

# DISCOVER AMERICA

## Course 26 - Teacher Guide



### Distance and Devotion: The Letters of John and Abigail Adams

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# Fourth Grade **Teacher Guide**



Credit: New England Historical Society

## **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, their roles during the Revolutionary War, and their contributions to shaping American history beyond the Revolutionary War, up until their deaths.
- 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.
- Analyze the motivations behind John Adams' representation of the British as legal counsel.





# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade

## Key Terms

- 01 **Boston Massacre:** a confrontation in Boston between British troops and colonists, where British soldiers fired into a threatening crowd, resulting in the death of five individuals.
- 02 **Declaration of Independence:** the document that proclaimed that the 13 original colonies were “free and independent states.”
- 03 **diplomatic:** able to control a difficult situation without upsetting anyone.
- 04 **First Continental Congress:** a meeting of delegates from each of the thirteen colonies.
- 05 **First Lady:** a title given to the wife of the President of the United States.
- 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 - Fourth Grade

# Introduction

## TELL Students

Imagine you're holding a special kind of treasure map. But instead of leading to buried gold, it guides you to a treasure trove of words and feelings exchanged between two remarkable people: John and Abigail Adams.



Credit: Smithsonian Magazine

In a time before emails and text messages, John and Abigail stayed connected through something extraordinary — letters! These weren't just any letters. They were like windows into their hearts, carrying messages of love, wisdom, and encouragement across the miles that separated them. As you open one of these letters, you're transported back in time, standing beside John as he writes about his adventures and challenges, from his bustling life in Boston to his important work in shaping a new nation. Then, you journey to Abigail's side, reading her thoughtful words filled with warmth and insight, supporting John through every trial and triumph. Through these magical letters, you'll discover the bond between John and Abigail, a bond that transcended time and distance.

## ASK Students

Have you ever received a letter from someone?

## TELL Students

John and Abigail Adams 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  
(continued)

# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade

# Introduction

## TELL Students (Continued)

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.



## ASK Students

What do you know about John and Abigail Adams?

## TELL Students

In the complex story of John and Abigail Adams, their bond served as a crucial support system. John's various roles in serving his country frequently required him to be far from home. Unlike today's instant communication, where a text or phone call is just a tap away, back then, staying connected meant relying on letters and patience.

## ASK Students

What do you think John Adams did to serve his country? What do you think Abigail Adams did to serve her country?

## TELL Students

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 (continued)

# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade

# Introduction

## TELL Students (Continued)

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!

## ASK Students

What do John and Abigail Adams' letters tell us about their lives and their service to our country?

## 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 the lives and sacrifices of John and Abigail Adams.

## WATCH

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



# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth 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.

## ASK Students

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



# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade Lesson

## 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 - Fourth Grade Lesson

## ASK Students

Why was John Adams initially hesitant to join the rebellion?

## TELL Students

Please read the following passage to learn more about John and Abigail Adams. [Teachers: Please print and disseminate the student text print-out included in the lesson guide.]

*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, John and Abigail 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 the late 1760s, John became well-known as a top lawyer in Boston. He believed strongly in fairness and justice. Even though he believed in the revolutionary ideas of the time, he put them aside to defend British soldiers accused in the 1770 Boston Massacre. In 1770, before the Revolutionary War, the **Boston Massacre** marked a confrontation between British troops and colonists in Boston, where British soldiers fired into a threatening crowd, resulting in the death of five individuals.



National Museum of American History

# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade Lesson

## TELL Students (Continued)

John was really good at persuading people, and he convinced a jury in Boston to declare the soldiers innocent during a time when tensions were high between the colonies and Britain. But even though he defended the soldiers, John still supported the colonists' fight for freedom.

## ASK Students

Why did John Adams defend the British soldiers?

## 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 encouraged him to fulfill duty for their country. 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!"



Credit: Britannica

## ASK Students

What did Abigail inspire John to do in her letter?

# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade Lesson

## TELL Students

During that time, women were restricted from directly owning land. So, Abigail devised a clever workaround by acquiring farmland for their family in both Massachusetts and Vermont under John's name. She wanted to purchase land to ensure financial stability and security for their family in case of unforeseen circumstances or hardships. Even though they were physically separated, John took the time to express his gratitude to Abigail from Philadelphia, where he was attending to his duties. Despite the challenges and her longing for John's presence, Abigail remained committed to her role, referring to her actions as a demonstration of her deep patriotism and dedication to their shared future.

## ASK Students

What does patriotic sacrifice mean?

## 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, he expressed how much he relied on her advice. Abigail kept John updated on public feelings. She told him that the colonies were ready for a more stable government.



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



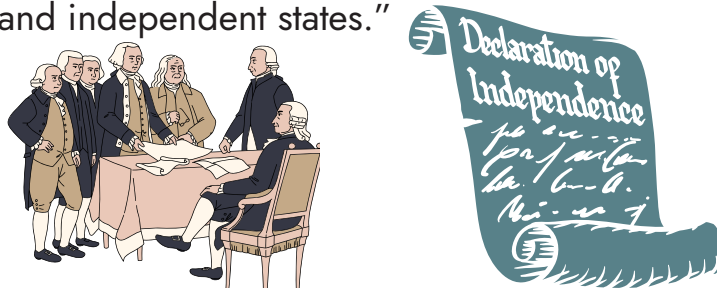
# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade Lesson

## ASK Students

What information did Abigail provide to John in their letters?

## 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 - Fourth Grade

# Lesson

## TELL Students

John Adams also played vital roles in diplomatic missions to Paris and Amsterdam during the Revolutionary War. Being **diplomatic** means someone is able to control a difficult situation without upsetting anyone. However, this meant he was away from home for long periods. Abigail referred to this time as her "widowhood," signifying the loneliness and sense of loss she experienced while John was abroad. When John finally returned home in 1784 after his diplomatic missions, their reunion was likely joyous but also marked by the challenges of readjustment. Despite his return, John's duties as Vice President, which began in 1789, kept him busy, limiting the time he could spend with his family. This period would have been difficult for Abigail, as she navigated the responsibilities of maintaining their household and supporting John's endeavors while longing for more time together as a family.

## ASK Students

What kept John away from Abigail during this time?

## TELL Students

Please read the following passage to learn more about John and Abigail Adams and their service to our country. [Teachers: Please print and disseminate the student text print-out included in the lesson guide.]

*In 1797, John Adams became the second President of the United States after George Washington's retirement. Despite Abigail's initial decision to stay in Massachusetts, John soon realized how much he needed her by his side. He earnestly asked her to join him in the nation's capital, where his duties as President awaited. Understanding the importance of their partnership, Abigail agreed to accompany John to the bustling hub of the young nation's government. (continued)*

# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade

# Lesson

## TELL Students (continued)

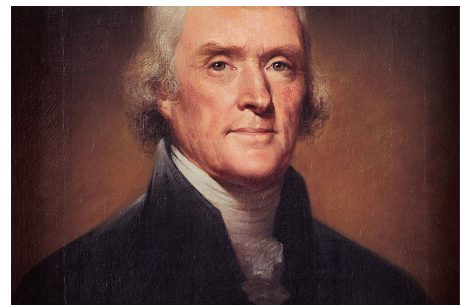
*Abigail's decision to join John in the nation's capital was not merely an act of companionship. It was also a testament to her commitment to serving her country. As the First Lady, Abigail took on numerous responsibilities, supporting John in his presidential duties and serving as a trusted advisor. Her insights and wisdom were invaluable to John's decision-making process, and her dedication to the well-being of the nation mirrored his own. Together, John and Abigail Adams formed a formidable team, united in their service to their country and their shared vision for a better future.*

## ASK Students

How did John serve his country? How did Abigail serve her country? How can you serve your country?

