



Abigail Disney, Producer The Power of Imagination

Lesson Introduction

Interview Log: Interviewed on September 18, 2023 by David Bender

- Access **The Thread** episode of Abigail Disney on our [YouTube channel](#) or at [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)
- Access her long-form interview on [LifeStories.org](#)

Learning Objectives

Social Studies Focus

- Explore the global influence of Disney films, characters, and stories in shaping culture and student's understanding of themselves
- Define capitalism, income inequality, corporate wealth, generational wealth
- Compare and contrast grassroots organizing to treetops organizing

English Language Arts Focus

- Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one filmmaker, philanthropist, and activist
- Explore how Disney stories, characters, and animation, have influenced storytelling, culture, and the film industry
- Analyze the structure and purpose of a narrative, identify key themes in the episode, and synthesize information from a spoken text
- Analyze, reflect on, and discuss the title "The Power of Imagination" after watching the episode
- Analyze the impact of personal experiences and family history on an individual's perspective
- Use Abigail Disney's episode as evidence to write a synthesis essay on an assigned

Episode Overview

As the granddaughter of Roy Disney, Abigail Disney could easily have rested on a family inheritance of fame and fortune and led a quiet life of comfortable privilege. Instead, she has chosen a bold path of promoting societal change by producing documentary films that highlight peace and social justice, particularly focusing on women who are making a difference. She is also one of the nation's most vocal champions on the issue of wealth inequality, fearlessly challenging the corporate practices of the company that bears her name. This episode of **The Thread** is a conversation with a person who unselfishly uses the gift of her birthright to change our world for the better.



Biography

Abigail Disney is an award-winning filmmaker, philanthropist, and CEO of Fork Films. Born in Los Angeles into a filmmaking dynasty, she's the granddaughter of Roy O. Disney, co-founder of The Walt Disney Company. A fierce advocate for peace and representation, Disney co-founded Fork Films with Gini Reticker in 2007, creating documentaries that tackle social issues. There, she produced the acclaimed *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* and made her directorial debut with the Emmy-winning *The Armor of Light*. In 2012, she co-created and executive produced PBS's award-winning series *Women, War & Peace* with Pamela Hogan and Gini Reticker. Fork Films also funds documentaries that showcase human rights, ensuring diverse voices are involved in production. In 2009, Disney founded Peace is Loud to promote peace through media and live events. Her accolades include honors from the International Women's Media Foundation and The White House Project's Epic Award. Abigail earned degrees from Yale (Bachelors), Stanford (Masters), and Columbia (PhD), and a mother of four.

Photo: Honorary chair and co-founder of Level Forward, Abigail E. Disney speaks onstage during attends the New York Women's Foundation's 2018 "Celebrating Women" breakfast on May 10, 2018 in New York City. (Monica Schipper/Getty Images for The New York Women's Foundation)



Teaching Tip: First Take

A **First Take** is a warm-up writing or conversation exercise created uniquely for *The Thread* that strengthens media literacy skills. Like an opening song in a musical, the first stanza of a poem, or even the first impression one person makes on another, the First Take asks students to reflect and share their initial thoughts and feelings about the episode's opening.

Suggested Steps

▣ **Watch and then read aloud** the opening of Abigail Disney's episode with students:

"I felt so proud. Standing there looking at my grandfather. I mean, it was. It's a little weird, you're standing there and that's Grandpa, and everybody's looking at Grandpa, and he's my grandpa, and he carries me on his back to the ice cream store on weekends. I mean, how is it possible that the world cares this much about my grandpa? The way I care about my grandpa? You know, for me, this was like my first real glance at the enormity of what was accomplished under this rubric that was my name."



▣ **Ask and Discuss:** What do you learn about Abigail Disney and her family from the opening of her episode? What insights can you infer?

▣ **Next,** as a class, discuss the role of "the opening" in any form of storytelling – an interview, film, play, or song. What is their point of view on why the filmmakers chose this as the opening for the episode? What ideas, topics, or themes may the filmmakers be foreshadowing?

