives them the power to improve their communities. Through Anne's journey, Montgomery shows that education can be a tool for freedom and change, especially in a society that still holds onto old gender roles.

2. RESILIENCE IN OVERCOMING SOCIAL AND PERSONAL HARDSHIPS

The character of Anne Shirley in *Anne of Green Gables* shows that a woman's strength is not only seen in her success at school but also in her ability to face life's many challenges. Anne had a difficult childhood—she was an orphan who moved from one foster home to another. She didn't have a loving family until she came to Green Gables. Even with all these hardships, Anne never gave up. She kept her hope, her imagination, and her strong spirit. This is what we call resilience—the strength to rise after going through hard times.

One important quote from the novel says:

“It's not what the world holds for you, it's what you bring to it.” (Montgomery, 1908)

This quote shows that Anne doesn't let her past define her. She believes she has value and strength, even when others look down on her. According to Benard (2004), resilience means being able to survive hard situations and still grow. Anne is a clear example of a resilient girl.

Anne also faces social rules that try to control how girls should act. In her town, girls are expected to be quiet, polite, and not speak their minds. But Anne loves to talk, imagine, and express her thoughts. People often scold her for it. What's interesting is that Anne doesn't change

just to please others. She learns from her mistakes, but she doesn't lose who she is.

For example, when Anne dyes her hair because she's ashamed of the red color, the result is a disaster—it turns green. But she doesn't stay upset. She learns to accept herself. She says:

“It's a burning shame to have red hair, but there's one consolation: it's bound to fade.” (Montgomery, 1908).

This shows that Anne is learning to make peace with who she is. Overton (2019), explains that Anne's experience shows how girls struggle to find their identity while facing pressure from society.

Anne also shows resilience in her relationships. At first, people in Avonlea thought she was strange. But over time, she builds strong bonds with Matthew, Marilla, and her friends. For example, Matthew once says:

“You've done something to me, Anne-girl. And I don't know what, but I like it.” (Montgomery, 1908).

This line shows that Anne has the power to change people's hearts through her kindness and honesty. Matthew, who is shy and quiet, opens up emotionally because of Anne. She helps him feel warmth, joy, and connection things he may have buried for years. This reflects Anne's emotional strength and her ability to heal others through love. Scholar Mary Rubio (2008) explains, that Anne “transforms those around her by being fully herself.” Feminist scholar Carol Giligan (1982), also argues that strong relationships based on care and empathy are key parts of women's moral development. Anne's journey shows that resilience is not only about surviving pain,

but also about connecting, growing, and helping others grow.

Another moment that shows Anne's strength is her choice to turn down a scholarship so she can stay and take care of Marilla after Matthew dies. Even though she really wants to continue her studies, she decides to stay home. This shows maturity and a sense of responsibility. Anne says:

"I'm just as ambitious as ever. Only, I've changed the object of my ambitions."
(Montgomery, 1908).

From a feminist perspective, as explained by Gilbert and Gubar (1979), Anne's decision is a sign of a woman's power to choose her own path, even if it goes against what most people expect. When we compare Anne to a character like Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice* (2003) by Jane Austen, we see different kinds of strength. Elizabeth shows strength by refusing to marry without love and by being independent. Anne, on the other hand, shows resilience through her positive spirit, her relationships, and her journey of self-acceptance. Both characters prove that women can be strong in their own ways.

3. CHALLENGING AND REDEFINING GENDER ROLES

In *Anne of Green Gables*, L. M. Montgomery gives a soft but powerful critique of the gender roles placed on women in rural Canada at the end of the 19th century. Through the character of Anne Shirley, the novel not only shows the limits of traditional gender expectations but also actively challenges and redefines them. Anne becomes a symbol of feminist empowerment.

In the Avonlea community, girls are expected to be quiet, obedient, gentle, and skilled in housework. Ambition,

independence, and education are often seen as "boyish" and not suitable for young girls. But Anne goes against these ideas from the start. Her outspoken nature, strong imagination, academic competitiveness, and refusal to follow social rules make her stand out.

"Why must people kneel down to be humble? If I could just do it standing up, it would be so much easier."
(Montgomery, 1908)

The quote shows Anne's rejection of traditional ideas about what it means to be a "proper" girl. She questions the idea that being humble means lowering yourself. Instead, she wants to stay strong and keep her dignity. This shows her desire for autonomy—something that is central to gender empowerment. Scholar Elizabeth Epperly (1992) explains, that Anne "redefines girlhood by refusing to be small or silent." Feminist critic Adrienne Rich (1972), also says that women must "reclaim their posture and voice" to resist roles forced on them. Anne starts this resistance even as a child. She also competes directly with boys, especially Gilbert Blythe—not to get his attention, but to prove her intelligence. In doing this, she breaks the stereotype that girls should stay quiet or focus only on marriage and motherhood. Through her academic success, winning a scholarship, and choosing to become a teacher, Anne shows a new kind of femininity: educated, ambitious, and confident.

Montgomery also highlights Anne's differences by comparing her with other characters in the novel:

3.1 Anne Shirley: Challenging Traditional Femininity

Anne Shirley is the main character who challenges traditional ideas of femininity. She speaks up, defends herself, and competes in school, showing

that girls can be strong and smart. She says confidently:

“I’ll show you that I can be as good as any boy!”
(Montgomery, 1908, p. 178)

This shows that Anne refuses to be limited by gender expectations. Her dreams—like going to Queen’s Academy and becoming a teacher—are part of her fight against the belief that girls should only focus on home and marriage. She wants to be valued for her mind, not just her manners. This line also shows how Anne uses ambition as a form of resistance. Instead of staying silent, she proves her worth through hard work. Scholar Elizabeth Epperly (1992), says that Anne “creates a new kind of heroine spirited, outspoken, and independent.” Feminist theorist Judith Butler (1990), also explains that gender roles are learned, and can be changed through action. Anne’s words and goals show that femininity can include courage, intelligence and determination.

