PRIMARY SOURCE LESSON

Purpose: Primary sources are eyewitness or first hand accounts of a moment in time. Many of the words in this play come from Abby’s letters. This lesson will help students recognize the speech patterns and language used in everyday 19th century America. The hand written manuscripts emphasize Abby’s commitment and sacrifice to her life’s work.

Timeframe: 1-2 class periods, works well a block lesson with B 6B and B 6C maps

Materials List:
- 17 April 1852 letter from Abby Kelley Foster to daughter Alla (copy on photo setting)
- Abby to Alla Worksheet
- Abby to Alla Transcription
- April 1854 letter from Alla to her mother (copy on photo setting)
- Alla to Abby Worksheet
- Alla to Abby Transcription
- Teachers may wish to make an overhead image of the manuscripts for easier viewing and discussion purposes.

Procedure:
1. Assign half of the class to work on Abby’s manuscript letter and the other half on Alla’s manuscript letter. With a partner, students will try to read one of the manuscripts and then try to answer the corresponding worksheet. The challenge of reading difficult manuscripts is part of the experience. Pass out Extension Lesson maps to those done early so they do not bother others. If time is a factor, transcriptions could be stapled to manuscripts.

2. After a reasonable length of time pass out corresponding transcriptions to help students complete the worksheet. Discuss how to “read” the past through primary source documents and artifacts. Have students read other manuscript if done early.

3. Using the timeline (L 2 Student Handouts), students could determine how old Abby and Alla were at the time they wrote these letters.

4. Have students share their discoveries about Abby’s relationship with her daughter with class.

5. Have students make a personal connection by writing their answer to: How is your relationship with an important woman in your life is similar or different to Abby and Alla?
Extensions:

- Students could be asked to correct Alla’s spelling and grammar on the manuscript or in their transcription.

- Students could be asked to write a letter to an important adult in their life describing their activities and a cause about which they feel strongly.

Answers:

Abby to Alla Worksheet

1. She is trying to end slavery. She is gone for a long time. She sometimes can take long walks. “Preach to these wicked men, and make them good, so that they would let the poor slave mothers go home to their children.”

2. To end slavery in the United States, “So the poor slave mothers go home to their children.”

3. “Keep house. “, “Building our house.”, Take walks with daughter, give daughter’s gift on birthday, and mend her daughter’s clothes.

4. Yes with some variations.

5. Answers will vary. Elizabeth’s five children under ten years of age, including a new baby, shows Abby what a mother usually does around a house. The family makes Abby miss Alla’s companionship.

Alla to Abby Worksheet

1. Writing letters, reading a book, dropping potatoes, maybe gathering hen eggs

2. Maybe use email now or telephone, still read, maybe help with vegetable or flower garden, probably not gathering eggs unless living in rural area.

3. Her father and cousin Flora, maybe Clara Lyon and maybe Uncle Adams

4. Bossy babysitter. Maybe Flora doesn’t want to hang around a little girl.

5. She’s been sick and might be trying to make mother feel guilty. She wants her home alone rather than bring other people home. She tells about good things, like green grass, perhaps to make her mother homesick. She’s affectionate, but not whining or gushy or begging—she accepts the way things are, but would rather have her mother home than Flora as babysitter.
17 April 1852 Letter from Abby Kelley Foster to Her Daughter Alla (Front)

Dear Allia,

Do you be
gone to think I shall
never get ready to keep
terms? I have told
you I intended to come home
then your mother will and then
you and I would keep house
together. Well, I intend really
to do so, but then, as you
Aunt Clara concluded to come
and keep house for you, I thought
I would stay a little longer,
and preach to these people
who have been to their children.
Do you often
think of the little slave girls
who can never be their dear
mothers again?

[Signature]

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Courtesy of the Kelley-Foster Papers 1941.08.2.50, Worcester Historical Museum and the
Abby Kelley Foster Letters Project, Worcester Women’s History Project
17 April 1852 Letter from Abby Kelley Foster to Her Daughter Alla (Back)

Dear Alla,

And now I am writing once more. I have come down in your week's and then we will hear some more of a letter from home. But you ask your aunt Abigail if she will write you a letter, if she was home in the world. Stay at home and keep your hand busy. I will write you a letter, and you can send it to me. Then I will write you a letter, and you can read it in your letter. There is a beautiful cake which I made. It is as long as your arm, and you can eat it for a cake. I shall not have any more cake. I shall not have any more cake. I shall not have any more cake.

Love you very much.

Abby Kelley Foster

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Courtesy of the Kelley-Foster Papers 1941.08.2.50, Worcester Historical Museum and the Abby Kelley Foster Letters Project, Worcester Women’s History Project
PRIMARY SOURCE: Abby to Alla Worksheet

1. What clues about Abby’s work can you find in this letter to her 5-year-old daughter? Give direct quotes as evidence.

2. Why is Abby making such a sacrifice?

3. List several tasks Abby thinks a good mother should do?

4. Do mothers still do these tasks in the 21st century?

5. Critical Thinking:
   Elizabeth Cady Stanton stays home with her children in Seneca Falls, NY while her abolitionist husband travels the lecture circuit. Abby, a powerful speaker and money raiser, also chooses to travel the anti-slavery lecture circuit. Elizabeth is a powerful writer and this may be done from her home. How do you think Abby’s visit with Elizabeth influenced Abby’s concerns about her own role as housewife and mother?
Honeoye [New York] Apr. 17 '52

My dear Alla

Have you got any chickens yet?  If you have, would you mind telling me about them?

