

Lesson 1: Getting to Know Abigail Adams

☐ Getting Started

Biographies often focus on powerful people whose ideas and actions changed their communities and inspired others in meaningful and long-lasting ways. Powerful individuals have a great deal of influence on others, but they are often also influenced by those around them. In colonial America, women were excluded from powerful positions in business, religion, and politics, yet they often wielded considerable influence over their husbands, their children, and their communities.

The life of Abigail Adams demonstrates the kind of influence that women in the colonies and the early republic could have in their communities and the nation as a whole. Abigail Adams lived at an exciting time in American history — the time of the American Revolution — and her life was deeply intertwined with the lives of many of the Founding Fathers of the nation, most significantly her husband, John Adams. Since she lived at such a pivotal time, her life story also reveals the ways in which historically significant events can profoundly influence the lives of individuals.

In this unit, you'll be reading a nonfiction biography of Abigail Adams to explore the ways in which she influenced those around her and the ways in which the people and events in her life influenced her. You'll also explore the ways in which biographers tell the life stories of their subjects, the idea of genre in literature, and the use of different verb forms. In the end, you may find that your own life has been influenced by your deeper understanding of this fascinating woman.

In this first lesson, you'll explore the front and back matter of the book, read the first two chapters, and complete a letter-writing activity to help you use vocabulary terms effectively.

Stuff You Need

- *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution* by Natalie S. Bober
- *Handy Guide to Writing by Beyond the Page*
- stationery* (Activity 2 - optional)

Ideas to Think About

- How do the lives of individuals interact with, influence, and become transformed by the events of the time and place in which they live?
- What is the purpose of biography and how can biographies influence and inspire readers?
- How does the availability of primary sources influence historical writing?

Things to Know

- Abigail Adams (1744-1818) was a fascinating historical figure. The wife of president John Adams and mother to president John Quincy Adams, she was both a strong advocate for women's rights and a devoted wife and mother who took great pride in her domestic role.
- Abigail Adams wrote thousands of letters over her lifetime, many of which survive today and allow historians to understand her life and the times in which she lived.
- **confidences**: secrets or private matters shared only with those one trusts
- **lucrative**: producing profit
- **wistfully**: showing a feeling of longing
- **foreboding**: a fear that something bad will happen
- **affliction**: something that causes suffering or pain
- **fortitude**: strength or courage
- **entail**: to involve something necessarily

Activities

☐ Activity 1: Exploring the Book

It's easy to just pick up a book and open it to page 1, skipping over or paying little attention to the introduction and other material before the first chapter, but a reader can get a lot more out of the book by beginning with a thoughtful "pre-reading" of the book itself. Exploring the book before you actually read it can help you approach the book with a better understanding of what it will be about, develop some questions that you hope the reading will answer, and begin reading actively with curiosity and engagement instead of beginning the book passively without any prior knowledge or questions.

In this activity, you'll explore the book that you'll be reading in this unit by completing the "Exploring the Book" activity pages, which will allow you to analyze various elements of the book before you begin reading. Consult the book's table of contents to find the location of the pages or sections mentioned.

Note: If you are reading an electronic version of this book, use the following link to view the front cover of the book and learn about the awards the book has received.



Natalie Bober

www.beyondthepage.com/link/2088/

This page describes the book *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution*. Scroll down the page and click the plus sign beside "Awards and Honors" to view the awards the book has received.

☐ Reading and Questions

Read Chapters 1 and 2 of *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution* by Natalie S. Bober, which focus on the early life of Abigail Adams. Next, answer the following questions.

1. What do you think Abigail's grandmother meant when she said that "wild colts make the best horses"?

2. What did Elizabeth Quincy Smith share with her daughters about her view of the appropriate role for adult women?

3. What were John and Abigail Adams' first impressions of each other?

4. What did John Adams mean that he needed "ballast" in his life?

☐ Activity 2: A Literary Correspondence

In today's reading, you learned that Abigail Adams visited with her aunt and uncle in Boston and became friends with several girls her own age while she was there. When she returned home, these new friends engaged in a "literary correspondence" that they hoped would provide an opportunity to improve their writing and engage their minds (Bober, p. 9).

Think of a friend with whom you might start such an intellectual correspondence. In this activity, you will write a letter to your friend about any topic you choose. Ask a parent which option you should complete. (Both options will use the vocabulary found on the page "A Literary Correspondence.")

