

LESSON PLAN #10: Abigail and Her Sisters

[1] **Curriculum framework(s):** 9.6 Relate a literary work to primary source documents of its literary period or historical setting. 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.

[2] **Goal of the lesson:** To acquaint students with themes important to Abigail in her life.

[3] **Expected student outcomes:** Students will be able to define vocabulary as well as select themes from non-fiction sources.

[4] **Assessment of expected student outcomes:** Appropriate completion of in class assignment.

[5] **Instructional procedures:**

Vocabulary: fulsome; camblet (camlet); viz.; visage; prudence; acquiesce (acquiesce); indellible (indelible); opulence; visisitdues (vicissitudes).

Activities: Students will have read the packet of letters for this lesson the previous night; after a preliminary discussion of theme and its role in non-fiction, introduce students to the Theme handout for this lesson. They should focus on themes, particularly relating to lives of women; for themes, encourage students to focus on marriage, family life, parenthood, or grandparenthood, since Abigail touches upon all of these issues and offers some clear themes on these topics. For background on the letters to Mary Smith Cranch and Elizabeth Smith Shaw, note the following: Abigail rose at 5am (ironically she says in the first letter that she is lazy compared to Mary rising at 4 am). Also, note the simile in the second letter. From the third letter for this lesson, notice John's P. S. to the letter to Mary. Likewise, in the fourth letter to Elizabeth, explain that Abigail's niece (her brother's child) was staying with Elizabeth because their brother was often incompetent. In terms of the "nephew leaving" in this same letter, mention that this refers to John Quincy Adams as he departs with his father for Europe. Lastly, in the fifth letter, note Abigail's opinions as a grandmother, and on second marriages. She speaks rather candidly in this letter. Use the background information to guide students towards the themes.

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

[6] **Material and resources:**

1) Handout on Theme

2) Five transcribed letters:

Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 15 July 1766

Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 6 October 1766

Abigail and John Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 12 January 1767

Abigail Adams to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, March 1778

Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 28 April 1787

Abigail's Message on Life

Theme is the author's message about life; most often applied to fiction or poetry, we can also apply it to non-fiction. Using Abigail's letters, find evidence of themes in her writings. As always, be sure to support that theme with direct quotes where applicable.

Theme	Quote/Evidence to Support Theme

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 Mary Smith Cranch, 15 July 1766

Braintree July 15.1766

My Dear Sister

Tomorrow being Commencment, suppose this will not fail thro want of a conveyance. I therefore set, to tell you that I was much obliged by your kind Letter. When ever I receive a Letter from you it seems to give new Springs to my nerves, and a brisker circulation to my Blood, tis a kind of pleasing pain that I feel, and I some how, or other catch the infection which you speak of, and I feel so glad that I can scarcely help feeling sorry. These seem to be odd, tho I believe they are very natural Sensations.

You ask me if I will not come and tarry a Week with you. I have been Scheeming of it this forghtright, and this was the week we pitch'd upon but some difficulties arose, then we talked of keeping Thanksgiving with you, but farming and the Courts come so thick upon us, that we cannot bring that to bear, for next week the Superior Court sets, the inferiour is adjournd to the week after. So that there is no opportunity till the week after that, and then I hope there will not any more Mountains arise to hinder me. Mole hills I always Expect to find, but them I can easily surmount.

As to Sister Betsy, poor Girl her heart is with you, but when her Body will be, is uncertain, for one while her cough is too bad, then it is too hot weather. O you know how it always was. Dont you remember the time when I wanted to go to Commencment.— These matters you know we always wish'd were otherways. I desire to be very thankful that I can do as I please now!!! I have had upon a visit here, from Saturday till tuesday Mr. Samll. Adams and wife, and indeed Sister they are a charming pair. In them is to be seen the tenderest affection towards each other, without any fulsome fondness, and the greatest Complaisance, delicacy and good breeding that you can immagine, yet seperate from any affectation—in them you might see those Lines of Thomson verified

*“There, friendship full exerts her softest power,
Perfect Esteem, enliven'd by desire,
Ineffable, and Sympathy of Soul
Thought meeting thought, and will preventing will,
With boundless confidence.”*

Had you been at Germantown, you should have been an Eye Witness of what I have told you. How often do I think, now if She was but there, I would run away and see her.

