



Lesson Plan: Exploring Parent-Child Relationships Through Letter Writing

THE FILM

This lesson plan is designed to be used with the film **Bronx Princess**, which chronicles the complex relationship between a young woman named Rocky and her Ghanaian mother as Rocky progresses from high school to college. Classrooms can use this film and its companion website resources to help students explore their own relationships with their parents through letter writing. (Note: This film sometimes uses English subtitles.)

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcast. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow any time during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network:

<http://www.amdoc.org/outreach/events/>.

Please visit our film library at http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php to find other films suitable for classroom use.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Use viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret a series of video clips.
- Work in groups to read and summarize parent-child letters.
- Write a letter to a parent and invite him or her to write back.
- Discuss how writing to a parent influences the writing process.

GRADE LEVELS

6-12

SUBJECT AREAS

Language Arts, Psychology, U.S. History, World History

MATERIALS

- Method of showing the entire class online video clips and a website
- Map showing the location of Ghana
- Handout: [Viewing Guide](#)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One to two 50-minute class periods, plus writing time outside of class

SUGGESTED CLIPS

Clip 1: Blouse or a Shirt? (length 2:04)

The clip starts at 4:00 with Rocky in bed. It ends at 6:04, when Auntie Yaa says, "...if you put your head on your shoulder, you lose."

Clip 2: Respect (length 1:57)

The clip starts at 11:29 with Rocky and Auntie Yaa at the beauty supply store. It ends at 13:26, after the subway passes in the background.

Clip 3: Home From College (length :57)

The clip starts at 36:38 with a street with Christmas lights. It ends at 37:35 with Rocky saying, “This is like the best stuff ever,” and her mother smiling in response.

BACKGROUND

In the film **Bronx Princess**, Rockyatu “Rocky” Otoo is shown graduating from high school with honors; going on a trip to visit her father, who is a chief in Ghana; and starting college on a full-tuition scholarship she has earned. Rocky grew up in New York City with her mother, “Auntie” Yaa, who is originally from the West African country of Ghana. “Auntie” Yaa runs her own beauty supply store in the Bronx.

ACTIVITY

1. Tell the class that you are going to show some video clips that introduce them to Rocky Otoo, who was raised in New York City. Rocky is graduating from high school and will attend college in the fall on a full scholarship. Her mother is “Auntie” Yaa, who runs a beauty supply store in the Bronx. Yaa is originally from Ghana. Show students where Ghana is on a map. Explain that Rocky’s father lives in Ghana, where he is the chief of his village.

2. Distribute the Viewing Guide handout and show Clip 1. Tell students to complete the first row of the table on the handout. Ask students, “Based on the clip we just watched, what does Rocky think is important?” Discuss the same for Yaa. Do students feel that they think differently from their parents? What factors might account for this, both in Rocky and Yaa’s situation and in the students’ own lives? Responses might include differences in culture, age, values and so on.

3. Show Clip 2 and ask students to complete the second row of the handout. Ask students if they think that Rocky and Yaa love each other despite their disagreements. Tell students to elaborate on their answers.

4. Explain that the last clip shows Rocky coming home after her first semester away at college. Show Clip 3 and complete the handout. Ask students if any of them have ever been away from home for more than a week. Ask students who have been away from home to reflect on their experiences. What did they miss about home when they were away? What did they not miss?

5. Compare and contrast Rocky and Yaa’s interactions with other parent-child relationships. Provide small student groups with one or two letters or blog posts to read together and summarize for the class. Consider pulling texts from the following sources, depending on the focus of your curriculum:

Blog Post: A Letter to My Mom (with response)

<http://ksc-thebrain.blogspot.com/2007/05/letter-to-my-mom.html>

A daughter writes a letter on her blog to her mother about their relationship, and her mother responds.

A Special Delivery: Mother-Daughter Letters From Afar

by Joyce Slayton Mitchell and Elizabeth Dix Mitchell

This book features a collection of letters between a mother living in Vermont and her pregnant daughter living in New Zealand.

From Mother and Daughter: Poems, Dialogues, and Letters of Les Dames Des Roches

edited and translated by Anne R. Larsen

http://books.google.com/books?id=3eYJi84WpQEC&dq=From+Mother+and+Daughter:+Poems,+Dialogues,+and+Letters+of+Les+Dames+Des+Roches&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=OWrWFsXJCH&sig=bYaZnCNL-Qr4SGuS1zV3RJluq5k&hl=en&ei=aDuySvOxFsSQtge1jM3ADg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

This book, available online, contains 16th-century letters that were sent by women in French literary history.

