

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Lesson Title - Letters from Abigail Adams from Elyse Poller

Grade- 8

Length of class period- variable-depending upon how in-depth you make the assignment (45-90)

Inquiry - What do Abigail Adams' letters indicate were issues surrounding the development of a government for the new country?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

Students will read and analyze two primary source documents – letters from Abigail to John Adams on November 27, 1775 and on March 31, 1776.

They will use the information to draw conclusions about the political concerns and developments during this time period.

Materials – Letters from Abigail Adams to John Adams from November 27, 1775 and March 31, 1776 and accompanying worksheet.

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

1. Review the political climate of the time.
2. Introduce Abigail Adams
3. Have students read the letters and put their commentary – regarding political issues – on the side
4. Discuss as a class what issues were raised and if those issues were addressed by the founders of the government.

How will you assess what students learned during this lesson?

Review analysis on the sheets

Assess input in discussion

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards-

- formulate historical questions based on primary and secondary sources, including documents, eyewitness accounts, letters and diaries, artifacts, real or simulated historical sites, charts, graphs, diagrams and written texts;
- examine data to determine the adequacy and sufficiency of evidence, point of view, historical context, bias, distortion and propaganda, and to distinguish fact from opinion
- demonstrate an in-depth understanding of major events and trends of United States history (e.g., the American Revolution, the Civil War, industrialization, the Great Depression, the cold war);
- describe the emergence of select governmental systems, principles and institutions;

Name _____

From the letters of Abigail Adams

SS #

Read the following letter from Abigail Adams to her husband, John. Use your background knowledge of the time period (around the American Revolutionary War) to analyze the letter. What does the text show about the political situation of the time? What concerns existed in relation to the development of the government for the new country? *Write your analysis to the right of the relevant text.* Please be specific in your explanation of your conclusions and inferences, referring to the text for support.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 27 November 1775

Tis a fortnight to Night since I wrote you a line during which, I have been confined with the jaundice, Rhumatism and a most violent cold; I yesterday took a puke which has releived me, and I feel much better to day. Many, very many people who have had the dysentery, are now afflicted both with the jaundice and Rhumatisim, some it has left in Hecticks, some in dropsies.

The great and incessant rains we have had this fall, (the like cannot be recollected) may have occasiond some of the present disorders. The jaundice is very prevelant in the Camp. We have lately had a week of very cold weather, as cold as January, and a flight of snow, which I hope will purify the air of some of the noxious vapours. It has spoild many hundreds of Bushels of Apples, which were designd for cider, and which the great rains had prevented people from making up. Suppose we have lost 5 Barrels by it.

Col. Warren returnd last week to Plymouth, so that I shall not hear any thing from you till he goes back again which will not be till the last of nextthis month.

He Damp'd my Spirits greatly by telling me that the Court had prolonged your Stay an other month. I was pleasing myself with the thoughts that you would soon be upon your return. Tis in vain to repine. I hope the publick will reap what I sacrifice.

I wish I knew what mighty things were fabricating. If a form of Government is to be established here what one will be assumed? Will it be left to our assemblies to chuse one? and will not many men have many minds? and shall we not run into Dissentions among ourselves?

I am more and more convinced that Man is a dangerous creature, and that power whether vested in many or a few is ever grasping, and like the grave cries give, give. The great fish swallow up the small,

and he who is most strenuous for the Rights of the people, when vested with power, is as eager after the prerogatives of Government. You tell me of degrees of perfection to which Humane Nature is capable of arriving, and I believe it, but at the same time lament that our admiration should arise from the scarcity of the instances.

The Building up a Great Empire, which was only hinted at by my correspondent may now I suppose be realized even by the unbelievers. Yet will not ten thousand Difficulties arise in the formation of it? The Reigns of Government have been so long slakned, that I fear the people will not quietly submit to those restraints which are necessary for the peace, and security, of the community; if we sepearate from Brittain, what Code of Laws will be established. How shall we be governd so as to retain our Liberties? Can any government be free which is not adminstred by general stated Laws? Who shall frame these Laws? Who will give them force and energy? Tis true your [\[Resolutions\]](#) as a Body have heithertoo had the force of Laws. But will they continue to have?

When I consider these things and the prejudices of people in favour of Ancient customs and Regulations, I feel anxious for the fate of our Monarchy or Democracy or what ever is to take place. I soon get lost in a Labyrinth of perplexities, but whatever occurs, may justice and righteousness be the Stability of our times, and order arise out of confusion. Great difficulties may be surmounted, by patience and perseverance....

I have with me now, the only Daughter of your Brother; I feel a tenderer affection for her as she has lost a kind parent. Though too young to be sensible of her own loss, I can pity her. She appears to be a child of a very good Disposition -- only wants to be a little used to company....

I must bid you good night. Tis late for one who am much of an invalide. I was dissapointed last week in receiving a packet by the post, and upon unsealing it found only four news papers. I think you are more cautious than you need be. All Letters I believe have come safe to hand. I have Sixteen from you, and wish I had as many more. Adieu. Yours.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 27 November 1775 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

Name _____
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Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams - Braintree March 31, 1776

I wish you would ever write me a Letter half as long as I write you; and tell me if you may where your Fleet are gone? What sort of Defence Virginia can make against our common Enemy? Whether it is so situated as to make an able Defence? Are not the Gentry Lords and the common people vassals, are they not like the uncivilized Natives Brittain represents us to be? I hope their Riffel Men who have shewen themselves very savage and even Blood thirsty; are not a specimen of the Generality of the people....

I have sometimes been ready to think that the passion for Liberty cannot be Eaquelly Strong in the Breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow Creatures of theirs. Of this I am certain that it is not founded upon that generous and christian principal of doing to others as we would that others should do unto us

I feel very differently at the approach of spring to what I did a month ago. We knew not then whether we could plant or sow with safety, whether when we had toild we could reap the fruits of our own industery, whether we could rest in our own Cottages, or whether we should not be driven from the sea coasts to seek shelter in the wilderness, but now we feel as if we might sit under our own vine and eat the good of the land.

I feel a gaieti de Coar to which before I was a stranger. I think the Sun looks brighter, the Birds sing more melodiously, and Nature puts on a more chearfull countenance. We feel a temporary peace, and the poor fugitives are returning to their deserted habitations....

-- 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. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the

Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in immitation of the Supreem Being make use of that power only for our happiness.

April 5

...I want to hear much oftener from you than I do. March 8 was the last date of any that I have yet had. -- You inquire of whether I am making Salt peter. I have not yet attempted it, but after Soap making believe I shall make the experiment. I find as much as I can do to manufacture cloathing for my family whowhich would else be Naked.... I know of but one person in this part of the Town who has made any, that is Mr. Tertias Bass as he is calld who has got very near an hundred weight which has been found to be very good. I have heard of some others in the other parishes. Mr. Reed of Weymouth has been applied to, to go to Andover to the mills which are now at work, and has gone. I have lately seen a small Manuscrip describing the proportions for the various sorts of powder, such as fit for cannon, small arms and pistols [illegible] . If it would be of any Service your way I will get it transcribed and send it to you. -- Every one of your Friends send their Regards, and all the little ones. Your Brothers youngest child lies bad with convulsion fitts. Adieu. I need not say how much I am Your ever faithfull Friend.