

THOMAS DAY’S LETTER TO HIS DAUGHTER, MARY ANN DAY
TEACHER TOOL 3

This Teacher Tool contains the full text of the letter that Thomas Day wrote to his daughter, Mary Ann. The letter has been modified from its original form (see Teacher Tool 5 for the letter in its original form) to make it easier to read aloud. It is also annotated with notes to help you lead a discussion about the letter with your students. The letter should be read aloud first and the notes referred to after. The bold segments of Day’s letter to his daughter correlate to the bold segments in the notes and the same is true for the italicized segments.

Thomas Day’s Letter to Mary Ann Day	Notes for Discussion After Reading
Milton, N.C. 21 November 1851	
My Daughter,	
We are in receipt of your Letters regularly & are glad to hear from you. We are pleased to know you are well and to hear of your satisfaction in your home—and hope your religious enjoyments may continue a comfort to you and consolation to the Brethren with whom you associate.	
The time is drawing to a close when I hope to meet with you again. And, I hope your return to Milton may be a source of comfort to you notwithstanding the obscure residence you may have here. You inquire how long before I leave and also observe you can’ see how I have lived so long in Milton. I can tell you it will not be [a] very great while before I hope to leave Milton and I can also tell you I have long since learned to enjoy my life in a higher circle than depending on human society for my comfort or happiness. My pleasures are placed in hope beyond this world. My highest pleasure is in discharge of my every day duty as nearly as possible.	<p>Students are frequently struck by these phrases in which Day indicates that he puts his hope and faith in God’s law (“a higher circle”) rather than in man’s laws on earth.</p> <p><i>This means that doing his work and meeting the tasks he has laid out for himself is where he finds pleasure and meaning in life.</i></p>
<p>You have read in the scriptures how the two first Brothers Cain and Abel enjoyed each others society and how also the Patriarch David loved his Beautiful son Absalom, And you see Absalom with an army craving his fathers blood; you see the modern time—net work society also—how frail the affection of friends—how deceitful. Well, you must love the lord thy God</p>	<p>With these biblical references to family members who turned on each other, Adam and Eve’s son, Cain, murdered his brother, Abel, and David’s son Absalom turned on his father and attacked him. Day is underscoring how one cannot be trusting in relationships with other people because they can turn on you.</p>

<p>with thy whole heart, soul and strength and thy neighbor as thyself. But all the time, worship God only.</p>	
<p>I am perfectly satisfied as regards Milton. I came here to stay four years and am here 7 times 4. I love the place no better nor worse than first day I came into it. <i>My mother and many other unavoidable encumbrances has held me here and I am as busy as you ever see an old fellow trying to work my way out—and as happy in doing it as I shall ever be any where. No doubt, my great concern at this time and will be is to get some suitable place for you and your Brothers—us all—to settle down. I want you to be in some place where your turn of feelings and manners can be well met with associates and I fully expect to affect my purpose if I live long enough.</i> <i>You some time ago mentioned your regret at having attempted to learn music. I want you to persevere in the practice of music and in all other accomplishments that may be useful—or gratifying to you and to your friends in your intercourse through life.</i></p>	<p>This statement often stands out to students because it seems unnatural that a person could live in a place for 28 years and not have stronger feelings for it than they did the first day they arrived. Why might Thomas Day feel this way? Explain that perhaps it's because as a free man of color he's an outsider in the white community who are his customers. He may go to church with them and have them as his clients, but he does not socialize with them and is not part of the white community.</p> <p><i>It is unclear exactly what Day meant by this statement. Mourning Stewart Day lived with the family since the 1830's. How she could have "held" him in Milton is not clear as she was not herself a Miltonian, but a Virginian from Dinwiddie County. Perhaps she for various reasons resisted moving and it was just too difficult to resist his mother's wishes out of respect and deference to her.</i></p> <p>Here Thomas Day seems to contradict what he said in the previous paragraph about being as happy in Milton as "I shall be any where" because he says that he's greatly concerned about finding another place for the family to settle. After Thomas Day's death in the early 1860's his wife, Aquilla Wilson and two children, Thomas Jr. and Mary Ann moved to Wilmington, North Carolina a bustling port city on the North Carolina coast with a large free black community. This is perhaps the town he was thinking about when he said "a sootable place for you and your brothers."</p> <p><i>Here Thomas Day is giving Mary Ann fatherly advice about the importance of</i></p>

	<p><i>having a variety of interests and talents, because they make for a more interesting and pleasant life.</i></p>
<p>The mind is very much like any piece of building or workmanship. It requires many members suitably arranged to give proper gracefulness and symmetry to a building in like manner the mind requires certain accomplishments to give that suitable ease necessary to its refinement. <i>Music has a happy tendency to soothe the unregular & bad passions of our nature. I want you to learn music well—to learn all other branches well that you have taken—learn to walk well—to stand erect—learn to feel free and to feel well and easy—learn to wear a free & easy expression and never forget the modesty and gentle caution so necessary in a lady to give her an independent and unquestionable character.</i></p>	<p>With this statement Thomas Day is comparing a person’s mind or intellectual development to a building or workmanship. He is saying that one needs to “construct” one’s mind and character just as one would build or create anything following principals of design, gracefulness and symmetry.</p> <p><i>The admonishment “Learn to walk well—to stand Erect—learn to feel free and to feel well and easy—learn to wear a free and Easy Expression...” often is noticed by students. Why is he telling his daughter to “feel free” and to wear a “free and easy” expression?</i></p> <p><i>We can never know all of his motivations for this, but very likely it’s because she is a free person of color. He does not want her to wear an expression that could contribute to the impression that she is an enslaved person or a fugitive slave. With a free and easy expression she would convey that she has nothing to hide.</i></p>
<p>Much has been said in your favor since you have been at Wilbraham. If you have done right and acted deservedly it has been just what you owe to your self and to your creator and to the world, Of course you know we are all gratified to hear favorably from you and I hope you will ever regard your character more than your life. And it is well for young ladies to be very cautious particularly when well spoken of be ever on your guard in all respects. A good character is of great value. Consequently, it requires much attention to retain it, The higher the character the greater the responsibility—the more is expected of that character or person and consequently the more you have to learn and to know—to meet the expectations and wishes of your friends.</p>	<p>This paragraph is full of more general fatherly advice for his daughter for how to carry herself as a young lady. A line that frequently grabs students’ attention is “ Ever regard your character more than your life.” Here he seems to be meaning that great character and a good reputation are good protection.</p>

