

Compare And Contrast a Historical Account and a Fictional Portrayal RL.7.9

For use with Lift Student's Book Level 2 Unit 7 page 325.

Read the fictional portrayal of a day in the life of Ada Lovelace.

A Flight of Imagination

If you were a bird, say a crow, or even a falcon, perched in the huge oak tree on the east side of the stone house, you could see the young girl through the window of the third-floor bedroom. Ada, for that is the girl's name, arranges her favorite clockworks from Switzerland carefully on the tabletop. She lines up the clocks at the back. A cuckoo bird pops out of each tiny wooden door every hour, which brings her great satisfaction. In front, she organizes the music boxes—plain wood and painted, they play different songs when their lids open. Ada's mother brought back fabrics, rugs, and jewelry from their year-long tour of Europe. However, Ada only wanted mechanical objects, with their wheels and cogs, metal teeth and chains that pulled.

Opening the smallest music box, she hears *Fur Elise*, and thinks about dancing around the room. Her mother might not approve, but then Mother has not yet returned from the spa by the sea. Ada grabs her long skirts and swishes them to the music. A knock on the door reminds her that she is late for her lessons, again. She drops her skirts.

"Coming, Madame Lamont." Her tutor of French, literature, music, and history insists on Madame. Ada closes the box, silencing the music.

This morning's lesson in the sitting room begins with French, and they converse about food and weather. Madame is an excellent teacher of many subjects, but sadly, not math or most of the sciences. However, she appreciates the beauty of the stars. The night sky has captured Ada's imagination, and Madame Lamont has encouraged her. A large telescope is set in the garden. Not so close to Ada as to distract her from her studies, but close enough for her to view the stars at night. To see how they swirl and spin in the night sky. But Ada is at this moment distracted.

"When will Mother be home?" Ada asks. "Exactly?"

Madame Lamont waits a moment, long enough for Ada to realize that there is no exact time for her mother's arrival.

"Sometime later today," Madame Lamont says firmly.

"By teatime?" Ada asks. "I have a surprise for her." She cannot wait for her mother to see her invention. "Did you know that there are trains now with steam engines?"

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Like the steam engine boats we saw in Switzerland. Oh, they were a **marvel**! Mountains of coal **transform** water into steam. The pressure of the steam moves the engines. Trains powered by steam will be ever so much faster than carriages. If Mother took a train, she could be here in no time at all."

"Yes, I remember your enthusiasm for steam engines." Madame says kindly. "Now let us take our exercise outdoors."

The day is fair, but chilly, so they put on hats, gloves, and short jackets. The gardens stretch in three directions, a formal flower garden to rear, a garden of shrubs cut into the shapes of animals to the west, and a smaller medicinal garden near the tall oak. Ada likes the medicinal garden best because the plants there have a purpose, to heal. Jemima Hawkes, the caretaker's daughter, just a few years older than Ada, grows herbs and other plants that can be used as medicines. Madame Lamont insists on walking three times around the outside of the larger gardens before Ada can visit the herb garden. But as they finally approach, Jemima rises from her position kneeling in the soil. She straightens and shakes out each leg, then wipes dirt from her skirts. Now she will go to work with the birds, Ada thinks.

"Madame, may I stay with Jemima and watch her train the birds?"

Madame Lamont tightens her lips and looks off to the right as if she's considering this idea, but this is a ruse. She always allows Ada to go with Jemima to work the birds. However, Madame does not know what Ada does in the barn while the older girl trains her birds.

Madame nods in her brisk way. "Please return shortly."

Ada's boots scatter stones on the path to the bird shed as she tries to keep up with Jemima's long steps. A quiet young woman, she doesn't speak.

In the dark barn, some light slips through cracks between the wooden boards. Birds, especially birds that hunt, tend to be quiet in the dark. Even in the low light, the falcon wears a hood over its head. The crow blinks its eyes when the door opens. Ada admires both birds, the crow for its intelligence, and the falcon for its hunting skill.

Today, Jemima has something to say.

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"The birds of prey, the eagles, falcons, and hawks, they're dying. Men don't need them now that they have guns to do their killing. Did you know that certain sorts of birds are for certain sorts of men? That kings can have eagles, and lords can have falcons, and the rest of us can have hawks." Ada knows this. She has completed her research, but she knows to be polite. Jemima continues her rare speech. "For generations, my family has trained hawks, and so that is our last name." She pulls on a special glove reaching towards the hawk, who climbs onto her arm.

Ada's mother believes in **pragmatic** interests, subjects like mathematics, history, or languages. She has faith in the **potential** of reasoning. She has no such **devotion** to fields she judges as foolish. She discourages "flights of imagination," by which she means anything not **relevant** to her own life. However, when Ada wondered aloud if she could become a mathematician, her mother said, "Mathematics are something you should know, not something you should do as a profession." This approach to learning confuses Ada. If she knows something, she wants to put it to use.

Ada's extraordinary invention rests on the rough table in the barn. Her invention stretches as wide as an eagle's wings with feathers she has gathered for months—blue from the jays, black from the crows, striped from the great owls. With tiny stitches and stolen embroidery thread, Ada sewed them to silk. The feathered silk stretches across metal arms that fold and extend like an umbrella. With scraps of metal, some nuts, bolts, and wire, Ada has created mechanical wings she can **operate**. When she pulls a chain, the wings extend; when she pushes a lever, they collapse. One day, she will build a flying machine powered by a steam engine, but for now, she has these. When her mother sees Ada fly, she will without doubt know her daughter's true worth. In the barn, Ada spends some time **manipulating** her flying machine. She's confident it will work that afternoon.

Later, as teatime approaches, Ada sits atop the stone wall at the entrance to their property. She tests her wings by extending and folding them. She has never actually tried to fly. Her first "flight of imagination" will be for her mother. In the distance, the sound of horses trotting and the creak of the carriage signal that her mother is finally home. Ada stands and spreads her wings.

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Complete the chart to compare and contrast *Programming Pioneer Ada Lovelace* (on Student's Book pages 318-325) and *A Flight of Imagination*.

	Programming Pioneer Ada Lovelace <i>Nonfiction account</i>	A Flight of Imagination <i>Fictional portrayal</i>
What time period is covered?		
Who are the main characters?		
How many historical facts can you check?		
How much do you learn about Ada's thoughts and personality?		
What are the advantages of this genre of writing/type of account?		

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Answer the questions.

1. Which do you prefer: the historical account or the fictional portrayal? Why?

2. What do you learn from each type of account?

3. Why might authors use fiction to write about historical figures?