Theodore Roosevelt's Letters to His Children

<http://www.questia.com/read/1497222?title=Theodore%20Roosevelt's%20Letters%20to%20His%20Children>

This online book provides a collection of letters that Teddy Roosevelt sent to his children.

While Father Is Away: The Civil War Letters of William H. Bradbury

http://books.google.com/books?id=fRuJVMYTrywC&dq=soldier+letters+home&printsec=frontcover&source=in&hl=en&ei=kTSySoTYKd63twexmq3EDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=13#v=onepage&q=soldier%20letters%20home&f=false

This compilation of letters from a soldier in the Civil War includes messages to and about Bradbury's children. Search the text for his daughter Jane's name.

After each group has provided the class with a summary of its assigned letter(s), ask group members to identify similarities and differences in the relationships between the people in the letters they read and Rocky and Yaa. How might the time periods in which the letters were written have influenced the parent-child relationship?

6. Review the basics of personal letter writing and discuss what makes a good letter. Ask each student to write his or her own letter to a parent and invite the parent to write back. (Note: Please be sensitive to each student's family situation and feel free to have students write to a loved one other than a parent if that would be more appropriate.) If writers aren't sure where to start, suggest expressing gratitude, describing concerns or talking about roles and expectations. Keep letters focused by limiting them to one typed page. Tell students to write "SHARE" at the top of letters that they wouldn't mind sharing with the class or posting on the POV website. Explain that letters without this designation will remain confidential.

7. After an appropriate writing period outside of class, collect the letters from students and their parents and choose a sample of those marked "SHARE" to read to the class. Ask students how writing to a loved one such as a parent affects tone, style and content. What type of language best fits the relationship? Did the process of writing letters affect how students and their parents understand each other? If so, how? What might students and their parents think of these letters in 10 or 20 years?

8. Consider submitting high-quality letter sets to the POV website for others to enjoy.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

Students can be assessed on:

- Completion of the Viewing Guide.
- Participation in class discussions and activities.
- The substance and clarity of the letters to their parents.

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

- Expand the discussion of what makes a good letter (step 6 in the main activity) to develop a student-generated rubric to use when assessing student work for this lesson. The article “[Developing Student-Generated Rubrics](http://www.angelfire.com/ok/freshenglish/stugenrubric.html)” (<http://www.angelfire.com/ok/freshenglish/stugenrubric.html>) shares some strategies for how this could be done.
- Watch, explore and discuss other POV resources that address complexities in family relationships, such as **Up the Yangtze** and **The Betrayal (Nerakhoon)**. These resources have companion educator activities to support their use in the classroom.
- Have students create visual representations of their family trees. Ask students to research and record the full names, birth and death years (where applicable) and place of longest residence for three to four generations of their families (students being the first generation). Students should create a family tree poster to organize and display this information, and then decorate the poster in a way that reflects their family’s culture and style. Display these posters around the room and discuss how knowing something about your family’s past contributes to your identity
- Explore different kinds of pen pal relationships. Help your class correspond with retired members of your community and record their personal histories. Or use an online service such as Kidlink (<http://www.kidlink.org/kidspace/index.php>) to help class members establish intercultural pen pal relationships with other young people their age around the world so they can compare life experiences.
- Research the roles of families in different periods of U.S. and/or world history. Have students choose a time period, gather information and write essays on how family roles were affected by events or developments of that time. For example, what impact did industrialization or World War II have on the family? Or, how did the French Revolution change family life in France?

RESOURCES

Friendly Letter Writing

<http://www.letterwritingguide.com/friendlyletter.htm>

This brief description of the purpose and typical content of friendly letter writing also provides links to a page showing the format for friendly letters and a sample friendly letter.

Mother-Daughter Dynamic

http://www.connectwithkids.com/tipsheet/2004/208_dec22/moth.html

This page describes challenges that arise in mother-daughter relationships and some of the reasons that conflict occurs.

STANDARDS

These standards are drawn from “Content Knowledge,” a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

Behavioral Studies

Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.

Family/Consumer Sciences

Standard 2: Understands the impact of the family on the well-being of individuals and society.

Language Arts

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Standard 5: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Working with Others

Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive’s director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource Web site (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.