

DISCOVER AMERICA

Course 26 - Teacher Guide



Distance and Devotion: The Letters of John and Abigail Adams

Table of
Contents

Themes & Values

Learning Objectives

Key Terms

Introduction

Lesson

Time Traveling Letter Writers

Exploring Types of Communication

Resources

Notes

First Grade Teacher Guide



Credit: PBS

Key Themes

- Adaptability and Creativity in Communication
- Connection Across Time and Space
- Leadership and Sacrifice
- Resilience

Core Values

- Community
- Faith
- Life

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

- Summarize the historical events surrounding John and Abigail Adams' lives, including the tensions leading up to the American Revolution and the roles they played in shaping American history.
- Identify how Abigail Adams supported and encouraged John Adams in his endeavors, such as representing Massachusetts in the First Continental Congress and the Second Continental Congress.
- Explain the significance of communication in maintaining relationships, as demonstrated by the heartfelt letters exchanged between John and Abigail Adams during times of separation and challenges in their lives.
- Compare and contrast the early lives of John and Abigail Adams by examining the similarities and differences between their families.



John and Abigail Adams - First Grade

Key Terms

- 01 **Declaration of Independence:** the document that proclaimed that the 13 original colonies were “free and independent states.”
- 02 **diplomatic:** able to control a difficult situation without upsetting anyone.
- 03 **First Continental Congress:** a meeting of delegates from each of the thirteen colonies.
- 04 **First Lady:** a title given to the wife of the President of the United States.
- 05 **public:** having to do with all members of a community.
- 06 **rebellion:** an armed fight against one’s government.
- 07 **Second Continental Congress:** a gathering of delegates who decided to create an organized army of colonists to fight in the war.
- 08 **Stamp Act:** Britain’s first direct tax on the colonies which taxed newspapers, almanacs, pamphlets, legal documents, and playing cards.

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade

Introduction

TELL Students

I have something very special to share with you today. Have you ever received a letter from a friend or family member? Well, imagine if I told you about a time when people didn't have phones or computers to talk to each other. Instead, they wrote letters.

ASK Students

Have you ever received a letter from someone?

TELL Students

Today, we are going to learn about two important people named John and Abigail Adams who wrote a lot of letters to each other.



Credit: Smithsonian Magazine

They were an extraordinary couple who lived a long time ago when America was just beginning. Even though they could not talk to each other like we do now, they wrote letters all the time. In their letters, John and Abigail talked about everything! They shared stories about their day, their dreams for the future, and even their feelings. And you know what? Many of these letters still exist today, like little time capsules that let us peek into their lives.

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade

Introduction

ASK Students

What do you know about John and Abigail Adams?

TELL Students

Today, each of you are going to imagine you are John or Abigail. You will write a letter to a friend, just like they did. You can tell your friend or family member about your day, share a story, or just let them know how much you appreciate them. Are you ready to start learning about writing letters? Let's see what wonderful letters you can create!

ASK Students

Who will you write your letter to? Is it faster to call, text a friend, or write a letter?

TELL Students

That is right! Texting is much faster! But, John and Abigail Adams did not have that option. John was the second President of the United States, and Abigail was his wife and the First Lady. The **First Lady** is a title given to the wife of the President of the United States. Even though they lived a long time ago, they are still famous today for something very special—writing letters! John had a very important job, so he had to travel a lot. But that didn't stop him and Abigail from staying close. They wrote letters to each other all the time, sharing stories, secrets, and a lot of love. And guess what? Many of these old letters are still around today, like treasures from the past!



John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Introduction

ASK Students

What do John and Abigail Adams' letters tell us about their life?

TELL Students

Even though John and Abigail lived in a different time, their letters help us understand how much they cared for each other and how important they were in history. Let's watch another episode of Star Spangled Adventures to learn more about John and Abigail Adams.



