



Molly Jong-Fast, Writer Inheriting Boldness

Lesson Introduction

Interview Log: Interviewed on July 25, 2023 by David Bender

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

Learning Objectives

***Note:** This episode and lesson discusses mature content and is recommended only for older students.

Social Studies Focus

- Analyze the McCarthy era's impact on individuals, families, and society
- Explore the effects of family history and legacy on personal beliefs and choices
- Analyze the interplay of privilege, social justice, and personal responsibility in shaping individual choices

English Language Arts Focus

- Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one writer
- 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 "Inheriting Boldness" after watching the episode
- Explore the idea of purposeful work and a meaningful life
- Use Molly Jong-Fast's episode as evidence to write a rhetorical argument on an assigned topic

Episode Overview

Molly Jong-Fast, has become one of the premier writers and political commentators of our time. Still only in her mid-forties, the prolific Ms. Jong-Fast is already the author of two novels and a memoir, and since 2016, she's been a go-to observer of the tumultuous American political scene, writing for *Vanity Fair*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Bulwark*. For this election year, her quick-witted commentary garnered her a spot as a political analyst on MSNBC. This episode of **The Thread**, like Molly Jong-Fast herself, is as fun as it is insightful and thought-provoking.



Biography

Molly Jong-Fast is an author, journalist, political commentator, and podcaster. Born into a renowned literary family—her mother is novelist Erica Jong, whose landmark novel *Fear of Flying* marked the beginning of the second wave of the feminist movement, her father is author Jonathan Fast, and her paternal grandfather, Howard Fast, wrote *Spartacus* while in prison for defying the House Un-American Activities Committee during the McCarthyism persecutions of the 1950s. Ms. Jong-Fast, graduated from Barnard College and earned her MFA from Bennington College in 2004. After publishing novels like *Normal Girl* and *The Social Climber's Handbook*, she shifted to political writing after the 2016 election, quickly building a large social media following. Jong-Fast has contributed to *The Atlantic*, *The Bulwark*, *Playboy*, *Glamour*, and *Vogue*. In 2019, she became editor-at-large at *The Daily Beast* and co-hosted "The New Abnormal" podcast. Now a contributing writer at *Vanity Fair*, she hosts iHeartMedia's "Fast Politics" and is a regular political analyst on MSNBC. Jong-Fast lives in Manhattan with her husband, CUNY professor Matthew Adlai Greenfield, and their three children.

Photo: Writer Erica Jong posing for a photo on October 10, 1980 in NYC. (Santi Visalli / Archive Photos / Getty)



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 Molly Jong-Fast's episode with students:

"So I got sober when I was 19, and the sort of maxim was that you were kind of given this gift, right? So, I always felt that I was saved, right? That I was 19 and I was saved and so part of that is that you are dependent on using that for the good. So, I feel and it's not that I'm insane by any stretch of imagination. I am on vacation in two days, but I just feel that I have this opportunity now to highlight people who might not otherwise be highlighted."



▣ **Ask and Discuss:** What do you learn about Molly Jong-Fast's point of view 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 a one-minute quick write reflecting on how the opening connects with the episode's title, "Inheriting Boldness." Then, have students get into pairs and share their thoughts and feelings.



Photos: Author Erica Jong and daughter attend the screening of 'Fierce Creatures' on January 21, 1997 at the Cineplex Odeon Cinema in New York City. (Ron Galella, Ltd./Ron Galella Collection via Getty Images) *top*; Nora Ephron, Erica Jong and Francine Du Plessix Gray seated together at a benefit for Women's Campaign Fund. (Diana Walker/Getty Images) *lower left*; Erica Jong attends the book party for Erica Jong "Fanny" on August 19, 1980 at B. Dalton Book Store in New York City. (Ron Galella, Ltd./Ron Galella Collection via Getty Images) *lower right*





Teaching Tip:

The Thread Up Close

Step One: Watch Molly Jong-Fast's episode "Inheriting Boldness" here.

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

- ▣ What are the important life lessons Molly Jong-Fast learned from her mother and grandfather?
- ▣ Molly Jong-Fast refers to sobriety as a gift in her life. How do you interpret this point of view?
- ▣ What parallels does she make between McCarthyism and contemporary political trends?
- ▣ How do you understand her reference to "the United States of Amnesia"?
- ▣ How does her perspective on privilege and social responsibility influence her personal and professional choices?

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 the process of building a career, share this quote (edited for clarity and brevity) and discuss what insights it offers:

"Remember I had a career when I was in my late teens and early 20s, and then I didn't have a career for about ten years. I was able to come back by writing for the Jewish Daily Forward and that's how I rebuilt my career. I wrote these columns every week, and some were good and some were not as good and I rebuilt my career. So at 44, I feel incredibly grateful that I get to have another whack at the apple. I just feel that I have this opportunity now to highlight people who might not otherwise be highlighted and feel very lucky to get to do it."

Connections: *The Thread Up Close*

- ▣ How does your family's history shape your point of view?
- ▣ What ideas, values, or expectations have been passed down to you?
- ▣ When you face obstacles, what or who do you turn to for support?
- ▣ How do you understand the title after watching this episode?
- ▣ What new or surprising insights about being bold did you learn as a result of Molly Jong-Fast's career and point of view?
- ▣ What new insight did you learn about (yourself, your community, your world) from her stories?



Activity: Inheriting Boldness

Molly Jong-Fast feels passionate about her work as a writer. She recognizes it as a privilege and a responsibility and shares it is what gets her out of bed in the morning.

- Have students reflect on any values or character traits they believe they inherited or learned from their parents or other significant adults in their lives.
- In pairs, have each student choose one to share and discuss its importance.
- If time permits, discuss their small group conversations as a large class.

Extended Learning: Develop a thesis and write a rhetorical argument on the title of the episode, “Inheriting Boldness.”



Additional Resources

- Listen to her podcast: [Fast Politics](#) with Molly Jong-Fast
- Read through her archive as a Special Correspondent for [Vanity Fair](#)