

Wallace Women Discovery Kit

A Letter from Susan

Best for Grades 8-12

Goal: To use letters as primary sources to investigate the concerns of 19th-century women.

Needed supplies: copies of letters (on following pages), 50 minutes

Before you begin, please inform your students

These letters are transcribed from the original hand-written letters. When transcribers transfer letters from handwriting to type, it is often difficult to read every word. As a result, many transcriptions have words or punctuation marks in brackets [] to indicate that the person who transcribed it isn't sure about that part and is making their best guess. Also, for the words that can be deciphered clearly, transcribers include them as they are written, not as they should be written. So, misspellings or wrong punctuation marks are still included since that's how the author originally wrote the letter. The letters "sic" indicate that the transcriber put in the mistake on purpose and it is not a typo.

- 1) Teacher selects 4 of the 8 letters for analysis, divides the class into 4 groups and distributes copies of letters to students. (5 minutes)
- 2) Students read through the letters and take note of the following questions. (10 minutes)
 - a) What is the letter about?
 - b) What events does Susan refer to?
 - c) What words or phrases does she use that we would not use today? What do they mean?
 - d) If this were an e-mail, how would the language be different?
- 3) Students present their findings to the class. Teacher lists the subjects and outdated terminology on the board for discussion. (15 minutes)
- 4) Discuss the contents of the letters: what subjects were common for that day and why would women be writing about them? (10 minutes)
- 5) Discuss style of the letters. Susan addresses her friend by title and last name, or by no name at all, things we don't usually do today. Also, the phrases she uses sound more formal than what we use now. (10 minutes)

Adaptations and Extensions

- Students re-write the letter in today's language. If time permits, they can present them to the class.
- All students examine the same letter as a class. Teacher leads discussion to answer the questions.
- Students take letters home to analyze and then discuss in class when the assignment is due.

English/Language Arts Standards

- **1. Reading Word Recognition, Fluency, and Vocabulary Development**
- **2. Reading Comprehension**
- **7. Listening and Speaking Skills, Strategies, and Applications**

Social Studies Standards

- **1. History:** Historical Knowledge; Chronological thinking, comprehension, analysis, and interpretation; Research capabilities
- **5. Individuals, Society and Culture**

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Letter 1: Susan writes to her friend Miss Bronson, January 1, 2861. This was at the beginning of the Civil War, and Susan was living in Paducah, Kentucky, to be close to her husband, Gen. Lew Wallace. Read the letter and answer the questions below.

New Years/61

Dear Miss Bronson,

I expected to see you before this time but have been so restless & anxious I could not feel like 'company for any body.' I am very glad to have the book you sent – be sure it will be well used and carefully watched, for I find that soldiers, under the polite name of borrowing, deliberately carry off anything they want.

Will you be kind enough to send me the name of a dress maker. I apply to you because I do not know where else to go and cannot get on with my dress alone. I know you will excuse me, although a stranger, for the freedom I feel in addressing you. You are making ready to receive ever so many calls from the 'dear fellows' – have all the fun you can for youth won't last long. To you and all yours, a happy New Year from

Your friend truly –
S.E. Wallace

[P.S.] The soldiers come back tired and oh, how made at General Smith. I will see you soon, perhaps tomorrow.

[Endorsed] Miss Bronson

1. What is the letter about?
2. What events does Susan refer to?
3. What words or phrases does she use that we would not use today? What do they mean?
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Letter 2: Susan writes to her friend Miss Bronson. Read the letter and answer the questions below.

[No dateline]

[To Miss Bronson, Whose son are you in mourning for?]

Dear Miss Bronson,

I don't know how to thank you for your continued remembrance of me. Imagine what thanks you can & it will be better than anything I can write. That old hen – long may she wave! Byron [?] is the very fellow I was after. I never could write in pencil, and rather indistinctly with ink – you made no mistake at all...

The [wind?] surrounds this place like a battery (which obscure pun I hope you will discover. I'm not guilty nowadays) and I dare not brave it. We are all well but rather out of spirit – as Mrs. Lyman says we have one night yet any how.

Again I am your obliged friend,
S.E. Wallace

[Endorse:] Miss Bronson
Whose "son" are you in
Mourning for?

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Letter 3: Susan writes to her friend Mrs. Bronson. Read the letter and answer the questions below.

[No dateline]

Dear Mrs. Bronson,

Our troops have orders to move at 4 o'clock – no one knows in what direction. I write to ask if you have a room where Mrs. Lyman & I could be put away till we hear from our husbands again.