WATCH

Star Spangled Adventures Cartoon Ep. 26: [John and Abigail Adams](#)



John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Lesson

TELL Students

On October 30, 1735, John Adams was born in Braintree, Massachusetts, on his family's farm. His father, John Sr., worked as a farmer and shoemaker, and also served as a deacon in the local Congregational church. John's mother, Susanna, came from a well-to-do family and was a homemaker. As a child, John loved the outdoors and often skipped class to fish and hunt. Despite this, he was an exceptional student and enrolled at Harvard College at the age of fifteen.



ASK Students

What did John Adams enjoy as a child?

TELL Students

Meanwhile, in nearby Weymouth, Massachusetts, Abigail Smith was born on November 22, 1744. The Smith family was similar to the Adams family in many ways. Abigail's father, William, was a church minister and a devout Congregationalist. Her mother, Elizabeth, came from the Quincy family, a well-known political family in Massachusetts. Unlike John, Abigail did not have the opportunity to pursue a formal education, even though she was described as "intelligent, well read, and outspoken." At that time, girls were often seen as intellectually inferior to boys, and educational opportunities were mostly available to boys.

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Lesson

ASK Students

How are John and Abigail's families similar and different?

TELL Students

After finishing his studies at Harvard, John started working as a lawyer. In 1758, he moved to Boston and opened a one-man law office.

Despite his Ivy League education and reputation for intelligence, John only managed to find one client in his first year. However, he gradually built his small office into a successful practice. With a steady income, John began to search for a wife to start a family with and began seeing Abigail Smith from Weymouth.



ASK Students

How did John Adams exhibit perseverance?

TELL Students

In 1764, John and Abigail were married, starting a beautiful journey together. Over the next eight years, they welcomed five children into their family. Meanwhile, across the colonies, tensions were rising against Great Britain. When the Stamp Act was passed in 1765, causing colonists to protest against the unfair taxes, John initially hesitated to join the rebellion. A **rebellion** is an armed fight against one's government. John worried about his legal career in Boston. The **Stamp Act** was Britain's first direct tax on the colonies which taxed newspapers, almanacs, pamphlets, legal documents, and playing cards. However, as the call for freedom grew louder, John realized he couldn't stay silent. He began writing powerful essays in newspapers, fighting for justice against British mistreatment.



John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Lesson

ASK Students

Why was John Adams initially hesitant to join the rebellion?

TELL Students

Even with John busy in Boston and the rest of the family living on their rural Massachusetts farm, their love stayed strong. Through heartfelt letters, they shared their affection and longing for each other. In a September 1764 letter, John expressed his deep love for Abigail, eagerly awaiting her return. Abigail reciprocated with equal warmth, reassuring John of their well-being and their shared love for their family. These letters, filled with love and devotion, remain a testament to their enduring bond.

ASK Students

How did John and Abigail Adams keep their love strong?

TELL Students

In 1774, John got an important opportunity to represent Massachusetts in the First Continental Congress. The **First Continental Congress** was the first government of the United States. This meant he had to leave his family and go to Philadelphia. While he was away, Abigail, his wife, encouraged him to do his duty for their country.



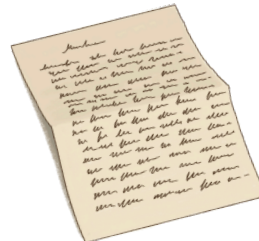
Credit: Britannica

She wrote to him, "You cannot be, ... nor do I wish to see you an inactive Spectator." Abigail was telling John, "You can't just sit and watch, and I don't want you to. You have to help!"

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Lesson

ASK Students

What did Abigail inspire John to do in her letter?



TELL Students

After the First Continental Congress didn't bring the changes the colonists hoped for, they gathered again for the Second Continental Congress in May 1775. **The Second Continental Congress** was a gathering of delegates who decided to create an organized army of colonists to fight in the war. Once more, John represented Massachusetts in Philadelphia. In a letter to his wife, Abigail, he expressed how much he relied on her advice. Abigail kept John updated on public feelings. **Public** means having to do with all members of a community. Abigail told him that the colonies were ready for a more stable government from Congress.



