

John and Abigail Adams: A Union of Hearts and Minds

Description of the Interpreter Experience:

John and Abigail Adams have been involved in American Politics for most of their married lives. In this conversation, Vice President John Adams and the first Second-Lady Abigail Adams discuss the important issues of the early years of the United States including: the actions which led to the American rebellion to the British authority, their mutually important but very different activities during the struggle for independence, the “current” difficulties involved in beginning a new nation, the national assumption of states’ debt, the location of the US Capitol, and raising their 4 children who grew up during the Revolution and founding eras and are now beginning careers and families of their own. As always, the Adams’ main concern is for the continued independence of their nation and for their children to hold responsible places in its future.

Before You Go: Background Knowledge Through Scripting Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 5th-8th Grade

Subject Area(s): U.S. History, Civics, World History

Time Length: One to two 50-minute class periods with optional extension time for more drafting and/or other extension activities at the end of this document

OBJECTIVES

- ★ **Objective 1:** Students will be able to analyze primary source letters to understand how individuals experienced and interpreted historical events from their own perspectives.
- ★ **Objective 2:** Students will discuss and synthesize the British policies and significant events that led to the American Revolution.

STANDARDS

- ★ **SS.5.A.5.1:** Identify and explain significant events leading up to the American Revolution.
- ★ **SS.6.W.1.3:** Interpret primary and secondary sources.
- ★ **SS.7.CG.1.5:** Describe how British policies and responses to colonial concerns led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence.
- ★ **SS.8.A.1.7:** View historic events through the eyes of those who were there as shown in their art, writings, music and artifacts.
- ★ **SS.8.A.3.6:** Examine the causes, course and consequences of the American Revolution.

MATERIALS

- ★ **Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: John and Abigail Adams Quote Analysis print out** (for paired or independent activity)
 - Paired Activity: one per pair
 - Independence Practice: one per student
- ★ **Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: John and Abigail Adams Group Quote Analysis work sheet** (for group activity)
 - One per group
- ★ **Text Messages from 1776: Revisited** text-messaging template
- ★ **Optional: background readings on John and Abigail Adams**

BELL RINGER/HOOK (5 MIN)

Put these two fake “text messages” on the board:

- *“Hi honey-- things are pretty tense here in town. Everyone’s talking about protesting and resistance. The people are NOT happy...”*
- *“Yeah I am in meetings debating what to do about it. Some still hope for peace, but others are starting to say it out loud... independence. I probably won’t be home for awhile, but I’ll keep messaging you. Sending love to you and the kids.”*

Using partner discussion or short response, have students brainstorm answers to the following questions:

- Who do you think would be having this conversation?
- What would the relationship between them be?
- What problems do you think they might be facing?

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND (10 MIN)

Transition from bell ringer/ hook: Explain that while they wouldn’t have been texting in the 1700s, John and Abigail Adams sent hundreds of letters to each other about everything from their family life and marriage to politics and philosophy. John and Abigail Adams were two ordinary-but-extraordinary people who both, in their own ways, contributed to the fight for American independence and made a lasting impact on the American system of government.

Students will be using real quotes from letters exchanged between John and Abigail Adams to learn about who they were as people, as well as what was going on in the colonies during the lead up to the Declaration of Independence and American Revolution.

- Optional: If you think your students will need more context you can give them a brief overview of who John and Abigail Adams were.

John Adams	Abigail Adams
Lawyer from Massachusetts	Father was a minister
Served on the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence with Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin	Ran the family farm and business while John was away
Delegate to the Continental Congress	Gave John advice on politics and leadership
For 5 th and 6 th Grade: Was later elected 2 nd president For 7 th and 8 th graders: Was a Federalist	Wrote powerful letters about freedom, women’s rights, and education

ACTIVITY (30 MIN)

Option 1: Group Activity

Materials needed: Group Quote Analysis Worksheet (1 per group)

Divide students into 6 groups. (Note: In a class of 24 there would be about 4 students per group. If more quotes are needed, please see the “Additional Resources” below for links to the archived letters.)

Teacher will pass out one “Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: John and Abigail Adams Group Quote Analysis work sheet” to each group.

Give students about 10-15 minutes to analyze their quote and record their analyses. For each quote, groups will have the following prompts:

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?
2. What emotions does the author demonstrate?
3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

During the analysis, each student has a job:

- **Reader** – reads the quote aloud, will share findings with the class
- **Translator** – puts the quote into modern language
- **Detective** – identifies emotions, key words, and themes
- **Recorder**– writes down the group’s answers for the reader to share with the class

After groups have had 10-15 minutes to analyze the quote and record their findings, have them present to the rest of the class.

