

Lesson 5: Remember the Ladies

☐ Getting Started

While John Adams was serving in the Continental Congress, Abigail maintained their home in Braintree. In this lesson, you'll read more about her interactions with other delegates to the Continental Congress and important figures like George Washington. You'll also explore Abigail's writings to John about women's potential role in the new nation that patriots were beginning to imagine. You'll have the chance to read some of John and Abigail's correspondence for yourself and to consider the roles of women in the revolutionary era.

Stuff You Need

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

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?
- How does the availability of primary sources influence historical writing?

Things to Know

- Biographers rely on a wide variety of sources to help them tell the life story of the person about whom they are writing. They may consult other books and articles about the same person written by other authors as well as primary sources like letters, diaries, newspaper accounts, government documents, images, or material objects.
- Biographers usually have to strike a balance between using their own words to tell the reader about the person they are describing and showing the reader evidence that supports their account by using quotations from primary sources and specific examples that support the points that biographers are trying to make.

☐ **Reading and Questions**

Read Chapters 9 and 10 of *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution* by Natalie S. Bober. These chapters cover Abigail Adams' life while her husband served in the Continental Congress. Answer the following questions about today's reading.

1. How did dysentery affect the Adams family?

2. How did women of earlier generations influence Abigail and Nabby Adams?

3. Why do you think Abigail shifted from writing to John about "your" affairs on the farm to, instead, referring to the daily business of running the household and managing decisions as "our" affairs?

4. How were women's rights under English law influenced by marriage?

Activities

☐ Activity 1: Exploring Primary Sources

Abigail Adams's letter to John in which she encourages him to "remember the ladies" is one of the most famous pieces of correspondence between the two of them. In this activity, you'll closely read that letter or one of the letters that followed it in their correspondence. You may find it helpful to read the letter out loud in order to fully understand it. Often, when reading older texts that are substantially different from modern English, hearing the text spoken can make the meaning clearer. If you run into any trouble, ask a parent for help.

You may also find it helpful to review this guide to working with primary sources from the archived website of LEARN North Carolina, a program of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Education. The guide walks you through strategies for analyzing primary sources, using correspondence between John and Abigail Adams as examples.



Analysis: Letters of Abigail Adams to John Adams

www.beyondthepage.com/link/12716/

Read the document analysis to give yourself a better feel for how a historian might approach a document like the letter you'll be reading



Abigail Adams to John Adams March 31-April 5, 1776

www.beyondthepage.com/link/1686/

Visit the Massachusetts Historical Society website and read this along with the following two letters, all of which are quoted in Chapter 10 of today's reading.



John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 14, 1776

www.beyondthepage.com/link/2022/



Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 7-9, 1776

www.beyondthepage.com/link/2023/

There are two options for this activity. In both options, you'll select one of the letters above to read. In Option 1, you will fill out an activity page about how the letter might be used by a historian. In Option 2, you will use the letter as your text as you work through the categories historians use when analyzing a primary source. Ask a parent which option you should complete.

Option 1: Exploring Primary Sources

Read the full text of one or more of the letters (web links provided in the introduction to the activity), all of which were cited in today's reading. You may, if you'd like, read other letters from the same few weeks of correspondence.

As you read, jot down your thoughts on what is interesting in the letter. Using the "Exploring Primary Sources" activity page, you will compare your thoughts on the letter you read with the way the biography's author used it in the book, giving you the chance to think about how the author used this letter and how it might have been used differently.

Option 2: Analyzing Historical Documents

In this option, you'll select one of the letters (web links provided in the introduction to the activity) and read through it while thinking about the categories historians use to analyze a primary source. These include:

- Who created this source? (Author/creator, date, purpose, audience)
- What type of source is this? (Letter, article, photo, map, etc.)
- What is the content? (What does it say/show? What main ideas or details stand out?)
- What was the context? (What was happening at the time this was created? Why does that matter?)
- What is the point of view or bias? (Is this source trying to persuade, inform, entertain? What perspective does it represent?)
- How does this source connect to what I'm studying? (How does it support or challenge other information? What questions does it raise?)

You may find it helpful to print out the letter that you're working with so that you can use the printout as a reference as you go through each category. You should answer each of the questions presented — really think about each question seriously and look for specific places in the letter that will provide the evidence you need to help you answer the questions. Remember that some questions may be difficult to answer, given the information provided in the letter, so you may not be able to adequately answer all of them. This is true for historical researchers, too — sometimes they can't answer all of the questions they are wondering about with a

single historical document. You may want to talk through each question with a parent as you go.

