Main Points of Katherine Clerk Maxwell

- She lived in Europe (the United Kingdom) during the 1800s.
- She helped to assist her husband in his physics experiments.
- She and her husband worked to research colored light, and how certain colors of light can mix together to create other colors.

Many photos and primary sources of Katherine and James, as well as their correspondence and experiments, can be found at the Cambridge Digital Library. This library database includes a large collection of primary sources from James Clerk Maxwell. It holds original photos pertaining to him and Katherine’s lives, as well as photos of his actual letters, experiments, and apparatus they used in their research. If students are interested, teachers may show them these photos:

https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/search?author=&excludeText=&expandFacet=subject&facetDate=1900s%20C.E.&fileID=&fullText=&keyword=Maxwell&language=&location=&page=1&place=&recallScale=0.0&shelfLocator=&subject=&tagging=1&textJoin=and&title=.

Katherine Clerk Maxwell (right) with her husband James Clerk Maxwell (left) and their dog Tobi.

Image courtesy of the Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge University. This image is under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License (CC BY-NC 3.0).

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1 Maxwell and his Wife, Katherine Mary Dewar, P1180, Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge University, https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PH-CAVENDISH-P-01180/1.


Evidence of Katherine’s participation in James’s gas viscosity experiments, eventually producing “On the viscosity or internal friction of air and other gases” in 1886.⁹