“How Blessings brighten as they take their flight.”

Dont you begin to think of comeing this way. And my Dear Betsy, I am affraid she will forget me. The weather will be so hot that I cannot think of bringing Nabby with me. Poor Rogue She has been very poorly these 3 or 4 Days, cutting teeth I believe. Her cough too is bad again. —Well tis time for me to think of drawing to a close, for tis pretty late, but I assure you I shall not follow your practise of rising by 4 oclock. It does not agree with my inclination to Laziness.

Your Stockings will send the first good opportunity, Love to Mr. Cranch. I have a little business for him, haveing broke the Spring of our timepiece. Mr. Adams sends Love to you and yours. So does your Truly affectionate Sister,

Abigail Adams

"Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch," 15 July 1766. *Adams Family Correspondence: Volume 1, December 1761-May 1776*. Ed. Lyman Henry Butterfield. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1963.

Letter from Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 6 October 1766

Braintree Octobr. 6. 1766

Dear Sister

I wrote to you a week ago, and sent my Letter part of the way, but like a bad penny it returnd, to me again. This I write in hopes that it will reach you this week by Sister.

Your Letter I received and it gave me both pleasure and pain, it rejoiced my heart to hear from you, and it pained me to hear how Ill Mr. Cranch had been, and how low he still was. Many are the afflictions of the righteous was a text which immediately occurred to my mind. I was in hopes that in leaving Braintree he would have left all his troubles behind him, but alass change of place has not yet had the desier'd effect.

O my Dear Sister I mourn every day more and more the great distance between us. I think Well now if She was but at Germantown I would run away and see her. I think I could come as often again as I used to. However as it is I please myself with the thoughts of seeing you in November, and hope I shall not be dissapointed, for I long to see you all; my Dear Betsy, what would I give to hear her prattle to her Cousin Nabby, to see them put their little arms round one an others necks, and hug each other, it would really be a very pleasing Sight, to me. —But to leave these little charmers-methinks your S[ale]m acquaintance have a very odd kind of politeness. By what I have heard of them, they have well learnd the lesson of Iago, to Rodorigo, "put money in thy purse." It is the Character of the whole people I find, get what you can, and keep what you have got. My advice to you is among the Romans, do as the romans do. This is a selfish world you know. Interest governs it, there are but very few, who are moved by any other Spring. They are Generous, Benevolent and Friendly when it is for their interest, when any thing is to be got by it, but touch that tender part, their Interest, and you will immediately find the reverse, the greater half the World are mere Janases.

I want to know how you make out, how business is with you, whether you have a Sufficent Supply? -&c.

As for News I know of none. We do pretty much as We used to of old. Marry and give in Mariage, encrease and multiply all in the old fashioned way. Parson Weld has an other son, Ludovicus by Name. Your friends here are all in good Health. Grandfather is much as he used to be. I saw Mrs.Eunice a Sunday, She told me that She left you well, and that Mr. Cranch (which I could scarcely credit) was leaner than ever. My Good Man

is so very fat that I am lean as a rale. He is such an Itinerant, to speak . . . that I have but little of his company. He is now at Plymouth, and Next week goes to Taunton.—But tis dinner time, and I must bid you good by, may be I shall find time to add more than that I am your affectionate Sister,

Abigail Adams

"Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch," 6 October 1766. *Adams Family Correspondence: Volume 1, December 1761-May 1776*. Ed. Lyman Henry Butterfield. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1963.

