

Sofia Kovalevskaya

An extraordinary woman, Sofia Kovalevskaya (also known as Sonia Kovalevsky) was not only a great mathematician but also a writer and advocate of women's rights in the 19th century.

As a young child, Sofia Kovalevskaya was fascinated with the unusual wallpaper on the wall of a room on the family estate: the lecture notes of Mikhail Ostrogradsky on differential and integral calculus.

Although her father provided her with private tutoring, he would not allow her to study abroad for further education, and Russian universities would not then admit women.

Sofia Kovalevskaya wanted to continue her studies in mathematics, so she found a solution: an amenable young student of paleontology, Vladimir Kovalensky, who entered into a marriage of convenience with her. This allowed her to escape the control of her father.



Sonia went to Germany and entered the University of Heidelberg, and then continued her studies at the University of Berlin, where her leader was the outstanding mathematician Weierstrass, known as the "father of modern analysis".

Despite the fact that the marriage was fictitious, the couple eventually really got along and after a few years, their daughter was born. Sophia received her doctorate. She was elected as a member of the Moscow Mathematical Society. Thanks to her academic success, Kovalevskaya was admitted to the Russian Academy of Sciences.

It was her struggle to obtain the best education available which began to open doors at universities to women. In addition, her ground-breaking work in mathematics made her male counterparts reconsider their archaic notions of women's inferiority to men in such scientific arenas.