

LESSON PLAN #13: Abigail as Mother (Part 1)

[1] **Curriculum framework(s):** 8.32 Identify and analyze the point(s) of view in a literary work. 11.5 Apply knowledge of the concept that the theme of meaning of a selection represents a view or comment on life, and provide support from the text for the identified themes.

11.6 Apply knowledge of the concept that a text can contain more than one theme.

13.25 Analyze and explain the structure and elements of nonfiction works.

[2] **Goal of the lesson:** For students to see that in writing to different children, a parent may change his or her point of view, depending upon the audience. Also, to demonstrate that in a letter, there can be many themes about life, much in the same way a parent wishes to impart many morals to a child.

[3] **Expected Student outcomes:** Students will be able to compare and contrast audience for tone and to identify themes.

[4] **Assessment of expected student outcomes:** Successful completion of class work.

[5] **Instructional procedures:** 45 minutes

Vocabulary: malevolent; insidious.

Background: Please note that Abigail was writing to Nabby (Abigail 2d) when Nabby was visiting Mercy Otis Warren. Secondly, in the letter to Thomas, Abigail was in London and her son was studying at Harvard.

Journal prompt: In family life, are children all treated the same, or are some siblings treated differently than others?

Activities: As in previous lessons, students will have read the two letters and completed an Epistolary Analysis for them. Lead the class by discussing observations of this analysis and the differences between her daughter and her son. Are there differences in the way in which she treats her son versus her daughter? Since students will have already completed a theme analysis and a tone analysis, divide the class into two groups: One group will compare and contrast themes, and one group will compare and contrast tones. Next, the groups will teach each other. Then they will hypothesize about a difference in tone and look for an explanation of what this says about family life. Return to the journal prompt. In contemporary family life, are children all treated the same, or are they treated differently?

Homework: Read the next letters in the unit and complete an Epistolary Analysis handout for them.

[6] **Material and resources:**

1) Tone and Theme charts for the Nabby /Tommy letters

2) Transcribed letters:

Abigail Adams to Abigail Adams 2d, February 1779

Abigail Adams to Thomas Boylston Adams, 15 March 1787

Nabby versus Tommy

Round:

Tone

Tone and Evidence of Tone In Abigail's Letter to Nabby	Tone and Evidence of Tone In Abigail's Letter to Tommy

Nabby versus Tommy

Round:

Theme

Themes (and Support) In Abigail's Letter to Nabby	Themes (and Support) In Abigail's Letter to Tommy

Student Name _____ Date _____

Epistolary Analysis

Date of letter(s)	Location of letter writer
Sender	Recipient

Topic of letter(s)	
Theme(s) of the letter(s)	
Significant quotes	
Historical details in the letter(s)	

Allusions, metaphors, similes and other figures of speech (give examples)	
Tone	
Images	
Diction	
Evidence of sarcasm or satire	
Vocabulary words	

Letter from Abigail Adams to Abigail Adams 2d, February 1779

Braintree, [ca. 11] February, 1779

My Dear Daughter

It is with inexpressible pleasure that I enclose to you a letter from your brother, and that I can tell you, that I last night received four letters of various dates from your papa, and one so late as of the 6th of November. I would send forward the letters, but know not how to part with them. Your papa writes that he has enjoyed uncommon health for him, since his arrival in France; that your brother is well, and, what is still more grateful to a parent's ears, that he conducts with a becoming prudence and discretion; that he assiduously applies himself to his books. And your papa is pleased to say, "that the lessons of his mamma are a constant law to him, and that they are so to his sister and brothers, is a never failing consolation to him, at times when he feels more tenderness for them than words can express." Let this pathetic expression of your papa's, my dear, have a due influence upon your mind.

Upon politics, your papa writes thus: "Whatever syren songs of peace may be sung in your ears, you may depend upon it, from me, (who unhappily have been seldom mistaken in my guesses of the intention of the British government for fourteen years,) that every malevolent passion, and every insidious art, will predominate in the British cabinet against us. Their threats of Prussians and of great reinforcements, are false and impracticable, and they know them to be so; but their threats of doing mischief with the forces they have, will be verified as far as their power."

This we see, in their descent upon Georgia, verified this very hour.