NOTE: If you are using the electronic version of this book, the page numbers may not work for you. If you learn how to use the "Search" function available in most electronic books, however, you will be able to find the words very quickly.

Option 1: A Letter to a Friend with Five Vocabulary Terms

Read over the list of vocabulary terms and circle several that you either already use regularly or that you think you might be able to incorporate into your own daily speech and writing.

Next, plan a short letter to a friend that could incorporate five of those vocabulary terms. Your letter can be about any topic you like — just be sure that the finished letter reads like a letter that someone would actually send to another person, with all parts of the letter connecting to one another. You don't want to have five unconnected sentences that use the vocabulary terms accurately but don't have anything to do with one another or else your reader will be very confused! Also, please pay attention to spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and be sure to use each of the five vocabulary terms correctly in context. If you hand-write your letter, underline each vocabulary term. If you type it, use the editing tools in your word processing program to show each vocabulary term in **bold** type.

NOTE: For more information about writing letters, see p. 50 in the *Handy Guide to Writing*.

Share your letter with a parent when you are finished and, if you'd like, you can then mail it to your friend.

Option 2: A Letter to a Friend with Seven Vocabulary Terms

Read over the list of vocabulary terms and circle several that you either already use regularly or that you think you might be able to incorporate into your own daily speech and writing.

Next, plan a letter to a friend that could incorporate all seven of the vocabulary terms listed. Like Abigail Adams, you will use your letter as a way of working on your writing style and expanding your mind, so choose a topic of an intellectual nature. Perhaps you will want to write to a friend about the book that you're reading for this unit or another book that you are reading as part of your education. Perhaps you'll want to share your insights on current events or relate a conversation that you had with someone about an issue or cause that concerns you. Perhaps you'll want to share your thoughts on the arts, recent scientific discoveries, religion, or an amazing experience that you had recently. As you plan your letter, think about how you might use all of the vocabulary terms accurately to share your ideas. Your letter should be about one page long (200-300 words).

Be sure that the finished letter reads like a letter that someone would actually send to another person, with all parts of the letter connecting to one another. You don't want to have seven unconnected sentences that use the vocabulary terms accurately but don't have anything to do with one another or else your reader will be very confused!

Also, remember that this is an informal writing assignment. You'll want to pay attention to spelling, grammar, and punctuation, of course, but mostly focus on the content and be sure you use each of the seven vocabulary terms correctly in context. If you hand-write your letter, underline each vocabulary term. If you type it, use the editing tools in your word processing program to show each vocabulary term in **bold** type.

NOTE: For more information about writing letters, see p. 50 in the *Handy Guide to Writing*.

Share your letter with a parent when you are finished and, if you'd like, you can then mail it to your friend.

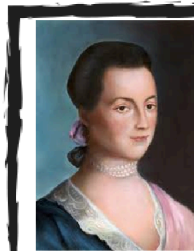
Wrapping Up

In the first two chapters, you've gotten to know young Abigail Smith and learned of her courtship with John Adams. In the next lesson, you'll learn about the early years of their married life and the ways in which John and Abigail balanced the demands of his career, the responsibilities of running a farm, family life, and their personal relationship, all against the backdrop of the unrest that would lead to the American Revolution.

Life Application (optional)

If an author planned a biography of your life, consider what he or she might include in the following sections of the book:

- Title: If the author used a structure like *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution*, what would come after your name in the title of the book about your life?
- Cover Image: Which picture of you might the author and editor choose for the cover, and would there be any background images?
- Timeline: Which significant events would be included on the timeline of your life?
- Map: Which places would you want to show a reader to help him or her understand your life more fully?



Exploring the Book

Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution

Fill in the following information as you explore *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution*.

Cover

List three words that describe the woman pictured on the cover:

1.

2.

3.

What is happening in the shadowy image behind the portrait that wraps around to the back cover?

Title

Here are the titles of several books about Abigail Adams. Write a few words to describe what you think each author might emphasize. Put a star next to the title that looks most interesting.

