

Worksheet for Analysis of a Letter

Prepare a written report on your assigned letter by answering these questions about it.

JUST THE FACTS

- When were these letters written? How do you know?
- Who is the author of the letters? Who is the recipient? What is their relationship?
- Where is the sender? How long does he expect the war to last?

THE PEOPLE OF THE LETTER

- What do these letters reveal about the writer? How old do you think he is? Why?
- Does the author reveal any personal biases in this letter?
- Do we need additional information about the writer in order to understand the letters?
- Are these love letters? Support your answer with examples from the letters.
- Does the tone of the letters change as time goes on? Explain.

THE HISTORICAL PERIOD OF THE LETTER

- What do the letters reveal about the events of the war? What do they not say?
- Why do you feel the writer spends so much time talking about other letters?
- What questions would you like to ask the writer?
- Do you notice any differences in word usage or writing style between these letters and modern correspondence? Are there words or expressions that seem outdated now?

A FEW MORE QUESTIONS

- What was the author's objective in writing these letters?
- Do you think the size of the V-mail form limits what the writer says? What other factors could limit his expression as well?
- Why did these letters survive when so many others did not?
- How did these letters change or add to your knowledge of this time period or event?

PROJECT AND DISCUSSION IDEAS

- We are hearing only one side of the conversation between these people. Write what you think might be the recipient's response to these letters.
- Do some reading on the background of V-mail. What does the "V" stand for? How were the letters produced? Why was this type of mail used?
- Do you think American soldiers in the more recent conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan might write similar letters? Explain.
- What might be some of the advantages of letters over other kinds of communication with loved ones far away? What would make a letter preferable to a phone call?
- How can reading letters from another period of history change your understanding of that period? What are some of the lessons we can learn about other generations from reading their letters and journals?
- Compare the historical or genealogical value of these letters with contemporary forms of correspondence such as telephone conversations, e-mail, and text-messaging. What historical evidence will we leave to help our children and grand-children understand our own lives better?

Sample Letters from World War II

(transcribed from V-mail letters in the Yeatman-Polk Collection, Addition, 1934-1955, Accession number 89-199 at the Tennessee State Library and Archives)

March 11, 1943

Dear Nancy:

It was truly a real treat to hear from you today and to learn that all goes well with you back in the Old North State. This is just a brief note in reply and in a day or so I'll try to write a bit at length. Yes, your first V-mail letter arrived as well as this one sent on February 14th. I hope that my three letters and a card managed to get through safely. The card was sent around March 1st and the letters were sent on January 23rd, February 18th and 20th.

Well, as you know, the war moves on. In spite of the recent successes in almost all combat areas I think that it will be three and possibly four or five more years before "the lights go on again all over the world." My reason is transportation. Of course, perhaps I am wrong (and I certainly hope so) but the supply problem is truly a tremendous one and Der Fuhrer's subs are not making the task any easier. In the meantime, I am going to observe as much as I can. This sort of life is a realistic and maturing sort of education. Trez

October 1, 1943

Darling Nancy:

This is just a Vmail note to let you know that I am still thinking of you and longing to see you once again. Your air mail letter of September 11th which I answered last night is still being read because it is so characteristic of you—so full of honesty and frankness. I really liked it a lot, Nancy

The Sigma Nu pin was mailed last night also and carries with it a very warm feeling for an exceedingly wonderful person. I didn't wrap it (as I wanted to) with ribbon and tissue paper because I just could not get such. However, regardless of that the feeling is there all the same. Maybe some day, Nancy, I can convince you of that.

Devotedly yours, Trez

October 4, 1943

Darling Nancy:

The past few days certainly have brought me a lot of joy in the form of your letters. Today, your two Vmail letters written on September 21st and 22nd arrived. Here is a resume of my latest mail to you:—Air mail letters sent on September 30th, October 2nd and 3rd, fraternity pin sent by regular mail on September 30th; Vmail note on October 1st. I hope that all reach you safely.

You asked: "Do I seem to forward to write you so much?", and the answer is – well you know it. You write of the little things that make life so worthwhile. It's your courage and cheerfulness, Nancy, your quiet, sweet, steady, stay-the-course way that makes you have a halo around your head from my point of view.

I still haven't been called for an interview in regard to the new type of work that I mentioned in my letter of September 27th. Such always takes quite a bit of time – much longer than I anticipated. I would certainly like to get into the type of work that I will be doing provided I am accepted. However, my fingers are still crossed because one can never take anything for granted in the army. One just has to hope for the best and take whatever comes.

In the meantime let me say again, Nancy, that I think you are very precious. I long to see you once again.

Ever devotedly yours, Trez

October 11, 1943

Darling Nancy:

I was so glad to get your Vmail letter of October 1st this afternoon and am eagerly looking forward to your air mail letters which have not arrived as yet. Mail from the United States **V-Mail**, page two

usually comes in batches. My last letter was sent by air mail on October 9th – this is it was mailed then. It will probably go to the United States by boat. I also sent a copy of Yank, the Army weekly, by regular mail at the same time.

Your mention of football is connection with the Rocky Mount-Goldsboro game brought back fond memories of our national autumn pastime. Over here in England the closest approach is rugby and soccer.

This is just a brief note but I wanted to let you know, Nancy, that I think of you so very much and will truly welcome the end of the war when I can see you again. You really are a swell person!

Ever devotedly yours, Trez

November 6, 1943

Darling Nancy:

Today's mail brought me untold pleasures in the forms of your air mail letter of October 19th. It is the first mail that has been forwarded to me since I left my old outfit and I really enjoyed it through and through. So far your air mail letters of October 7th and 9th have not arrived, but mail is an irregular sort of thing in these times so they may not be lost – at least I certainly hope not. I'll let you know if they arrive. My last letter was of the air mail variety and was written on November 3rd.

This is just a brief Vmail note to let you know that I am constantly thinking of you, Nancy. I will write an air mail letter tonight.

Ever devotedly yours, Trez

November 29, 1943

Nancy darling:

I really have been overwhelmed because when I returned to base from the hospital today a huge stack of letters from you were there. Here is the list October 9, 14, 25, 26, 28, 30 and November 2, 4, 8, 10, and 16. The letters sent to my old outfit were forwarded to the wrong APO, probably kept there for several weeks, then sent back to my old unit and then forwarded again to my present address. Nancy, I truly don't know where to start in answering those wonderful letters. This is just a brief Vmail note to let you know that I have received them. I'll write by air mail tonight.

Ever devotedly yours, Trez

P.S. As you probably noticed my letters were rather drab without the inspiration that yours furnish. Now that mail delivery is back to normal I should show improvement.

February 17, 1944

My darling Nancy:

Your air mail letter of January 25th and your Vmail letter of February 4th reached me today. I was very sorry to hear that you have been in bed all week and earnestly hope, my dearest, that your recovery was rapid. Sinus trouble can be very bothersome as I too well know from personal experience. Last year I was bothered quite a bit by such but so far this year I have managed to escape.

I'll write an air mail letter in the very near future, but in the meantime I wanted you to know that I was thinking of you and longing to be with you again, my darling.

Ever devotedly yours, Trez

P.S. My last air mail letter was sent on February 14.