Option 2: Paired Version

Materials needed: Quote Analysis (1 per pair)

Teacher will pass out the quote analysis print out to each pair of students. For each quote, pairs will have the following prompts:

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?
2. What emotions does the author demonstrate?
3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

Students will alternate being the interpreter and the writer for each quote analysis. For example: Student A will be the interpreter for Quote A, analyzing the quote and answering the prompts. Student B will write down Student A’s answers, adding input or making suggestions, and asking for clarification as needed. For Quote B, the students will switch roles, with Student B now doing the analyzing and Student A recording the information. This will continue until all 4 quotes have been analyzed.

Option 3: Independent Practice

Materials needed: Quote Analysis (1 per student)

Teacher will pass out the quote analysis print out to each student. For each quote, students will have the following prompts:

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?
2. What emotions does the author demonstrate?
3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

REFLECTION/DOOR PASS (10 MIN)

- ★ **Text Messages from 1776: Revisited:** Using **one** of the prompts below, students will create a text conversation between John and Abigail Adams.
 - Their mutually important but very different activities during the lead up to Independence
 - Their concerns for the Nation as well as their family during the struggle for Independence.
 - John and Abigail Adams discussing what kind of country they want their children to grow up in.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- ★ **Rewriting History:** Have the students explore the Adams Family Papers archives. Instruct students to select a letter or letters from the collection and write it like a modern email. Encourage students to be creative- use emojis, modern slang, etc.
- ★ **Compare and Contrast Across Time:** Have students identify a modern figure or activist whose words echo John or Abigail’s ideals, values, or concerns. Then, in a short essay, have them make connections between the modern figure and the American revolutionaries.
 - Biography: Abigail Adams: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/adams-abigail/>
 - Biography: John Adams: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/adams-biography/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ★ **The Adams Family Papers from the Massachusetts Historical Society:** This electronic archive presents images of manuscripts and digital transcriptions from the Adams Family Papers, one of the most important collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society. <https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/index>
- ★ **Massachusetts Historical Society Lesson Plans:** lesson plans on a variety of topics related to John and Abigail Adams:
 - **“The Adams Family of Massachusetts: A Legacy of Justice in Action.” (Middle School)**
<https://www.masshist.org/education/adams-family-massachusetts-legacy-justice-action>
 - **“Abigail’s War: The American Revolution through the Eyes of Abigail Adams” (Elementary School)**
<https://www.masshist.org/education/abigails-war-american-revolution-through-eyes-abigail-adams>
- ★ **iCivics for more Background Knowledge:** There are multiple games and activities that can be fun for students to look at involving the causes of as well as the important figures of the nation’s founding:
<https://ed.icivics.org/teach>
 - “Investigation Declaration” allows students to connect enlightenment ideas with the declaration. This is a great puzzle solving game and can be fun to do as teams of students to see who can finish the game quickest.
 - “Hey King, Get Off Our Backs” walks the students through the major complaints that would lead to the declaration of independence.
 - “The Founding Mothers” includes a one-page reading about the women who played a role in our nation’s founding and includes some document-based, primary source analysis to complement the reading.

Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: John and Abigail Adams Letter Analysis

Directions: Read the quotes from the letters between John and Abigail Adams. Then, answer the questions to analyze the context and message of the quotes.

“But a Constitution of Government once changed from Freedom, can never be restored. Liberty once lost is lost forever. When the People once surrender their share in the Legislature, and their Right of defending the Limitations upon the Government...they can never regain it.”

-Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 7 July 1775

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?
2. What emotions does the author demonstrate?
3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

“Our house has been, upon this occasion, the scene of confusion and distress... the constant roar of the cannon, and the frequent alarms... have kept us in a continual state of anxiety and expectation.”

-Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 10 March 1776

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?
2. What emotions does the author demonstrate?
3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

“I must study Politicks and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematicks and Philosophy.”

- Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, post 12 May 1780

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?
2. What emotions does the author demonstrate?
3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

“I long to hear that you have declared an independency -- and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors.”

-Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March - 5 April 1776

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?
2. What emotions does the author demonstrate?
3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: Group Quote Analysis Worksheet

Step 1: Assign your Roles:

- **Reader** (reads the quote aloud, will share findings with the class): _____
- **Detective** (identifies emotions, key words, and themes): _____
- **Translator** (puts the quote into modern language): _____
- **Recorder** (writes down the group's answers for the reader to share with the class): _____

Step 2: Read Your Quote

“Our house has been, upon this occasion, the scene of confusion and distress... the constant roar of the cannon, and the frequent alarms... have kept us in a continual state of anxiety and expectation.”

- Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 10 March 1776

Step 3: Analyze the Quote

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?

2. What emotions does the author demonstrate? (circle one or more)

Fear Anger Hope Determination Uncertainty

Explain your answer:

3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

Step 4: Prepare to Share

Each reader will share out the group's answers to the above questions.

Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: Group Quote Analysis Worksheet

Step 1: Assign your Roles:

- **Reader** (reads the quote aloud, will share findings with the class): _____
- **Detective** (identifies emotions, key words, and themes): _____
- **Translator** (puts the quote into modern language): _____
- **Recorder** (writes down the group's answers for the reader to share with the class): _____

Step 2: Read Your Quote

“But a Constitution of Government once changed from Freedom, can never be restored. Liberty once lost is lost forever. When the People once surrender their share in the Legislature, and their Right of defending the Limitations upon the Government...they can never regain it.”

- Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 7 July 1775

Step 3: Analyze the Quote

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?

2. What emotions does the author demonstrate? (circle one or more)

Fear Anger Hope Determination Uncertainty

Explain your answer:

3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

Step 4: Prepare to Share

Each reader will share out the group's answers to the above questions.

Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: Group Quote Analysis Worksheet

Step 1: Assign your Roles:

- **Reader** (reads the quote aloud, will share findings with the class): _____
- **Detective** (identifies emotions, key words, and themes): _____
- **Translator** (puts the quote into modern language): _____
- **Recorder** (writes down the group's answers for the reader to share with the class): _____

Step 2: Read Your Quote

“Congress has appointed...a Committee to collect an Account of the Hostilities committed by the [British] Troops and Ships.... A Tale of Woe it will be! Such a scene of Distress, and Destruction...”

- Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 19 October 1775

Step 3: Analyze the Quote

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?

2. What emotions does the author demonstrate? (circle one or more)

Fear Anger Hope Determination Uncertainty

Explain your answer:

3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

Step 4: Prepare to Share

Each reader will share out the group's answers to the above questions.

Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: Group Quote Analysis Worksheet

Step 1: Assign your Roles:

- **Reader** (reads the quote aloud, will share findings with the class): _____
- **Detective** (identifies emotions, key words, and themes): _____
- **Translator** (puts the quote into modern language): _____
- **Recorder** (writes down the group's answers for the reader to share with the class): _____

Step 2: Read Your Quote

“The great anxiety I feel for my Country, for you and for our family renders the day tedious, and the night unpleasant...Did ever any Kingdom or State regain their Liberty, when once it was invaded without Blood shed? I cannot think of it without horror.”

- Letter from Abigail Adam to John Adams, 19 August 1774

Step 3: Analyze the Quote

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?

2. What emotions does the author demonstrate? (circle one or more)

Fear Anger Hope Determination Uncertainty

Explain your answer:

3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

Step 4: Prepare to Share

Each reader will share out the group's answers to the above questions.

Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: Group Quote Analysis Worksheet

Step 1: Assign your Roles:

- **Reader** (reads the quote aloud, will share findings with the class): _____
- **Detective** (identifies emotions, key words, and themes): _____
- **Translator** (puts the quote into modern language): _____
- **Recorder** (writes down the group's answers for the reader to share with the class): _____

Step 2: Read Your Quote

"I must study Politicks and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematicks and Philosophy."

- Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 12 May 1780

Step 3: Analyze the Quote

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?

2. What emotions does the author demonstrate? (circle one or more)

Fear Anger Hope Determination Uncertainty

Explain your answer:

3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

Step 4: Prepare to Share

Each reader will share out the group's answers to the above questions.

Voices of a Revolutionary Marriage: Group Quote Analysis Worksheet

Step 1: Assign your Roles:

- **Reader** (reads the quote aloud, will share findings with the class): _____
- **Detective** (identifies emotions, key words, and themes): _____
- **Translator** (puts the quote into modern language): _____
- **Recorder** (writes down the group's answers for the reader to share with the class): _____

Step 2: Read Your Quote

“I long to hear that you have declared an independency -- and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors.”

- Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March – 5 April 1776

Step 3: Analyze the Quote

1. Analyze the quote. What is being discussed?

2. What emotions does the author demonstrate? (circle one or more)

Fear Anger Hope Determination Uncertainty

Explain your answer:

3. Rewrite the quote as a modern text message.

Step 4: Prepare to Share

Each reader will share out the group's answers to the above questions.

Text Messages from 1776: Revisited

Using **one** of the prompts, students create a text conversation between John and Abigail Adams:

- Their mutually important but very different activities during the lead up to Independence
- Their concerns for the Nation as well as their family during the struggle for Independence.
- John and Abigail Adams discussing what kind of country they want their children to grow up in.

The worksheet is a large light blue rectangle containing three rows of speech bubbles. Each row has a white speech bubble on the left and a green speech bubble on the right. The white bubbles are empty and have a thin green outline. The green bubbles are solid green and also have a thin green outline. The bubbles are arranged in a vertical column, with the white bubbles on the left and the green bubbles on the right, creating a visual representation of a text conversation.