



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)

<p>Your birth day 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 you father give you the Maple Sugar cake which the Patriotic Club sent you? —</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Housaye Apr. 17-52</p> <p style="text-align: center;">My dear Alla</p> <p>Do you begin to think I shall never get ready to keep home? I had told you I intended to come home when your father did and then you and I would keep home together. Well, I intended, really, to do so, but then, as your Aunt Diana concluded to come and keep home for me I thought I would stay a little longer, and please to those wicked men, (and make them good, so that they would let the poor slave mothers go home to their children. Do you often think of the little slave girls who can never see their dear mothers again?</p>
<p>Have did your father get you a Kaleidoscope as a present from Aunt? If he has not ask him if he will do so when he goes into town next.</p>	
<p>I fear your clothes are getting ragged but I will fix them up when I come if your Aunt can make them hang on so long.</p>	
<p>When my time to your Aunt. Please give Uncle and your Cousins — Your affectionate Mother</p>	

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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)

But now I am pretty sure I shall
come home in four weeks and then
we will have fine times
a building our house.
While you ask your
aunt Diana if she will
stay all summer and help
help us, while our house is
building and tell when she will
have her room built? Now if
you shall be very good and help
your aunt all you can, and be
as little trouble as possible, I
think she may be willing to stay.
Please give her my love and a kiss.
Have your Uncle Adams and Aunt
Sarah got, surely to have keeping?
What a fine walk we will have
when I get home going up to see
them.
Tell your Aunt Diana and your
father that I hope they will spend
an evening with Nancy Cook's
husband. He must be very lonely.
Have you got any chickens yet?

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
one house into town, and boats
sail on it. I took a very pleas-
ant 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. 1941.08.2.50



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?



PRIMARY SOURCE: Abby to Alla Letter Transcription

Honeoye [New York] Apr. 17 __'52

My dear Alla

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 then, as your Aunt Diana concluded to come and keep house for me I thought I would stay a little longer, and preach to these wicked men, and make them good, so that they would let the poor slave mothers go home to their children. Do you often think of the little slave girls who can never see their dear mothers again?

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But now I am pretty sure I shall come home in four weeks and then we will have fine times a building our house. Will you ask your Aunt Diana¹ if she will stay all summer and help us while our house is building and tell where she will have her room built? Now if you shall be very good and help your aunt all you can, and be a little trouble as possible, I think she may be willing to stay. Please give her my love and a kiss. Have your Uncle [sic] Adams and Aunt Sarah² got nicely to housekeeping?

What a fine walk we will have when I get home going up to see them.

Tell your Aunt Diana and your father that I hope they will spend an evening with Nancy Cook's husband.³ He must be very lonely. Have you got any chickens yet?

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TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES:

[] Brackets indicate an addition by the transcriber. () Parentheses indicate the transcriber's interpretation of illegible writing. [sic] means the transcriber left the original spelling, even though it is incorrect, 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 living two farms away from the Foster farm on Mower Street in Worcester.



Worcester Women's History Project
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Have you seen what a pretty stamp there is on this paper?

It was given me by Mrs. Stanton⁴ 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 you[r] 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.

WHM 1941.08.2.50

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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 children⁵ sent you?__ And did your father get you a kaleidoscope [sic] as a present from me? If he has not ask him if he will do so when he goe's [sic] into town next.

I fear your clothes are getting ragged but I will fix them up when I come if your aunt can make them hang on so long.

Give my love to your Aunt Sarah your uncle (Adams) and your cousins __
 Your affectionate
 Mother.

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

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 Alla [Apr 1854]
 At home,
 My Dear Mother,
 I thought I
 would write you a little letter
 as father was. I was sick yesterday
 afternoon but I am well now.
 Clara Lyon gave me this paper
 and she is here now. And she gave
 me a new book with a star on
 each side. The name of the book is
 love each other. Uncle Adams has got
 ten chickens now. And we have two hens
 more. I think you had better try
 to buy some before you write to
 have other come there. Letty
 and Uncle Newell are coming here the
 last of this month I think. Our front
 garden is green now. We have begun
 to drop potatoes now. I drop them
 and grandfather covers. Father says he
 will drop ^{all} ~~the~~ ~~potatoes~~ will give me a bushel
 bushel of potatoes and he will sell
 them for ^{me} and will give all the
 money he gets for them. I want
 you to take Flora home when
 you come. Your affectionate Alla

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 Courtesy of the Kelley-Foster Papers 1941.08.2.42, Worcester Historical Museum and the
 Abby Kelley Foster Letters Project, Worcester Women's History Project



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Foster Farm
Mower Street
Worcester, Massachusetts

Primary Source: Alla To Abby Transcription

WHM1941.08.2.42 Alla [Apr. 1854]

At home.

My Dear Mother,

I thought I

would write you a little letter

as father was. I was sick yesterday forenoon but I am well now.

Clara Lyon¹ gave me this paper, and she is here now. And she gave me a little book with a star on each side. The name of the book is love each other. Uncle Adams² has got ten chickens now. And we have two hens sitting. I think you had better try

(come yes) before you write to have others come there. Leroy and uncle Newel³ are coming here the last of this month I think. Our front yarde is green now. We have began to drop potatoes now. I drop them and grandfather cover[r]s Father says if I will drop them all he will give me a bushel of potatoes. And he will sell them for me and will give all the money he gets for them. I want you to take Flora⁴ home when you come. Your affectionate Alla.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES:

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

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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.