

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Lesson Title – “Remember the Ladies”

Grade - 11

Length of class period – 45 minutes. This may take 2 class periods.

Inquiry – How did 18th century men of authority react to women who aspired to more than the traditional role society expected of them?

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

- To decipher primary documents from 1776
- To discover how some women questioned the authority in their lives and advocated for change

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?) – (please attach)

Letters from Abigail Adams to John Adams dated March 31, 1776 and May 7, 1776

Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams dated April 14, 1776

Letter from John Adams to fellow Massachusetts politician James Sullivan

Written Document Analysis Worksheet

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

*Start the lesson with a quick biography of Abigail Adams.

*Give each student a copy of the letters and a document analysis sheet for each letter. Working with a partner, the students will decipher the document.

* As an entire class,

*discuss what grievances and suggestions Abigail discusses with John

*discuss John’s response to Abigail

*discuss the meaning of John’s correspondence with James Sullivan

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

Through class discussion and collection of the document analysis sheets.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

*use primary source documents to analyze multiple perspectives

*explain how purposes served by government have implications for the individual and society

LETTERS BETWEEN ABIGAIL ADAMS
AND HER HUSBAND JOHN ADAMS

MARCH 31, 1776

ABIGAIL ADAMS TO JOHN ADAMS

"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 favorable 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 particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, 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 (servants) of your sex; regard us then as being placed by Providence under your protection, and in imitation of the Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness."

APRIL 14, 1776

JOHN ADAMS TO ABIGAIL ADAMS

"As to your extraordinary code of laws, I cannot but laugh.

"We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bonds of government everywhere; that children and apprentices were disobedient; that schools and colleges were grown turbulent; that Indians slighted their guardians, and negroes grew insolent to their masters.

"But your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented.

"This is rather too coarse a compliment, but you are so saucy, I won't blot it out.

"Depend upon it, we know better than to repeal our masculine systems. Although they are in full force, you know they are little more than theory. We dare not exert our power in its full latitude. We are obliged to go fair and softly, and, in practice, you know we are the subjects.

"We have only the name of masters, and rather than give up this, which would completely subject us to the despotism of the petticoat, I hope General Washington and all our brave heroes would fight."

MAY 7, 1776

ABIGAIL ADAMS TO JOHN ADAMS

"I cannot say that I think you are very generous to the ladies; for, whilst you are proclaiming peace and good-will to men, emancipating all nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives.

"But you must remember that arbitrary power is like most other things which are very hard, very liable to be broken; and, notwithstanding all your wise laws and maxims, we have it in our power, not only to free ourselves, but to subdue our masters, and without violence, throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet."

May 26, 1776

JOHN ADAMS TO JAMES SULLIVAN

"It is certain, in theory, that the only moral foundation of government is, the consent of the people. But to what an extent shall we carry this principle? Shall we say that every individual of the community, old and young, male and female, as well as rich and poor, must consent, expressly, to every act of legislation? No, you will say, this is impossible. How then, does the right arise in the majority to govern the minority, against their will? Whence arises the right of the men to govern the women, without their consent? Whence the right of the old to bind the young, without theirs?...

But why exclude women?

You will say, because their delicacy renders them unfit for practice and experience in the great businesses of life, and the hardy enterprises of war.... Besides, their attention is so much engaged with the necessary nurture of their children, that nature has made them the fittest for domestic cares. And children have not judgment or will of their own. True, but will not these reasons apply to others? Is it not equally true, that men in general, in every society, who are wholly destitute of property, are also too little acquainted with public affairs to form a right judgment, and too dependent upon other men to have a will of their own? ... They talk and vote as they are directed by some man of property....

Your idea that those laws which affects the lives and personal liberty of all, or which inflict corporal punishment, affect those who are not qualified to vote, as well as those who are, is just. But so they do women, as well as men; children, as well as adults. What reason should there be for excluding a man of twenty years eleven months and twenty-seven days old, from a vote, when you must admit one who is twenty-one? The reason is, you must fix upon some period in life, when the understanding and will of men in general, is fit to be trusted by the public. Will not the same reason justify the state in fixing upon some certain quantity of property, as a qualification?

The same reasoning which will induce you to admit all men who have not property, to vote, with those who have, for those laws which affect the person, will prove that you ought to admit women and children; for, generally speaking, women and children have as good judgments, and as independent minds, as those men who are wholly destitute of property; these last being to all intents and purposes as much dependent upon others, who will please to feed, clothe and employ them, as women are upon their husbands, or children upon their parents.

Depend upon it, Sire, it is dangerous to open so fruitful a source of controversy and altercations as would be opened by attempting to alter the qualifications of voters; there will be no end of it. New claims will arise; women will demand a vote; kids from twelve to twenty-one will think their rights not enough attended to; and every man who has not a farthing, will demand an equal voice with any other; in all acts of state. It tends to confound and destroy all distinctions, and prostrate all ranks to one common level....

Written Document Analysis Worksheet

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| 1. | <p>TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Patent <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Map <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram <input type="checkbox"/> Press release <input type="checkbox"/> Report </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record <input type="checkbox"/> Census report <input type="checkbox"/> Other </td> </tr> </table> | <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Patent <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum | <input type="checkbox"/> Map <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram <input type="checkbox"/> Press release <input type="checkbox"/> Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record <input type="checkbox"/> Census report <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
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| 2. | <p>UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting letterhead <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten <input type="checkbox"/> Typed <input type="checkbox"/> Seals </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Notations <input type="checkbox"/> "RECEIVED" stamp <input type="checkbox"/> Other </td> </tr> </table> | <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting letterhead <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten <input type="checkbox"/> Typed <input type="checkbox"/> Seals | <input type="checkbox"/> Notations <input type="checkbox"/> "RECEIVED" stamp <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |
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| 3. | <p>DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:</p> <hr/> | | | |
| 4. | <p>AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:</p> <hr/> <p>POSITION (TITLE):</p> <hr/> | | | |
| 5. | <p>FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?</p> <hr/> | | | |
| 6. | <p>DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)</p> <p>A. List three things the author said that you think are important:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>B. Why do you think this document was written?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:</p> <hr/> <hr/> | | | |

**Designed and developed by the
 Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration,
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