☐ **Activity 2: Men's and Women's Roles**

In the early years of marriage during her husband's absence, Abigail Adams had to handle not only the household duties that were usually a wife's responsibility at the time but also the duties that usually fell to a husband. Even though she was not politically active herself (since women were not allowed to vote or hold office in this time period), Abigail had a great deal of influence on her husband, who was instrumental in shaping the direction that the revolution would take and the form that any new government might have. When John was in the Continental Congress and beginning to imagine what a new government might look like, Abigail urged him to "Remember the Ladies" in his considerations. While John did not take her comments as seriously as she would have liked, Abigail freely shared her views on this issue as in all things with her husband, and their mutual respect for each other meant that he listened to her, even if he did not always act on her suggestions.

In this activity, you'll explore men's and women's roles, either in the time in which Abigail and John Adams lived (Option 1) or in the present day (Option 2). Choose the option that you would prefer to complete.

Option 1: Expectations and Realities

At the time of the revolution, the responsibilities of adults in colonial society were relatively strictly divided between duties for men and duties for women. In this activity, you'll explore the roles that John and Abigail Adams took on in their marriage and the ways in which some of those roles shifted when John had to be away. Follow the instructions on the "Exploring Roles" page.

Option 2: Then and Now

Today, household responsibilities tend to be divided more evenly between spouses than they were in colonial times. More women earn incomes outside the home, and women have political and economic rights that they did not have at the time in which Abigail Adams lived. In this activity, you'll explore the division of household labor in a two-parent household, either your own or that of someone you know. Think about how the same duties might have been divided differently at the time of the revolution. Follow the instructions on the "Household Responsibilities" page.

Wrapping Up

While Abigail Adams never expressed a desire to enter politics herself, she did have strong views on the matter and not only had lengthy correspondence with her husband about the revolutionary cause and the new government, but also entertained and maintained relationships with several critical leaders of the time such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. While women were denied political rights in this time period, some women, like Abigail Adams, did share their ideas with those who had the power to create political change, and most women had influence over the men in their lives. The women negotiated household responsibilities and shared their ideas with their husbands, and they also educated their sons to become thoughtful and responsible citizens. So while women may have been denied formal political power, they still had some influence over public affairs through their relationships with men.

Life Application

Ideas about men's and women's roles have changed a great deal since the time of the revolution. Today, women vote, hold political office, and work outside the home while many men take a more active role in domestic activities like cooking, housekeeping, and childcare. As an adult, what kinds of roles do you want to play in your own family and community? What kind of division of labor do you think you will have in your own adult household? What do you think would be most fair?

Exploring Primary Sources

Instructions: Read one of the three letters between Abigail and John Adams mentioned in the activity instructions and then complete the following:

Date of Letter: _____ **From** _____ **To** _____

In the space below, summarize the main topics of the letter and make notes about what you found interesting about it:

Go back to your reading in Chapter 10 and review the way the author used the letter that you read. You can use the Reference Notes at the back of the book to find which footnotes refer to the letter you chose and then look back at the chapter to find those footnotes and read the way that the author chose to quote from the letter.

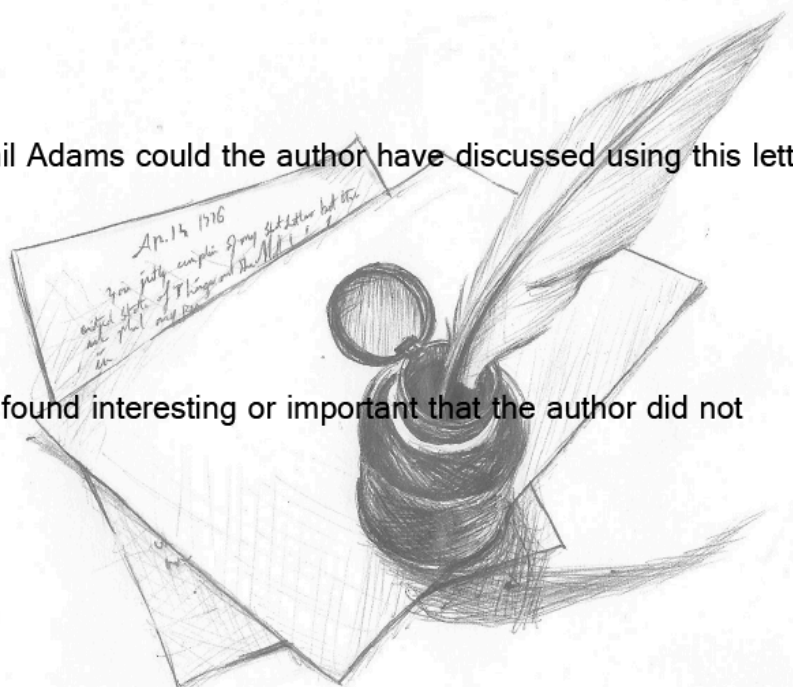
How much of the letter did the author quote? (circle one)