<p>All this is nothing hard to do—the way to keep out of Evil is never to get into it. I wish that all persons knew the worth of true female virtue and the blessings of female accomplishment. How much better is a lady prepared to stand crosses—loss, affliction, poverty when she has a good character & good information than is one ignorant of the value of any and everything even her own body and soul. What a blessing is true piety to a young lady—bracing her infirmities and preserving her mind from extravagant desires. How many beautiful young ladies are lost to all usefulness by a lack of proper information. There is now a perfect waste of human flesh here in this very way the young ladies come into villages to school. They learn a little of one thing a little of another and a little on the piano. They return to their country homes knowing nothing but a scoff at persons who they think inferior to themselves and with nothing in their heads but foolish pride. They enter upon life they know how to dress their bodies according to fashion and all is done. They can't write—they won't read—they are something they can't tell what. They keep clear of poor people and follow after rich people. They so they go and such children they raise here are just such as could be expected from such parents.</p>	<p>Here, Day is providing more fatherly advice. He also is providing insight into his feelings and contempt for the young white girls in the Milton area and their parents because of their shallowness and lack of character and values.</p>
<p>I have been truly sorry to hear Devereux health in such a precarious fix. I hope he will remain still till he is better or so perfectly well as to be able to attend to business. I wish you use your persuasion with him to get him to stay at Wilbraham till he is perfectly well—I have written to him to that effect if his constitution won't stand the cold I want him to come home though would rather he would work in Boston till next summer—at which time I will then see him I conclude for the best.</p>	<p>Devereux is one of Mary Ann's brothers at Wesleyan. The other is Thomas Jr. Here Thomas Day is showing concern for Devereux and encouraging Mary Ann to not let Devereux leave school until he is well.</p>

<p>Nothing but Religion is the theme in Milton now—the greatest revival I ever knew in the south 95 or 7 persons in Milton professed conversion. There came an Englishman originally a sailor but now a Baptist preacher—he has been preaching every night and day for one month and his meeting has resulted in the profession of the above number. I truly hope they may be faithful to the end.</p>	<p>Revivals were great religious gatherings that occurred throughout the South throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries, often in fields and often with hundreds even thousands attending. They were huge social gatherings and served also as a form of “entertainment” as the preaching was often dramatic and stirring and at the end people had the opportunity to “be saved” which added to the drama and power of the revival.</p>
<p>Your mother is still quite well but complaining a little. She wants to see you very badly and so do I, but I am not allowing myself to get very uneasy till the time comes. I intend to get you a piano and am in hopes you will learn to play on the guitar so as to amuse yourself while traveling perhaps on the broad ocean.</p>	<p>It is not known how far Mary Ann Day got with music, something Thomas Day encouraged her in. He once tried to get her piano lessons at Salem Academy in North Carolina but the record is not clear if she were accepted or not.</p>
<p>Sofrona Jeffryes is dead, Nathans Daughter. Miss Hawkins has not been here this year—Miss Esther Fair is thinking of moving again from No. Durhams. Mrs. Patey Smith is still moderately well and remembers you as usual. Nothing new in Milton worth attention. When you come home you must expect cool comfort so far as human intercourse is concerned. There is nothing here but to make a little money and that but little to induce us to stay here. Though with all this you will enjoy yourself well as anywhere for a while.</p>	<p>Here Thomas Day mentions the names of some of Mary Ann’s social acquaintances. All of these are free black women and men who lived nearby in neighboring counties. His point about when you “come home you must expect cool Comfort so far as human intercourse is concerned—” may relate to the fact that Mary Ann may have gotten used to being friendly with white students at Wesleyan. Her father appears to be advising her or reminding her that she must not expect that kind of close warm relationships with people in Milton, but instead must expect “cool comfort.”</p>
<p>I have mailed a check to Mr. Raymond for about \$285, which is to meet your expenses and a part of Devereux, Though not enough for Devereux and not wanting him by any means to leave Wilbraham till he gets well I want to send him some money and must by the time he will be able to go.</p>	<p>In these last paragraphs Day is closing the letter by remembering some business and personal items. He is talking about the business matter of paying Mr. Raymond, the school’s headmaster, for Mary Ann’s and Devereux’s schooling expenses and also he insists he that he does not</p>

<p>The check to Mr. Raymond comes on Tuesday mail. Your mother sends her love to you and says she is going to send you a Christmas Gift.</p>	<p>want Devereux to leave Wesleyan until he is completely well.</p>
<p>From your Affectionate Father Thos Day</p>	<p>This manner of ending a letter was typical for mid 19th century correspondence etiquette.</p>

Teachers may use and reproduce the material on the Crafting Freedom website for instructional purposes.