Do you begin to think I shall never get ready to keep house?  I had told you I intended to come home when your father did and then you and I would keep house together.  Well, I intended, really to do so, but when I saw Aunt Diana decided to come yet the poor slave mothers go home to their men, and make them good, so that they would let the poor slave mothers go home to their own children.  Do you often think of the little slave girls who can never see their dear mothers again?  But now I am pretty sure I shall come home in four weeks and then we will have fine times building our house.  Will you ask Aunt Diana if she will stay all summer and help us while our house is building and tell her when she is going to do that?  Aunt Diana, I think she may.  Then she will have her room built?  Now if you will tell her that I will have her room built before you come home, she will have her room built?  Then she will have her room built before we come home.  Tell your Aunt Diana and your father that I hope they will spend an evening with Nancy when I get home and get a little longer and preach to these wicked men and make them good, so that they would check the poor slave mothers go home to their own children.  Do you often think of the little slave girls who can never see their dear mothers again?

Please give her my love and a kiss.  Have your Unkle Adams and Aunt Sarah 2 got nicely to housekeeping?  What a fine walk we will have when I get home again.

Tell your Aunt Diana and your father that I intend to come home when your father does and then you and I will keep house together.  I intend not to keep house?  I had told you never get ready to keep house?

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Page 2

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES:
[   ]  Brackets indicate an addition by the transcriber. (   )  Parentheses indicate the transcriber's interpretation of illegible writing. [sic] means the transcriber let the original spelling. Even though it is incorrect, it is left intact to have a clearer picture of the writer's personality at that moment.

1 Diana Kelley Ballou was Abby's older sister who often came to help care for Alla.
2 Adams and Sarah Foster had lived on the farm, caring for it and Alla, until they purchased a nearby farm in 1851. Adams was Stephen's older brother.
3 Nancy Cook's husband possibly refers to a member of the family. He likely lived on the farm and was related to Stephen Foster. He might have been an uncle. Nancy was Stephen's cousin. thereafter.

Worcester Women's History Project
Yours for Humanity—Abby
Curriculum Packet © 2004
Have you seen what a pretty stamp there is on this paper? It was given me by Mrs. Stanton and a lot more of very nice paper, so I can write you a lot of letters on nice paper. I hope you will keep your letters very clean and laid up in your drawer.

There is a beautiful lake close by where I am. Do you know what a lake is? It is a large pond. This is as long as from our house into town and boats sail on it. I took a very pleasant walk yesterday down to the side of the lake. The sun was warm and bright, the water sparkled, the birds sang and the green shoots of grass were beginning to spring up. By the time I come home the flowers will begin to bloom and the fields will be beautiful to walk in. Shall we be very happy?

Yes, if we are good. The good are always happy.

Your birth day [sic] will come soon after I get home and then you will be five years old. What a great girl you are getting to be. You will soon be as tall as I am I think. Would you like to be as tall as your father?

Did your father give you the maple sugar cakes which the Pete children [sic] sent you? And did your father get you a kaleidoscope as a present from me? If he has not ask him if he will do so when he goes [sic] into town next.

Give my love to your Aunt Sarah, your uncle (Adams) and your cousins —

Your affectionate mother.

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4 Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) lived in Seneca Falls near Honeoye, NY. She wrote the Declaration of Sentiments that was signed at the first Woman’s Rights Convention in 1848. Her fifth child, Margaret, was born in 1853 while her husband Henry B. Stanton lectured for the abolition of slavery.

5 The Pete family possibly refers to a New York family the Fosters knew or boarded with on their lecture travels.
PRIMARY SOURCE: Alla to Abby Worksheet

We can learn about ‘Alla’ Paulina Wright Foster (1847-1923) from her letter to her mother, Abby Kelley Foster (1811-1887). We can also discover clues about life in New England in the mid 19th century.

1. What types of activities fill her time?

2. How do they differ from today’s 6 and 7 year olds?

3. Who is taking care of her while her mother is lecturing in Indiana?

4. What role do you think Flora plays in Alla’s life?

5. What clues can you find to discover how she feels about her mother’s absence?

6. Critical Thinking:
   Note that the spelling and capitalization are hers. What suggestions would you make to Alla to help her become a better speller and letter writer?
April 1854 Letter From Alla To Her Mother

At home,

My Dear Mother,

I thought I would write you a little letter as it was the war. I was sick yesterday.

Dona [?] gave me this paper, and she is here now. And she gave me a new look with a star on each side. The name of the book is how each other Uncle Adams has you buy chickens now. And we have two hens now. I think you had better buy some.
At home.

My dear Mother,

I thought I

would write you a little letter

 Lahde, Newel is her father's brother whose daughter is married to the present keeper of the farm.

Tina Lyon, was probably a friend of the Foster family.

Clara Lyon was probably a friend of the Foster family.

Please indicate an addition by the transcriber: (Parentheses indicate the transcriber's interpretation of illegible writing.)

Original spelling and capitalization left intact for the reader to have a clearer picture of the writer's personality at the moment it was written.

TRANSCRIPTION NOTES:

1 Clara Lyon was probably a friend of the Fosters.
2 Uncle Adams is her father's brother who bought a nearby farm.
3 Uncle Newell is her father's brother and Leroy is probably his son.
4 Flora is Alla's cousin, the daughter of her mother's youngest sister Lucy. She's about 9 years old at the time.

Primary Source: Alla To Abby Transcription

WHM 1941.08.24 Alla [Apr. 1841]