Almost all Europe, the Dutch especially, are at this day talking of Great Britain in the style of American sons of liberty. He hopes the unfortunate event at Rhode Island will not produce any heart-burnings between Americans and the Count D'Estaing, who is allowed by all Europe to be a great and worthy officer, and by all that know him to be a zealous friend of America.

After speaking of some embarrassments in his public business, from half anglicized Americans, he adds, "But from this court, this city and nation, I have experienced nothing but uninterrupted politeness."

I have a letter from a French lady, Madam la Grand, in French—a polite letter, and wrote in consequence of your papa's saying that, in some cases, it was the duty of a good citizen to sacrifice his all for the good of his country. She tells him that the sentiment is worthy of a Roman and a member of Congress, but cannot believe he would sacrifice his wife and children. In reply, he tells her that I possessed the same sentiment. She questions the truth of his assertion; and says nature would operate more powerfully that the love of one's country, and whatever other sacrifices he might make, it would be impossible for him to resign those very dear connections, especially as he had so often given her the warmest assurances of his attachment to them; and she will not be satisfied till she has related the conversation, and appealed to me for my sentiments upon the subject. She is an elderly lady, and wife to the banker, expresses great regard for your brother, of whom she is very fond, says he inherits the spirit of his father, and bids fair to be a Roman like him.

When I have fully translated the letter I will send it forward. I would have written to Mrs. Warren, but have much writing to do, and you may communicate this letter to her, if she can read it; but 'tis badly written, and I have not time to copy.

Let me hear from you soon, who am, at all times, your affectionate mamma,

A.A.

"Abigail Adams to Abigail Adams 2nd." February 1779. *Adams Family Correspondence: Volume 3, April 1778-September 1780*. Eds. Lyman Henry Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1973.

Letter from Abigail Adams to Thomas Boylston Adams, 15 March 1787

London March 15th 1787

Dear Tommy

I would not omit writing you, because you seem to think you have been agrieved. I do not recollect what I wrote you, but I have Some Idea, that it was an enumeration of the various accidents you had met with, and advising you to more care and attention in future. I had no occasion to chide you for want of application to your studies, because your uncles your Aunts & your Brothers had been witnesses for you, and all of them had Spoken well of you. it has indeed been a great and an abundant pleasure both to your Father & to me to hear the repeated & constant testimony of all our Friends with regard to the conduct of all our Sons, and I flatter myself that what ever else may be our lot & portion in Life, that of undutifull and vicious children will not be added to it. —Not only youth but maturer age is too often influenced by bad exampls, and it requires much reason much experience firmness & resolution to stem to torrent of fashion & to preserve the integrity which will bear the Scrutiny of our own Hearts, virtue like the stone of Sysiphus has a continual tendency to roll down Hill & requires to be forced up again by the never ceasing Efforts of succeeding moralists. if humane nature is thus infirm & liable to err as daily experience proves let every effort be made to acquire strength. nature has implanted in the humane mind nice sensibilities of moral rectitude and a natural love of excellence & given to it powers capable of infinite improvement and the state of things is so constituted that Labour well bestowed & properly directed always produces valuable Effects. the resolution you have taken of persueing such a conduct as shall redound to your own honour & that of your family is truly commendable. it is an old & just observation, that by aiming at perfection we may approach it much more nearly than if we sat down inactive through despair-

you will do well to join the military company as soon as you are qualified. every citizen should learn the use of arms & by being thus qualified he will be less likely to be called to the use of them. War cannot be ranked amongst the liberal arts, and must ever be considered as a scourge & a calamity, & should Humiliate the pride of man that he is thus capable of destroying his fellow creatures—I am glad to find you mending in your hand writing, during the vacancies you & your Brother Charles would do well to attend to that. it is of more importance than perhaps you are aware of, more for a Man than a Woman, but I have always to lament my own inattention in this matter. inclosed you will

find a little matter which you will make a good use of. your sister sends her Love and will write you soon. I am my dear Son/most affectionately/Yours

AA

"Abigail Adams to Thomas Boylston Adams." 15 March 1787. *Adams Family Correspondence: Volume 8, March 1787-December 1789*. Eds. Margaret A. Hogan, et al. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007.