Second Continental Congress Adopts Declaration of Independence by John Trumbull (U.S. Capitol)

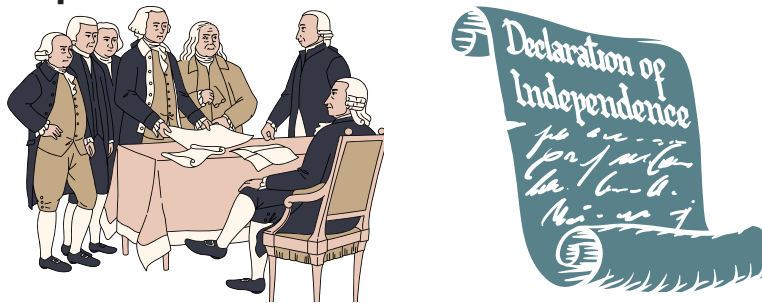
ASK Students

What information did Abigail provide to John in their letters?

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Lesson

TELL Students

That is right! Abigail expressed how the public felt in her letters to John. This was very helpful as he represented the colonists in the Second Continental Congress. John also represented the colonists in a special group called the Committee of Five, which included Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams. This group was chosen by Congress to write the **Declaration of Independence**.



This document proclaimed that the 13 original colonies were “free and independent states.” The day before Congress officially approved the document on July 4th, John eagerly shared his belief with Abigail that this day would be celebrated for generations to come. He imagined grand celebrations across the continent, filled with solemn acts of devotion, parades, games, bells, bonfires, and illuminations.



ASK Students

What holiday did John imagine would be celebrated for years to come? Was he correct?

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Lesson

TELL Students

With the Declaration of Independence, the colonies became independent from Great Britain. During the Revolutionary War, John took on important diplomatic roles in Paris and Amsterdam. Someone who is **diplomatic** is able to control a difficult situation without upsetting anyone. He did not see Abigail again until 1784, which she referred to as her "widowhood." Upon returning home in 1788 from his diplomatic missions, John didn't get much family time. In 1789, he became the first Vice President of the United States.

ASK Students

What kept John away from Abigail during this time?

TELL Students

In 1797, John became the second President of the United States after George Washington's retirement. Although Abigail chose to stay in Massachusetts, John realized he needed her by his side. He pleaded with her to join him in the nation's capital, and she agreed.



ASK Students

Why did John need Abigail?

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Lesson

TELL Students

During John's presidency, Abigail became known as the "chief domestic minister without portfolio," advising him on many issues. However, John lost his bid for re-election in 1800 to Thomas Jefferson. After leaving the White House, they returned to their home in Massachusetts, which was later named "Quincy" after Abigail's grandfather.

ASK Students

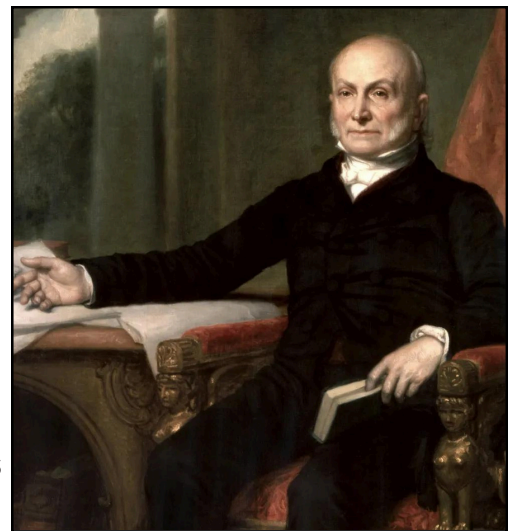
Why do you think John and Abigail returned to Massachusetts?

TELL Students

On October 28, 1818, Abigail passed away at their Quincy home, speaking her final words to John. John himself died on July 4, 1826, exactly one year after his son, John Quincy, became president.

ASK Students

Do you think John and Abigail Adams inspired John Quincy Adams to work hard and serve his country as President of the United States?