▣ **Last,** have students do a one-minute quick write reflecting on how the opening connects with the episode's title, "The Power of Imagination." Then, have students get



Photos: Producer Abigail Disney arrives at the 7th Annual Tribeca Film Festival - *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* Premiere at the AMC Village 7 Theater on April 24, 2008 in New York City. (Jim Spellman/WireImage) top; Roy E. Disney with a storyboard for *Oliver & Company* behind him. (RGR Collection) lower left; Parade in Disneyland park. (Album / Archivo ABC) lower right



Teaching Tip:

The Thread Up Close

Step One: Watch Abigail Disney's episode "The Power of Imagination" here.

Next, have students discuss and debrief the episode using these suggested questions:

- ▣ How does Abigail Disney describe her grandfather's influence on her identity?
- ▣ What do you learn about the Disney family from this episode?
- ▣ How would you describe Disney's relationship to her family and do you believe it informs her activism today?
- ▣ How did Abigail's acceptance of her family name evolve throughout her life?

Step Two: After discussing the questions in Step One, have students return to *The Thread* episode and engage in a close read and analysis of her interview using the transcript and video as a reference. Depending on the lesson, question, or theme you are aligning *The Thread* with, have students annotate the transcript, select passages that reflect the assignment, and explain their reasoning in class.

Here is an example of a *Thread* lesson connection: If you are exploring how family history shapes future generations, read these quotes from Abigail Disney and discuss what they reveal about this topic:

"My grandfather, Roy, was a very humble man. He just was a sweet human, and we were his only four grandchildren. And he treated us like we were gods and goddesses. And I learned a lot from him."

"He took his name off of it [the company.] It stopped being the Disney brothers and became a Walt Disney Company because he didn't really like having the focus on him and he really believed the creatives should get the credit."

"You know, it's a complicated legacy, and I can talk for hours about why it's complicated, but those moments when you hear the pure joy that came into the world as a result of that work, that makes me so proud."



Photos: The American film producer Walt Disney (1901-1966) behind his movie camera. (Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo) *lower left*; Disney Studios got its start with animators and producers Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks, his brother Roy Disney in finance and his team of cartoonists/animators, Ham Hamilton, Hugh Harman and Rudi Ising. Young actress Margie Gay paid them a visit 1924. (Photo 12 / Collection 7e Art) *lower right*



Connections: *The Thread Up Close*

- How does Abigail Disney's experience with her family's wealth shape her perspective on privilege, and what responsibilities does she believe come with that privilege?
- What are Abigail's views on capitalism and its relationship to privilege and responsibility?
- How can individuals from wealthy backgrounds use their resources to address social inequalities?
- What role do you think the younger generation plays in shaping the future of societal and economic systems?
- How do you understand the title after watching this episode?
- What new or surprising insights did you learn about the power of imagination from Abigail Disney's life experiences? What did you expect to hear given her upbringing? How did she re-imagine her life differently from your point of view?
- What new insight did you learn about (yourself, your community, your world) from her stories?


Activity: The Power of Imagination

Abigail Disney has leveraged her privilege and to engage in social and economic change to improve the lives of others. She imagined a different world and modeled a way of engaging in the world differently than others with family wealth.

In this spirit, invite a local activist or community leader to speak to students about their experiences in social responsibility and activism. Prepare students to write questions prior to the speaker and encourage a Q&A session to explore new and modern implications of Abigail's ideas.

Extended learning: Write a synthesis essay on Abigail Disney's activism. Use any of the articles posted in Additional Resources as evidence as well as other source materials if helpful.

Additional Resources

- Explore [Abigail Disney](#) - official website
- Listen to Abigail Disney's Podcast: All Ears
- Read more about her activism
- [Fortune](#), August 15, 2023
-  ["Abigail Disney on Income Inequality, 'The American Dream and Other Fairytales' and How to Fight for Fair Wages," *Parade*, September 30, 2022](#)
- ["Abigail Disney Scorching Wage Inequality at Disney: 'Reward All of Your Workers Fairly,'" *Vanity Fair*](#)