Abigail Adams: First Lady of Faith and Courage by Evelyn Witter

Abigail Adams: Girl of Colonial Days by Jean Brown Wagoner

Abigail Adams: First Lady of the American Revolution by Patricia Lakin, Bob Dacey, and Debra Bandelin

Abigail Adams: Famous First Lady by Maya Glass

Abigail Adams: Champion of Women's Rights and American Independence by Jacqueline Ching

Woman of Independence: The Life of Abigail Adams by Susan Provost Beller

Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution by Natalie S. Bober

Exploring the Book

Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution

Contents	
Read the chapter titles. How do you think the author selected titles for the chapters? Are the chapters typically long or short?	
Table of Contents 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	
Acknowledgements	Foreword
What roles did other people play in the creation of this book?	As you read the foreword, jot down in your own words any ideas that seem especially important:

Cover Page

Describe the image on the cover page inside the book:



Look at the other titles written by Natalie S. Bober. What kinds of books does she seem to write?

Chronology	
Write down 5 events that you are most interested in learning about:	
1. Date:	Event:
2. Date:	Event:
3. Date:	Event:
4. Date:	Event:
5. Date:	Event:

Exploring the Book

Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution

Reference Notes

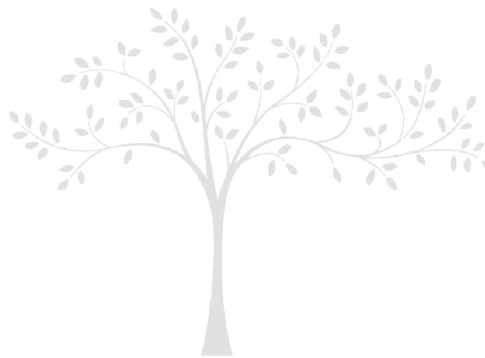
Read the list of source titles. Do these seem like reliable sources? Why or why not?



Scan the rest of the Reference Notes section. Does it appear that the author cited reliable sources frequently throughout the chapters?

Family Trees

Read over the Quincy-Smith and Adams family trees. How might this reference come in handy as you read the book?



Back Cover

What awards has the book won?



Bibliography

Look over the sources listed in the bibliography section. Pay particular attention to the titles of the secondary sources listed. Make a list of the topics covered by the books and periodical articles that the author consulted:

Does it seem that the author was thorough in her research?



Summary

Based on your exploration of the book, write three questions about Abigail Adams that interest you as you get ready to read the book:

1.

2.

3.

A Literary Correspondence

Confidences — secrets or private matters shared only with those one trusts

"The girls shared *confidences* and discussed their interests." (p. 9)

Lucrative — producing profit

"He accepted the interesting cases rather than the *lucrative* ones, and he plunged into the study of the great English casebooks and the treatises written in Latin that he had to labor over sentence by sentence." (p. 15)

Wistfully — showing a feeling of longing

"*Wistfully* revealing her own desire to travel, she told him that this was the best season of life for him to travel, 'Ere you have formed connection which would bind you to your own little Spot.'" (p. 37)

Foreboding — a fear that something bad will happen

"When he left home he was sick to his stomach, feverish, and numb with horror and *foreboding*." (p. 55)

Affliction — something causing suffering or pain

"Separated from him 'who used to be a comforter towards me in *affliction*,' she was overwhelmed by her sense of loss." (p. 65)

Fortitude — strength or courage

"It took all her *fortitude* to keep from breaking down in front of the other children." (p. 91)

Entail — to involve something necessarily

"And, his going would *entail* a dangerous winter crossing of the Atlantic Ocean." (p. 89)

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Getting Started

✿ Ideas to Think About

- How do the lives of individuals interact with, influence, and become transformed by the events of the time and place in which they live?
- What is the purpose of biography and how can biographies influence and inspire readers?
- How does the availability of primary sources influence historical writing?



Things to Know

- Abigail Adams (1744-1818) was a fascinating historical figure. The wife of president John Adams and mother to president John Quincy Adams, she was both a strong advocate for women's rights and a devoted wife and mother who took great pride in her domestic role.
- Abigail Adams wrote thousands of letters over her lifetime, many of which survive today and allow historians to understand her life and the times in which she lived.
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⦿ Skills

- By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently. (LA)
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (LA)
- Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general, academic, and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression. (LA)

Introducing the Lesson

An intelligent and thoughtful commentator on the exciting times in which she lived, Abigail Adams is a fascinating historical figure whose voluminous correspondence with her husband, John Adams, and other important people in the revolutionary era gives us insight into both the personal and political aspects of her life and times.