Credit: The White House

TELL Students

From John and Abigail's story, we learn that even when separated because of responsibilities, there are many ways to show our loved ones we care. Whether through letters or calls, we can bridge the distance and keep our hearts close.

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Lesson

WATCH

Learn More With Liberty: Behind Closed Doors: The Adams Letters

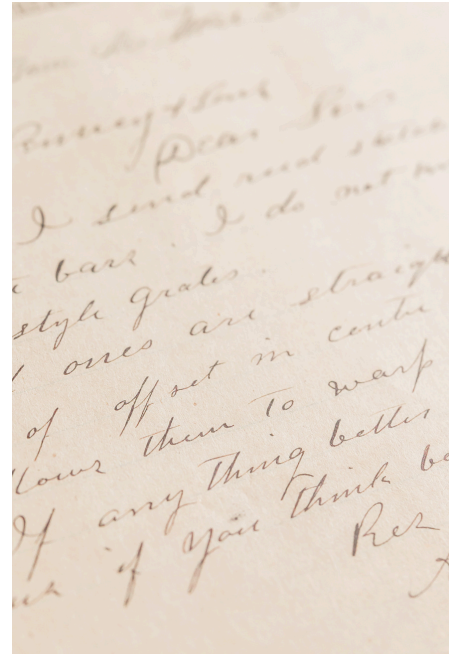


John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Time Traveling Letter Writer

Objective: To engage first graders in learning about historical communication through the letters exchanged between John and Abigail Adams.

Materials Needed:

- Large poster board or whiteboard
- Markers
- Printed copies of simplified excerpts from John and Abigail Adams' letters
- Blank paper
- Crayons or markers
- Envelopes
- Stickers (optional)
- Glue sticks



Introduction

- Gather the students and introduce the concept of letters as a way people used to communicate before phones and computers.
- Review the special letters written by John and Abigail Adams, who lived a long time ago.
- Engage the students in a discussion, asking questions like:
 - Why do you think John and Abigail wrote letters to each other?
 - How do you think they felt when they were apart?
 - Have you ever written a letter to someone you care about?

Letter Writing

- Distribute printed copies of simplified excerpts from John and Abigail Adams' letters to each student.
- Provide each student with a piece of blank paper, crayons or markers, and encourage them to write a letter to a friend or family member.
- Assist the students in writing their letters, focusing on expressing care and love for the recipient.

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Time Traveling Letter Writer

Envelope Decoration

- Give each student an envelope and encourage them to decorate it with drawings, stickers, or other embellishments.
- Provide glue sticks if needed to affix decorations to the envelopes.



Sharing Time

- Allow students to share their letters and envelopes with the class, explaining who they wrote to and why.
- Display the letters on a large poster board or whiteboard for everyone to see.

Time Traveling Letters

- Discuss with the students how the letters they wrote are like time-traveling messages to the future, just like John and Abigail's letters are messages from the past.

Reflection

- Lead a brief reflection on the activity, asking questions like:
 - How did it feel to write a letter to someone you care about?
 - What did you learn about communication from this activity?
 - How do you think John and Abigail felt when they received letters from each other?

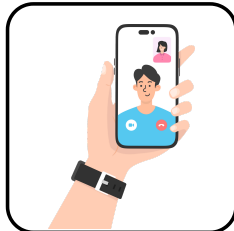
Closure

- Thank the students for participating and emphasize the importance of expressing care and love to others, whether through letters or other forms of communication.