- A) just a few phrases or a sentence or two
- B) several sentences
- C) half or more of the letter
- D) nearly the whole letter

What point or idea was the author trying to convey by using selections from this letter?

What other aspects of the life of Abigail Adams could the author have discussed using this letter as a source?

Were there parts of the letter that you found interesting or important that the author did not mention? Explain.



Exploring Roles

Instructions: In Chapters 4-10, you learned a great deal about the household responsibilities that Abigail Adams took on in John's absence. Based on what you read, list at least five things that were usually John's job when he was home, five things that were usually Abigail's job, and as many things as you can find that they shared responsibility for. Then circle any things that Abigail had to manage on her own while John was away.

John's Job:

Shared:

Abigail's Job:

How do you think the shift in Abigail's duties while John was away may have influenced her?

Household Responsibilities

Directions: If your household has two parents, interview one or both parents to find the information that you need to fill in the following chart, and then answer the questions below. If you live in a one-parent household, ask your parent or another adult who grew up in a two-parent household how responsibilities were divided in the home in which he or she grew up. Place each of the following duties into one of the columns below based on which parent usually does each job. If the two parents share a job more or less equally, write that job under "Shared":

earning income
auto maintenance
childcare
grocery shopping
educating children

cooking
cleaning
child-rearing decisions
financial decisions
transportation

household repairs
yard work
pet care
home improvement projects

list any other responsibilities that you can think of as well

Parent #1:

Shared:

Parent #2:

What differences do you see in the responsibilities of the two parents?

Why do you think responsibilities are divided in this way?

Which of the jobs above would you most like to do and least like to do as an adult?

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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?
- How does the availability of primary sources influence historical writing?



Things to Know

- Biographers rely on a wide variety of sources to help them tell the life story of the person about whom they are writing. They may consult other books and articles about the same person written by other authors as well as primary sources like letters, diaries, newspaper accounts, government documents, images, or material objects.
- Biographers usually have to strike a balance between using their own words to tell the reader about the person they are describing and showing the reader evidence that supports their account by using quotations from primary sources and specific examples that support the points that biographers are trying to make.

● Skills

- Utilize elements that demonstrate the reliability and validity of the sources used (e.g., publication date, coverage, language, point of view) and explain why one source is more useful and relevant than another. (LA)

Introducing the Lesson

In this lesson, your child will learn more about Abigail Adams' life while her husband was in Philadelphia with the Continental Congress. He will read some of John and Abigail's correspondence for himself and consider the roles of women in the revolutionary era.

Reading and Questions

1. How did dysentery affect the Adams family?

John's brother Elihu and Abigail's mother both died of dysentery. Abigail, Tommy (then 3 years old), and several servants were all sick with the disease, and numerous families in their community, including some relatives, lost family members in the epidemic.

2. How did women of earlier generations influence Abigail and Nabby Adams?

Abigail Adams remembered and valued the advice that her own grandmother had given her. She hoped that her own daughter, Nabby, would remember the advice that Abigail's mother had passed along to Nabby as well. Women passed down wisdom, advice, and practical skills to their daughters and granddaughters.

3. Why do you think Abigail shifted from writing to John about "your" affairs on the farm to, instead, referring to the daily business of running the household and managing decisions as "our" affairs?

Answers will vary, but students should understand that Abigail was taking on more responsibility for decisions, financial affairs, and day-to-day management of the farm than had been typical and had grown to think of these affairs as part of her own concern, and not just John's business that she was managing in his absence.

4. How were women's rights under English law influenced by marriage?

Only those who were not dependent on others were thought to have rights. Married women were dependent upon their husbands, so they did not have the same rights that men had.