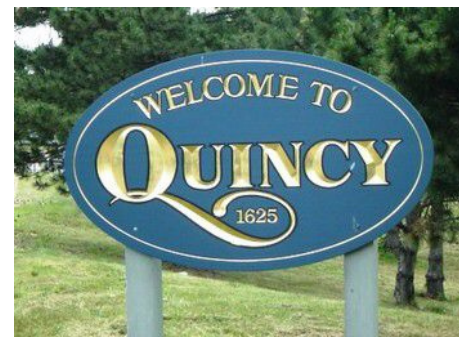
## TELL Students

During John's presidency, Abigail Adams took on an important role as the "chief domestic minister without portfolio." This meant that she played a significant part in advising him on various matters related to running the country, even though she did not hold an official government position. Abigail's keen intellect and sound judgment made her a trusted confidante to John, and he often sought her counsel on matters both big and small. Despite their efforts, John ultimately lost his bid for re-election in 1800 to Thomas Jefferson.



National Geographic Kids

After leaving the White House, John and Abigail returned to their beloved home in Massachusetts. Interestingly, their hometown was later renamed "Quincy" in honor of Abigail's grandfather, making it a fitting tribute to her family's legacy.



# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade

# Lesson

## ASK Students

Why do you think John and Abigail returned to Massachusetts?

## TELL Students

Back in Massachusetts, John and Abigail settled into a quieter life away from the political spotlight. However, their dedication to public service did not wane. They continued to be active in their community, offering their wisdom and support whenever needed. Even in their retirement years, John and Abigail remained committed to making a positive impact on the world around them, leaving behind a lasting legacy of service and leadership. 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.



Credit: The White House

## 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?

## TELL Students

From the remarkable journey of John and Abigail Adams, we discover a valuable lesson on staying connected despite being apart due to responsibilities. Their story highlights the importance of letters in maintaining relationships, even when faced with distance and obligations. In a time without modern technology, John and Abigail relied on handwritten letters to share their love, thoughts, and support. While today's world may offer faster ways to communicate, the essence of their letters remains timeless. Whether through handwritten notes (continued)

# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade Lesson

## TELL Students (Continued)

or digital messages, reaching out to loved ones shows a commitment to staying close, no matter the miles between. Thus, the tale of John and Abigail Adams teaches us that the power of communication and love can endure, transcending any distance or obstacle.



# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade

# Student Text

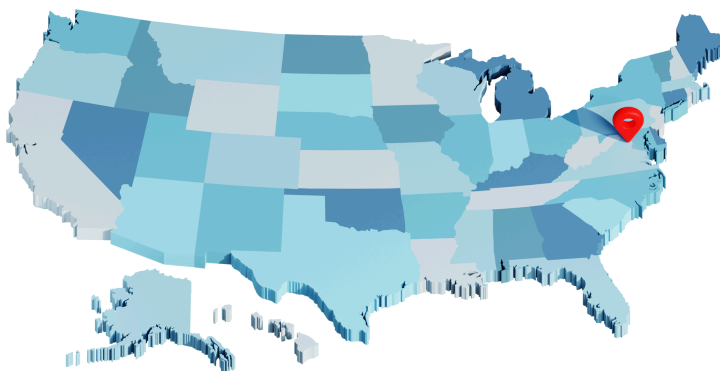
## Passage 1

*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, John and Abigail 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.*



## Passage 2

*In 1797, John Adams became the second President of the United States after George Washington's retirement. Despite Abigail's initial decision to stay in Massachusetts, John soon realized how much he needed her by his side. He earnestly asked her to join him in the nation's capital, where his duties as President awaited. Understanding the importance of their partnership, Abigail agreed to accompany John to the bustling hub of the young nation's government. Abigail's decision to join John in the nation's capital was not merely an act of companionship. It was also a testament to her commitment to serving her country. As the First Lady, Abigail took on numerous responsibilities, supporting John in his presidential duties and serving as a trusted advisor. Her insights and wisdom were invaluable to John's decision-making process, and her dedication to the well-being of the nation mirrored his own. Together, John and Abigail Adams formed a formidable team, united in their service to their country and their shared vision for a better future.*





# Serving Our Country: Comparing John and Abigail Adams

**Objective:** To analyze and compare the ways in which John and Abigail Adams served their country during their lifetimes.