Parents should note that John and Abigail Adams were very much in love. In this book, the author references quotes from their letters to each other that describe the passionate love they had for each other, particularly in Chapter 3, which students will encounter in Lesson 2. The editorial staff of Moving Beyond the Page believes the author has done this in an appropriate way for the audience for which she is writing,

but we encourage you to skim the book before your child reads it and make decisions that are appropriate to your own family's needs and preferences.

This might be a great time to have a talk with your child about positive relationships with the opposite sex and how responsible young adults might handle strong feelings for their beloved. John and Abigail Adams modeled a positive courting and marriage relationship, but you may want to discuss with your child the relationship and the way that the author and John and Abigail wrote about it to place it in the context of your own family's values. The author's decision to include information about not only their role in the broader story of American history but also their relationship as, first, courting young adults and later as a married couple, should make it easier for readers to relate to them as real people with feelings that many modern pre-teens and teens can understand.

In this first lesson, your child will complete an activity focused on the front and back matter of *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution*. He will then read the first two chapters of the book, which focus on the childhood and early courtship of Abigail Adams, and write a letter that will enable him to make use of new vocabulary terms learned in the lesson.

Activities

Activity 1: Exploring the Book

In this activity, your child will learn to "pre-read" a book by exploring its title, cover, front matter, and back matter to create an overall impression of what the book will be like and generate questions about the book's contents. This kind of pre-reading analysis can pique a reader's curiosity about the book, allow the reader to develop questions that the reading will answer, and set the stage for a more active and engaged reading experience. You may want to encourage your child to try this kind of activity with other books that he reads in the future.

Reading and Questions

1. What do you think Abigail's grandmother meant when she said that "wild colts make the best horses"?

Answers will vary, but your child may suggest that she was expressing her confidence that even if Abigail was high-spirited as a child, she would become a respectable adult.

2. What did Elizabeth Quincy Smith share with her daughters about her view of the appropriate role for adult women?

Mrs. Smith emphasized marriage and motherhood.

3. What were John and Abigail Adams' first impressions of each other?

He thought that she lacked tenderness and she thought that he talked too much.

4. What did John Adams mean that he needed "ballast" in his life?

Answers will vary. John Adams felt an acute need for recognition and was very demanding of himself, insisting on perfection. He may have felt that he needed a steadying force in his life that would help him remain stable and grounded when he had doubts or felt pulled in many directions.

Activity 2: A Literary Correspondence

In this activity, your child will review a list of vocabulary terms drawn from the first six chapters of *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution*. He will then write a letter to a friend using the vocabulary terms. In Option

1, your child will be asked to choose five vocabulary words. In Option 2, he will be challenged to use all seven vocabulary terms in his letter. Choose the option that will be more appropriate for your child.

Option 1: A Letter to a Friend with Five Vocabulary Terms

In this option, your child will read over the vocabulary terms and their definitions, identify words that he already knows or could incorporate into his daily speech and writing, and then write a short letter to a friend that uses five of the terms in context. Read over your child's letter to be sure that he has used each vocabulary term correctly. He will have either underlined each term or set it to display in **bold** type.

Option 2: A Letter to a Friend with Seven Vocabulary Terms

In this option, your child will read over the vocabulary terms and their definitions, identify words that he already knows or could incorporate into his daily speech and writing, and write an intellectual letter to a friend that uses all seven of the terms in context. Read over your child's letter to be sure that he has used each vocabulary term correctly. He will have either underlined each term or set it to display in **bold** type.

Wrapping Up

Questions to Discuss

- When Abigail Adams was growing up, what were the expectations for women? (Women were supposed to be primarily concerned with marriage and motherhood and were not necessarily supposed to be educated. Abigail Adams was taught by her mother to accept her lot in life and to be kind, caring, and compassionate.)
- What did John Adams see in Abigail Adams that helped him to fall in love with her? (Answers may vary, but your child might mention her intelligence, her willingness to stand up to him, her looks, her modesty, or other attributes mentioned in the reading.)
- Do you think you would have liked Abigail Smith (later Adams) as a teenager? Why or why not?

Things to Review

- Review your child's answers to the reading questions.
- Review your child's response to Activity 1.
- Review your child's letter from Activity 2 and confirm that he has used each vocabulary term accurately.
- If your child did the optional Life Application, discuss his answers with him.