Exploring Types of Communication

Name: _____ Date: _____

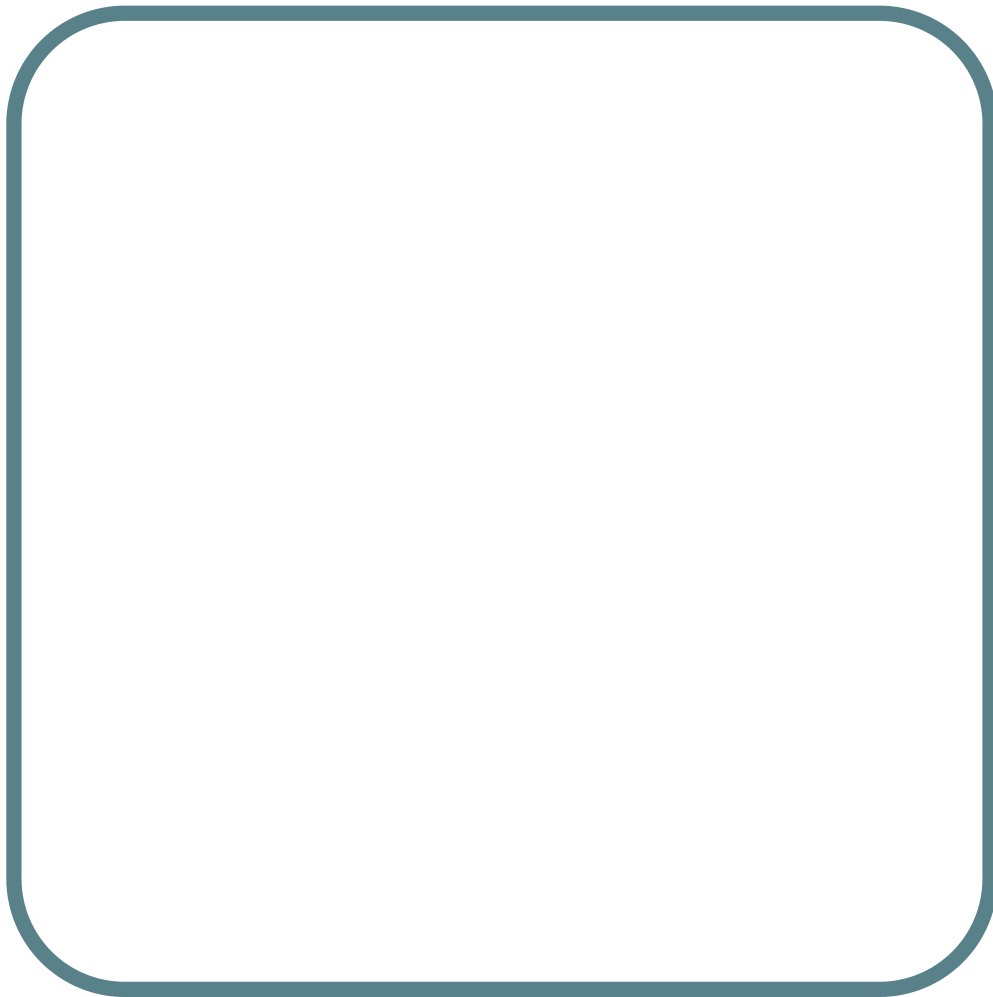
Instructions: Look at each picture and draw a line to match it with the correct type of communication. Then, write the name of each type of communication in the space provided.



Exploring Types of Communication

Name: _____ Date: _____

Bonus Question: Think of one more way people can communicate. Draw a picture of it in the space below and write its name.

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark teal border, intended for writing the name of the communication method.

Exploring Types of Communication

Answer Key



Talking on the Phone



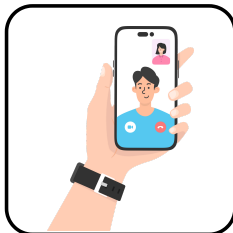
Writing a Letter



Talking Face to Face



Sending an Email



Video Calling



Using a Megaphone

John and Abigail Adams - First Grade Resources

1. <https://millercenter.org/president/adams/life-before-the-presidency>
2. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/adams-abigail/>
3. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0038>
4. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0049>
5. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0116>
6. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0110>
7. <https://millercenter.org/president/adams/family-life>
8. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0138>
9. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0259>
10. <https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760331aa>
11. <https://ellistheelephant.com/remember-the-ladies/>
12. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-12-02-0042>
13. <https://newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/john-quincy-adams-grieves-mother-abigail-adams/>