## **Materials Needed:**

- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Markers
- Printed biographies of John and Abigail Adams (optional)
- Worksheet with guided questions (included below)

## **Instructions**

1. Begin by reviewing John and Abigail Adams. Provide a brief overview of their lives and their roles in American history.
2. Divide the class into small groups and provide each group with a printed copy of their student text or direct them to online resources.
3. Distribute the worksheet with guided questions (see below) to each group.
4. Instruct students to work together to read the student text and answer the questions on the worksheet.
5. Encourage students to discuss and compare the ways in which John and Abigail served their country. They should identify similarities and differences in their roles, contributions, and challenges faced.
6. After completing the worksheet, reconvene as a class and have each group share their findings. Facilitate a class discussion to explore the various ways in which John and Abigail served their country.
7. Conclude the activity by summarizing the key points discussed and emphasizing the importance of serving one's country in different capacities.

## **Extension Activity**

- Have students create a Venn diagram to visually compare and contrast the roles and contributions of John and Abigail Adams in serving their country. They can use the information gathered from the worksheet to fill in the diagram and present their findings to the class.

# Serving Our Country: Comparing John and Abigail Adams Worksheet

1. What were John Adams' main roles and contributions to the United States?

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2. What were Abigail Adams' main roles and contributions to the United States?

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3. How did John and Abigail's roles differ in terms of their official titles?

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4. How did John and Abigail both contribute to the founding of the United States?

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5. What challenges did John and Abigail face in their respective roles?

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6. How did John and Abigail support each other in their efforts to serve their country?

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7. What similarities do you notice between John and Abigail's service to their country?

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8. What differences do you notice between John and Abigail's service to their country?

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9. In your opinion, whose contributions do you think were more significant, John's or Abigail's? Why?

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10. How can we apply the lessons learned from John and Abigail's service to our own lives?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Fill in the Blank Activity

**Instructions:** Please carefully read each question. Use your student text to locate and fill in the correct answer.



1. John Adams was the \_\_\_\_\_ President of the United States.
2. Abigail Adams was the wife of John Adams and the \_\_\_\_\_ Lady.
3. John and Abigail Adams stayed connected through \_\_\_\_\_.
4. John Adams was born on October 30, \_\_\_\_\_, in Braintree, Massachusetts.
5. John's father, John Sr., worked as a \_\_\_\_\_ and shoemaker.
6. Abigail Smith was born on November 22, \_\_\_\_\_, in Weymouth, Massachusetts.
7. Abigail's father, William, was a church \_\_\_\_\_.
8. John Adams started working as a \_\_\_\_\_ after finishing his studies at Harvard.
9. John and Abigail were married in \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The Stamp Act was passed in \_\_\_\_\_, causing colonists to protest against unfair taxes.
11. John Adams initially hesitated to join the rebellion because he worried about his \_\_\_\_\_ career.
12. John and Abigail often communicated through \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Abigail showed her patriotism by purchasing farmland under \_\_\_\_\_'s name.
14. John represented Massachusetts in the \_\_\_\_\_ Continental Congress.
15. John eagerly anticipated the celebration of \_\_\_\_\_ as a holiday for generations to come.



## John and Abigail Adams - Fourth Grade

# Fill in the Blank Answer Key

1. second
2. First
3. letters
4. 1735
5. farmer
6. 1744
7. minister
8. lawyer
9. 1764
10. 1765
11. legal
12. letters
13. John's
14. First or Second
15. Independence

# John and Abigail Adams - Fourth 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/>

# Notes



A series of 20 horizontal lines for writing, spaced evenly down the page. Each line is a simple black horizontal line, with consistent spacing between them.