Letter from Abigail and John Adams to Mary Smith Cranch , 12 January 1767

Braintree Jana'ry 1767

Dear Sister

Mr. Etter was so good as to come this morning and inform me that his Sons would go to Salem tomorrow. By them I gladly embrace this Opportunity of inquiring after the welfare of you and your family. It has been a very long time since I heard any thing from you; the roads have been so block'd up with Snow here; that I assure you I have not been to Weymouth since mother came from Salem. They were all well to Day, father dined here, Sister Betsy had an ague in her face which has been very troublesome to her. —I imagine the Winter will seem very long to you, not being able to see your Friends from this way and scarcely to hear from them. They have all round made you a visit and retired to their abiding places waiting, hoping and Expecting that when the Spring returns, you will return their visits. Thus I reckon Febry., March, April, May, and then I hope to see you again in this Cottage of our own, where we have heretofore sat, and had sweet communion to gether. With what a painful pleasure do I recollect those hours of social chat? and how earnestly do I wish for the continuance of them? But alas where are they—fled "in the Dark backward, and abyss of time."

How does our Dear Brother, how would the Sight of his Grave, Yet chearful countenance Gladden my Heart? And my Little Betsy, how does She. How every word and action of these little creatures, twines round ones heart? All their little pranks which would seem ridiculous to relate, are pleasing to a parent. How vex'd have I felt before now upon hearing parents relate the chitt chat of little Miss, and Master said or did such and such a queer thing—and this I have heard done by persons whose good Sense in other instances has not been doubted. This tho really a weakness I can now more easily forgive, but hope in company I shall not fall into the same error.

As for New's we have not any but what tis like you see in the publick papers, where A B and C are drawn up in Battle array against P&c. As for Domestick News, I mean such as family News, we have none, unless it would be so to tell you that we have 2 horses, 3 cows, 2 Yearlings, 20 Sheep, 1 cock and no hens. Mem'one peice and a material one I had like to have omitted, viz. that the camblet has been done these 3 weeks but how to get it to you now I know not. I shall send it to unkle Smiths as the likeliest way to find a conveyance. Dawson has damaged it something . . . for which I am very sorry,

but if you want any thing for Strength I believe I may warrant this. Pray be so good as to write by Mr. Etters Sons how you and Brother, Betsy and all do? My good Man would send his Love to you all only he sets by reading news paper politicks, and is so taken up with them (being just come in) that he cannot think of better matters. He would take it as a favour if Mr. Cranch would write to him, for at all times it delights him to hear of your Health and happiness as much as it does Your Truly affectionate Sister,

Abigail Adams

*P.S. I will send my Love. What care I for News Paper Politicks?—Since last May, my Heart has been at Ease. At Ease I say, and the Governor and all his Friends and Enemies together cant trouble it. —What would I give to have Brother Cranch's long Visage along Side of my short one, with a Pipe in each, talking about this and that and 'tother?
da da yrs,
J.A.*

"Abigail and John Adams to Mary Smith Cranch," 12 January 1767 *Adams Family Correspondence: Volume 1, December 1761-May 1776*. Ed. Lyman Henry Butterfield. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1963.

Letter from Abigail Adams to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, March 1778

[Braintree, March 1778]

I was meditating a Letter to my dear Sister when her agreeable favour reachd my Hands. Tho my own felicity is over cast, I can rejoice in that of my Friends and tis with pleasure I hear of your Health and happiness which are very dear to me.

The Scene which I have had to pass through, and in which you so kindly sympathize has put to the full proof all my fortitude and patriotism, and required the aid and assistance of a still nobler motive to bear up and support the pained anxious mind.

*“Religion noble comfort brings
Disarms our Greifs or blunts their Stings.”*

Known only to my own Heart, is the Sacrifice I have made, and the conflict it has cost me. Call'd by the unanimous voice of his Country to an Embassy important to America and attended with much greater difficulties than tis prudence to represent—willing to resign all his domestick felicity and to devote fame, fortune and life to the Service of his Country, he bid defiance to ease, affluence and the allurements of ambition on the one hand and pushd forward against the threats of Calamity on the other. Satisfied as I was that his integrity and abilities were calculated to do essential Service at this critical season, I was determind to resign my own personal felicity and happiness and at all Events to bring my mind to acquiese in the cruel Seperation from the dearest connexion on Earth—a connexion formed early in life, matured by age and strengthend by the virtues of a Heart all my own, a Seperation for an unlimited time, if it should please Heaven to preserve his life—seldom like to hear from him, unable to afford him any

assistance in case of sickness, exposed to the Dangers of the Sea, to the open assaults of Enemies, and O Good Heaven, perhaps to the dark assassin and secret Murderer.