We would hold it a great kindness to be allowed to board with you for the present, and will be as little trouble as possible. After our helter-skelter way of living here you can put us off any way & it will seem luxurious.

Do not hesitate to say no if it will inconvenience you. We are all sensible people & there need be “nobody hurt.” I write in haste – the house is all in an uproar. Your friend truly.

Please answer now.

S.E. Wallace

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Letter 4: Susan writes to her friend Miss Bronson. Read the letter and answer the questions below. “Mrs. L_” refers to Mrs. Lyman. It was common in the 1800s to abbreviate names by writing only the first letter.

Jan. 16, 1861

Dear Miss Bronson,

I return you some books left by Mrs. Lyman. She says the other volume of the “wide wide woods” is in Hibbin’s possession. Mrs. L_ left for Cumberland this morning. I am at Mrs. Pope’s where I will remain till Mr. Wallace returns, or I can go to him again.

I try to busy myself all day that I may shut my eyes to the future, and defy the worst. It is very hard but must be borne. My brother is out on an expedition even more perilous than “leading the column from Paducah.” If tomorrow is pleasant I think I will go to see you a little while – it is by great effort I do anything but ‘sit round’ – but so much kindness has been shown me here it is hard to realize I am in “the enemy’s country.”

In this I have been most pleasantly surprised. I shall always remember your attentions to me and feel myself your obliged friend –

S.E. Wallace

[Endorsed:] Miss Bronson

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Letter 5: Susan writes to her friend. Read the letter and answer the questions below.

October 30, 1892

My dear Friend

I had thought to meet you again and say goodbye but was detained at home This is only for hail and fairwell. Parting is sweet sorrow to long lovers whispering in the stillness of Italian gardens but not to me. Where the question is when, where and how shall we meet again?

I hope your lives may fall in pleasant places, but wherever you may go you cannot drift beyond my interest in you and yours for I am

Yours faithfully
Susan E Wallace

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Letter 6: Susan writes to her friend. Read the letter and answer the questions below. The “grip” is a sickness that often afflicted people in the late 1800s.

Dear Friend

I had promised myself the pleasure of seeing you before this time, but a fourth blow of grip keeps me in. Not so bad as the others, but enough to make me the color of a dandelion and wrinkled as the lines of a R.Road map.

I wanted to say to Bro Switzer that I am ready for hospitality but only in the old way. He must arrange as best he can for the coming guests*. I have in the kitchen a Forlorn Hope who does not even know how to tell the time by a clock. She has friends who want to come to town for work and I enclose their names. (Sisters.) who may perhaps be better than nothing for a tired tired housekeeper, longing for some one who will do good work for good wages.

The magazine need not be returned. I found an article in it which may interest the lovers of Ansley and possible furnish an item for a notebook.

Hand and head are tired but my heart – never!

Always faithfully yours
Susan E Wallace

* Many as he likes, for me

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Letter 7: Susan writes to her friend. Read the letter and answer the questions below. The Epworth League is a group at the Methodist Church that Susan participated in. The “grip” is a sickness that often afflicted people in the late 1800s.

Wed PM

Dear Friend

I must thank you for kind interest in my kitchen. I am pretty well supplied now. At first thought I had found the mythic “Perfect Treasure.” Have discovered P.T. is stiff and rheumatic. Ah me! But am glad it’s as well with me as it is

Where is the bill for the guests of the Epworth League?

We have employed a colored man who is licensed to preach. He was so ignorant of the deep things he is to teach that I venture to ask Bro Switzer to lend me some book he has outgrown, some help for beginners, which I will call for soon. Do not trouble yourself to answer by mail. Am slowly wearing off the fifth time of grip and what it is no one knows. Total depravity?

Interrogatively yours

Susan E Wallace

Our chronic trouble seems perfectly organized. Peace, peace, but there is no peace.

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Letter 8: Susan writes to her friend. Read the letter and answer the questions below. The S.S. board probably refers to the Sunday School board at the Methodist Church. “Supt.” Means Superintendent. “...these Egyptian days” may be a reference to the plague of darkness that afflicted the Egyptians in the Biblical book of Exodus.

Wednesday PM

Dear Friend

It is unwise for me to venture out tonight. May I beg you to represent me at the S.S. board meeting? Am with the majority (It is best to march with my regiment) and vote for Brown as Supt. In preference to Lotten.

I sincerely hope the P_ trial is Bro. Switzer’s last trial in Crawfordsville and that we shall soon enter two years of peace – sweet peace.

Hoping there is light in your dwelling through these Egyptian days. I am as ever,
Faithfully, SEW

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