3.2 Marilla Cuthbert: A Traditional Figure Undergoing Transformation

Marilla starts as a strict, old-fashioned woman who believes in discipline, good manners, and a woman’s duty at home. But Anne’s presence slowly changes her.

“She’s got a tongue of her own, that’s what. I like her spirit.” (Montgomery, 1908, p. 89)

At first, Marilla values silence, obedience, and duty, but Anne’s bold words and lively mind begin to affect her. Marilla starts to admire girls who speak up and show strength. This marks a shift in her beliefs about what a girl should be. Scholar Elizabeth Waterston (2008), explains that Marilla “learns to respect emotional honesty and independence in

women.” Over time, Marilla becomes more open and caring. She supports Anne’s dreams and growth, showing that even traditional women can change and help empower others.

3.3 Diana Barry: Conventional Femininity with Growth

Diana Barry represents the ideal girl in Avonlea—kind, obedient, and polite. But through her friendship with Anne, Diana begins to see new ideas about courage and freedom.

“I guess you can do lots of things boys can do if you try hard enough.” (Montgomery, 1908, p. 153)

This quote shows Diana starting to believe that girls can do just as much as boys if they try. Her bond with Anne helps her question the traditional roles she was taught and opens her mind to new possibilities. Scholar Mary Rubio (2008), notes that Anne’s presence often “awakens hidden strength in others, especially in girls like Diana.” Feminist theorist bell hooks also says that change often begins in relationships, where girls learn from each other and begin to challenge the limits placed on them. Diana’s growth reflects how even traditionally feminine characters can develop a stronger sense of independence and self belief.

3.4 Miss Stacy: A Professional and Progressive Woman

Miss Stacy is a powerful example of a woman who breaks gender roles. She’s an educated, independent teacher working in a male-dominated society. Her way of teaching is different—she encourages critical thinking and big dreams, especially for Anne.

“Miss Stacy makes a difference in everything she

touches.” (Montgomery, 1908, p. 211)

This quote shows how deeply Miss Stacy influences her students, not just through lessons, but through inspiration. She proves that women can take strong leadership roles outside the home and help shape their communities. Miss Stacy becomes a role model for Anne, showing that women can lead, teach, and guide with confidence. Feminist theorists bell hooks (1994), also says that education led by women can create spaces for growth, freedom, and resistance. Miss Stacy does exactly that. Her character shows how professional women can empower others and push society forward.

3.5 Rachel Lynde: A Layered Representation of Social Morality

Rachel Lynde is a strong adult woman who values tradition and often judges others quickly. At first, she criticizes Anne for being wild and rude. But later, she changes her opinion and supports Anne's goals.

“Well, I must say I'm proud of that girl. She's clever, and she's got grit.” (Montgomery, 1908, p. 277)

This quote shows that Rachel comes to respect bravery and intelligence in girls. Though she begins with a conservative view of femininity, she grows to appreciate Anne's strength and ambition. Rachel becomes a symbol of how traditional views can shift when people see real examples of empowered women. Feminist critic Nancy Armstrong (1897), argues that literature helps shape what society sees as acceptable roles for women. Through Rachel's change, the novel shows that even those who resist change at first can grow to accept and support strong, independent girls.

3.6 Gilbert Blythe: Masculinity The Respects Equality

Gilbert Blythe also plays an important role in the gender story. He starts as Anne's academic rival, but he respects her talent and strength. When he says:

“I suppose I'll just have to get used to a rival, Anne.” (Montgomery, 1908, p. 203)

It shows that he accepts Anne as an equal. This quote marks a shift from competition to mutual respect. Gilbert's attitude helps create a view of gender equality that includes boys as allies. He does not feel threatened by Anne's intelligence instead, he admires it. Feminist theorist Michael Kimmel (2000), argues that true masculinity includes the ability to respect women and support their success. Gilbert's growth shows that boys too, can challenge gender roles and become part of a more equal future.

CONCLUSION

The novel *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery offers a rich and inspiring narrative that highlights how women's empowerment can be achieved through education, resilience, and the redefinition of gender roles. Anne Shirley, as the central character, becomes a literary symbol of a girl who refuses to conform to restrictive norms and instead chooses to build her own path with courage and independence. Her strong will to pursue education, win a scholarship, and become a teacher illustrates how knowledge can serve as a powerful tool for self-determination and social mobility.

Resilience is another major theme that reflects Anne's strength—not only in overcoming her difficult past as an orphan, but also in resisting societal expectations about how a girl should behave. Her ability to stay true to herself, build meaningful relationships, and make mature decisions even in hard times shows how personal growth and emotional endurance are crucial parts of empowerment.

Furthermore, the novel presents a broader picture of gender roles in a patriarchal society through supporting characters like Marilla Cuthbert, Diana Barry, Miss Stacy, Rachel Lynde, and Gilbert Blythe. These characters undergo development or support Anne's growth, demonstrating that empowerment is not only an individual process but also one that takes place within social relationships and shared values. Montgomery challenges traditional norms and presents new models of femininity—confident, thoughtful, ambitious, and self-sufficient.

Through the lens of liberal feminism, *Anne of Green Gables* encourages readers to reflect on the importance of equality in education, freedom of choice, and the need to question gender stereotypes. The novel remains relevant today as it continues to inspire discussions on women's rights, agency, and the possibility of change in both individual lives and society at large.

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