In this conflict my Heart has sufferd a distress which words cannot discribe and which nothing could alleviate but a confidence in that Being without whose notice not a sparrow falls to the ground.

The infamous attack upon the life of a Man so respectable as Dr. Franklin is a convincing proof that no regard is paid even to venerable age dignified by virtue, and distinguished by abilities which do honour to humane Nature.

*For Nought avails the virtues of the Heart
Nor tow'ring Genious claims its due reward
From Britains Fury as from Deaths keen dart
No Worth can save us and no fame can guard.*

Tis with a double edg I feel the weapon that pirced the Bosome of a Franklin. Nor can I refrain from imprecating the just vengance of Heaven upon the base and diabloical Counsels of a Nation who have not only deprived individuals of happiness, but by their cruelty, Rage and rapine laid waste oppulent cities, populus Towns, fruitfull villiges and pleasent Feilds, but reduced to misiry and famine the widow, the Fatherless and the orphan. No former atchivements of Glory, illusterious deeds nor high renown can wipe out the indelliable stains dyed with Rivers of American Blood, and shed by the hands which ought only to have been lifted for her protection.

But I quit the subject and return to my own private affairs. I am endeavouring to put the Farm I am in possession of out of my Hands which will releive me from a load of care, and be more Beneficial to my Interest I believe than to struggle along as I have done from year to year. If I effect this I hope to be more at leisure to visit my Friends. One of the first visits will be to Haverhill.

Our Worthy parent was well this day and in good Spirits. The Roads have been so bad that I have not been to Weymouth since I saw you. I have but a few enducements to encounter difficulties to visit a place which has but one link left of a chain which once bound me to it.

Remember me in affectionate Terms to Mr. S[ha]w, who I dare say from the sympathetick Soul he possesses has participated in my anxiety—and to my Little Neice who I compasionate that she has not a Father whom she can Honour. I thank my Sister for her Remembrance of a Nephew who I hope will never disgrace his parents or bring shame upon his relations. He mantaind a manly firmness at parting tho his Sister and Brothers burst into Tears. I need not add that the Mothers Heart is dissolved at the recollection, yet what ever it pleases Heaven to allot me the knowledg of your happiness will always give joy to Your Sister,

AA

Letter from Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 28 April 1787

London April 28th 1787

My dear sister

I have now to acknowledge your kind favour of April 7th by Captain Folger—I have already written to my Neices and informed them of the addition to my family—you will rejoice with me that an event which as a parent so nearly concernd me, is so happily over, and that the mother and Child are both finely. indeed I never saw a healthier Lad in my life. he has not even had those complaints incident to children, which I partly attribute to the care of the nurse who leaves all to Nature without even tea drink or doses of any kind. she has been a Nurse 21 years & never had a child with a soar mouth. She washes little master with cold water from the day of his Birth, & is exceedingly attentive to Cleanliness. the Nurses here never think of going to Bed during the whole month, they lay themselves down on a settee, or sleep in an easy chair, & I do not see But what they are quite as contented & as Bright as ours, who go to bed & frequently let a poor woman suffer. tis true they do nothing else, but attend to the Lady and Child. the Cook of the family makes all the victuals, & the maid carries it up, and they are well pay'd for their trouble, but still they are the best Nurses I ever saw—how happy would it make me; could my dear sister look in upon us. I have been very unwell all this Spring. a slow intermitting fever, and Billious complaints have greatly afflicted me, I am better than I was a month ago, as the fever has lessend, but still the cause is not wholly removed, and the doctor tells me, it must be a work of time & care; I had similar complaints the spring before I left America, only not to so great a degree. I have not escaped one spring or fall since. the dampness of this climate & the little tendency that there is to perspiration encreases this disorder greatly, I must try a journey soon—

