



My Historical Broadway Show, Lesson Three

Level: Grades 7-12

Today we'll be looking at two letters written by Alexander Biddle to his family in Philadelphia while he was fighting for the Union Army in the Civil War. The first letter was written to his kids Aleck, Julia, Harry and Winny. At the time that the letter was written, Aleck was six years old, Harry was five, Julia was three and Winny was one. Alexander has been at war for four months when he writes this letter to his children. Just a few weeks before, on December 13, he and his regiment fought in their first battle, the Battle of Fredericksburg. The Union army lost. Twenty-four soldiers in Alexander Biddle's regiment were killed and one hundred and fifteen were hurt. After the Battle of Fredericksburg, his regiment marched from their camp at Brooks Station to the camp at White Oak Church, about fifteen miles away, just across the Rappahannock river from Fredericksburg. He writes this letter from the camp near White Oak Church, Virginia.

January 3, 1863

Dear Children

Papa sends happy New Year to Aleck Harry Julia and Winny – Papa wished very much to go home on New Year's day to have a New Year's dinner with Mama Uncle and his dear children with Uncle Clem but Papa had to stay with his Regiment and take care of the soldiers who do not take good care of themselves – Papa has to see that they dress betimes and are cleanly in all that they do so that they will always be well and ready to march at a moment's warning.

Papa would be very glad to get home and trusts he may be permitted (DV) to see his darlings again and hear Mama say that they are all good industrious children who can read write and cipher. Papa's men have built a log cabin for the Colonel Lieut Colonel and himself to sit and live in. there it is it is all logs except two pieces of canvas which go over a log at the top and make a roof we got some bricks and made a fireplace and filled up the spaces between the logs with chunks of wood and mud Papa hopes to send a better drawing of it home some day for Mama. it has a little window in the side with a door at the back. Mama sent Papa some corn starch and on Christmas and New Year's days Papa mixed three table spoons with milk sugar lemon peel and some cherries Mama had sent him and made a pudding – Every one said it was excellent – mama will make such a one for her darlings if they are good. Papa hopes Miss Smith and Miss Kneeder will both say they are if he comes home and trusts our Heavenly Father will bless his dear children Mama Uncle and bring all in peace and happiness together again.

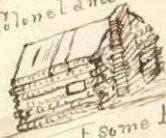
Papa

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Papa



The next letter was written to Alexander's wife Julia. When he wrote this letter, he had been at war for five months. He is writing from the camp at White Oak Church, Virginia. On January 20, his regiment was ordered to march towards Fredericksburg again to fight with General Lee's confederate army. The weather was very rainy. The roads became very muddy and the soldiers were ordered to return to their camp a few days later. Papa Biddle's regiment was exhausted by the march. So they settled down at camp for the winter.

February 4, 1863, Letter from Alexander Biddle to his wife Julia

Dear Julia

Today is a day of a snow storm it has been snowing since early daylight and is now about one O'clock PM. We are in a moderately warm cabin but will soon again have a fine blazing fire which has already burned down twice since morning. I am writing on the Lieut Col's bed made out of blankets put on poles thus. four forked sticks are driven into the ground and a cross piece goes from fork to fork – on these long poles are placed which form the bottom of the bed and have some spring in them, on these by means of blankets we make pretty comfortable beds and the spring of the poles make them easier than one would expect – The Lieut Col is lying on my bed made on top of a large trunk like the one you sent to me. Hall and the Quartermaster are writing and doing nothing on the other side. The day of course is a very stupid one. I have been repairing camp stools all the morning and reading the military book you sent me. Your corn pudding preparation is still very acceptable to our mess. I now make it in one of the tin pails which had butter and partridges in for me – they are the very things for the march and hereafter one will go on my saddle and one on Reuben's Our horses are all ensconced in stables made of pine boughs which moderately protects them – the greatest trouble I have had with horses is with Louis who knocks his fore shoes off with his hind ones – but both are now very fair order – I have written this short letter intending to send Aleck & Harry a few lines on the other sheet May Heaven bless and protect you dear wife and soon restore us to each other never to part – I don't know whether you can comprehend my rough illustration but they may amuse our darlings

Love to Uncle & winsome Winny

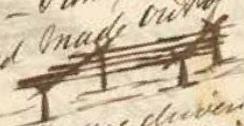
Your Loving

Alexander

Thursday February 5. 1863
Head Quarters 121st Regt P.V.
Camp near Woodchuck Mt

Dear Julia

Today is a day of a snow storm it
has been raining since early daylight
and is now about one O'clock P.M. -
We are in a moderate snow cabin
but with soon as any snow a fine
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shoes off with his hind ones - but
to the bewitching fair tales - I have
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Alice & Mary a few lines on the other sheet
May Heaven bless and protect you dear
wife and soon restore us to each other
peace to part - I don't know whether
you can comprehend my rough illustrations
but they may amuse you a little
Love to Uncle Samson's army
Your loving
Alexander

Read the letters carefully and then consider these questions.

1. Alexander Biddle describes where he is living and what he is eating. But he does not say anything about the battles he has fought. Why doesn't he share more details about the war with his family?
2. Did you notice that the letter to his children is printed while the letter to his wife is in cursive? Why do you think he used print when writing to his kids?
3. Why do you think he included drawings in his letters?
4. Were there unfamiliar words or phrases in the letters? Underline them and then research their meaning.