we have accounts by way of New york to the 8th of march, which inform us that general Lincoln had met with more resistance from the insurgents, than we had reason to expect from former accounts, that an engagement had taken place, in which several persons on both sides fell, but we do not learn who, that Shayes had got off into vermont, where it was probable he would meet with protection. I hope these accounts are not well founded. Let not the Patriots of our Country be discouraged or disheartned altho their affairs are much embarrassed. the Country is fruitfull in resources, patience perseverance industry and frugality will accomplish great things. our Countrymen create most of the misfortunes they feel, for want of a disinterested Spirit; a confidence in each other, & a union of the whole. it is a great misfortune when one state thawrts the measures of 11 or 12 and thus injures, the credit & reputation of the whole. the situation of our Country greatly damps the pleasure I should feel in anticipating my return to it. you may well suppose that falshoods in abundance are circulated here, an attempt to publish the Truth; or contradict them, would have no other affect than raising a Nest of wasps & Hornets, & would employ the whole time of one person. an extract of a Letter publishd from dr Rush to dr price, giving an account of the establishment of 2 or 3 new societies, drew upon the latter so much abuse & Scurility as would disgrace any people. the writer like an envenomed toad spit forth his poison. there are a set of Refugees residing here, the enormity of whose offenses forbids their ever returning again to America, like Satan they

look to the Heights from which they have fallen, with a malice and envy similar to that which the arch Fiend felt when he beheld the Glory of the new world, and like him they wish to destroy the happiness of its inhabitants. such is Galloway, & Smith who is gone prime minister to Lord Dorchester, a few days before he left the Country, he gave it his solid opinion that, he did not doubt he should live to see America sue to Britain for protection & to be received again by it, he might have added; it should not be his fault if they did not. I hope a watchfull Eye will be kept over Lord Dorchester & all his movements—This Government are as much disposed to sow seeds of dissention amongst us as ever, & build wholly upon our splitting to peices. But I will quit this subject for our own Domestick concerns. you ask my opinion respecting the wives talkd of for our uncles. Second marriages at their age can be considerd only as affairs of convenience the heyday of the Blood is tame, and waits upon the judgment, as Hamlet expresses it. the same ardor & passion so suitable in Youth would be ridiculous in age, nor is it improper to consult even Interest as well as convenience. Good dispositions fair Characters and a regard to the station which was formerly held by the parties, ought to be more maturely considerd than at an earlyer period of Life. young people more easily accommodate themselves to each other, too great a disparity in years often makes second marriages not only Ridiculous but unhappy—I know not the person whom I should like so well or one who would do more credit to the Relation, or discharge the duties of her station with greater honour to herself than the Lady you have mentiond for our good uncle S— She is the only one, which has occured to my mind, since the discease of our dear Aunt—as to the other Lady of the same Name, I can only say if I was in her situation I would not exchange it for a residence at Weymouth tho I have not a personal knowledge of mrs W. from the Character which she sustaind in this Country, the visisitudes of fortune which she experienced with great equinimity, the many handsome things I have heard dr Jeffries say of her, who attended her through a most distressing sickness the perfect Harmony in which she is said to have lived with her former partner, all serves to hold her up to my view as a Lady highly deserving & well calculated for any situation in Life affliction is the best school for wisdom, and knowledge, but wherever my worthy Friends may fix; I most sincerely wish them happy and I am sure they will not give me a Relation whom I cannot respect.—I am very glad that Miss Mayhew has so pretty an addition to her fortune, she did not however stand in need of that recommendation in my Eye to qualify her for a good wife. I have no doubt she would have shone in that character, and I cannot help thinking that it argues cowardice in the gentlemen that she still remains single. she has a strength of mind, and an understanding, which will always ensure her respect, provided the hereditary talant which she has at Satire; is properly regulated. This I conceive has been the weapon that has terrified all the gentlemen, conscious perhaps how justly it may be levelld against them, but no woman of sense will ever make her Husband an object of Ridicule; for in proportion as she lowers him she lessens herself. neither the Character of Lady G. or miss How, are to be immitated by the Woman of true delicacy of sentiment, but miss Mayhews talant has always been display'd with so much good humour when ever I have been witness to it that I think I could not have been angry, if I had been the subject of it, yet my dear sister I have ever observed that it is a most Dangerous thing for a Female to be distinguishd for any quallification beyond the rest of her sex. Whatever may be her Department, she is sure to draw upon herself the jealousy of the men and the envy of the women, nor do I see any way to remedy this evil but by

increasing the number of accomplished women, a monopoly of any kind is always envidious

I have never received a Line from mr Hay since she left England, which I have wonderd at considering the intimacy which subsisted between us when here. I thought her reasons good for chusing to go to America. it was natural for her to wish to be with her relations during the long voyages of captain Hay, rather than to reside at Board abroad. I know she endeavoured to influence him to go with her, but he was in good business here, & saild with more safety in a British Ship, than he could in an American vessel subject to the capture of Algerines as he thought at that time. he was about taking a voyage when she left him, in which he expected to be absent 15 months I think I should have done as she did, if I had been in her place I know Captain Hay met with a dissapointment, by his owners loosing his Reason, by which means captain Hay was detaind here a long time—nor do I know how long he has saild when circumstances are known, it greatly alters appearances

Mrs Elworthy I saw at her House not long ago. She was well then. they live in the city & have but very small appartments not calculated to see company. they are people of Buisness honest industerous & obliging but their whole House is very little larger than your office. mr John Cranch and I have the honour to correspond sometimes, he frequently sends us game from the Country, I inclose a letter from him which I received a few days ago to cousin Betsy. I fear I must acknowledg myself a delinquent with respect to my dear Brother Cranch I received his excellent Letters, and one of them was answerd, but it was at a time when no vessel was going for a long time and I did not think it worth a postage from Newyork so it grew old & out of date—mr Adams is frequently chargeable with omissions to his correspondents, but he has more to plead in his excuse than I have, as his time is occupied in investigating more important Subjects—but when a vessel is near sailing you can hardly form an Idea what a call there is upon my pen and yet I leave some of my much esteemed Friends without a Line. I hope the vessels by which I have written are all safely arrived, and the articles I sent by them. Captain Callihan is so kind as to take a peice of Linnen for Tommys use it is not fine but a good fabrick. Remember me to all our Friends I shall write to several of them if I am able, if not they must attribute it to indisposition, as I am seldom able to set up a whole day at a time; I ride out when the weather permits

Col Smith set of with week to portugal. it is the first seperation even of a day since he was married. Mrs Smith thought it a Sad affliction. She has not been innured like her mamma, and I hope she never may to such long dangerous & painfull seperations. she however behaved well when it came really to the trial, and the little Boy is a great amusement to her. I send the Caps for my worthy parent to whom present my duty & that of her great grandson.

I fear a little that my Eldest son will be so much of a Book worm & Scholar that he will grow too neglegent of those attentions which are due to the World, & which tho they may appear little, & trifling, much of our happiness is found by experience to depend upon them. his cousins must gaurd him against this error—it was a maxim of Epictetus's that it was incumbent on every one to offer libations and sacrifices conformable to the customs of his Country, with purity, and not in a slovenly manner, nor negligently, that is, the muses & graces should join Hands-

*adieu my dear sister and believe me with the tenderest sentiments of
affection/your
A Adams*

*Remember me affectionately to all my Friends & Neighbours
Esther is well & so is Brisler who is one of the best of Servants; Indeed I know not
how I should keep house in this Country without him, on both my Americans I can
depend. I never knew them deceive me, but the very best English servants which I have
had, & I have been very fortunate, think deception & fibing no harm.*

"Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch," 28 April 1787. *Adams Family Correspondence: Volume 8, March 1787-December 1789*. . Eds. Margaret A. Hogan, et al. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007.