Activities

Activity 1: Exploring Primary Sources

In this activity, your child will consider a letter between John and Abigail Adams that is quoted in Chapter 10 of today's reading. In Option 1, he will read the full text of the letter, take notes on its contents, and then answer some questions about how the author made use of the letter in the biography and about the other ways in which the letter might have been used. In Option 2, your child will just select one of the letters and read through it while thinking about the categories historians use to analyze a primary source. You could also discuss the questions together, working through them one at a time as you look through the letter. The first option is more complex, requiring that your child think like a historian to discover ways that a letter could be used in historical analysis. In Option 2, your child will walk through several steps of analyzing a primary source — this option may be best if you are short on time or if you think your child could benefit from a step-by-step approach to learning document analysis.

Option 1: Exploring Primary Sources

In this activity, your child will compare his own thoughts on the letter he chose to the ways in which the author used that same letter. He will read the full text of the letter, take notes on its contents, and then answer some questions about how the author made use of the letter in the biography and about the other ways in which the letter might have been used. Your child's answers to the questions on the activity page may vary depending on the letter, his own creative ideas about what other topics the letter could be used to illuminate, or his thoughts on the other ways the author might have used the letter as a source. He might, for example, mention that the "Remember the Ladies" letter also mentions fears of smallpox, planting of crops, the sense of peace as displaced people returned to their homes, illness in the family, and the making of soap and saltpeter among other things, and so it's possible that the letter could be used as a source of evidence for discussing any of those topics and more!

Option 2: Analyzing Historical Documents

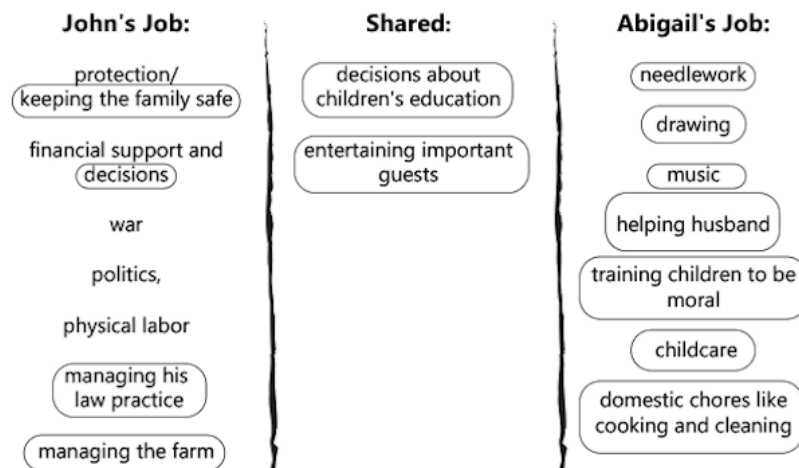
In this option, your child will just select one of the letters and read through it while thinking about the categories of analysis and mentally answering the questions presented in this activity option. You could also discuss the questions together, working through them one at a time as you look through the letter. This would be a great way for you to check your child's understanding of the historical document and having some fun sharing your own historical insights!

Activity 2: Men's and Women's Roles

This activity focuses on the roles of men and women, especially during the time when Abigail Adams lived. In Option 1, your child will consider the roles of men and women at the time of the revolution, and in Option 2, your child will interview parents to see how household responsibilities are divided in your own family. Read over the options together and allow your child to choose the one that he would like to complete.

Option 1: Expectations and Realities

In this activity, your child will explore the duties of John and Abigail Adams and the ways that those roles shifted when John was away on legal or political business. Abigail wound up shouldering much of the burden of household management, not only fulfilling her own duties but also managing many things that were usually a man's job. Answers may vary, but the answer key provides possible answers. For the last question, your child may believe that shouldering John's responsibilities may have given Abigail confidence in women's abilities to manage the affairs of men, or he may have felt that Abigail believed that taking on so much of what would normally be John's jobs had given her the right to consider the affairs of the household "theirs" instead of "his" and perhaps also to demand more equal treatment.

Answer KeyOption 2: Then and Now

In this activity, your child explored the division of household labor in a two-parent household. If your family is a one-parent family, you may discuss your own parents' division of labor or invite your child to talk to someone else about the division of labor in his or her family. This activity may provide a great opportunity to talk to your child about all of the responsibilities that must be attended to in running a household and about the ways in which adults can share those responsibilities equitably.

Wrapping Up**Questions to Discuss**

- After Abigail Adams's mother died, she hoped that her own daughter, Nabby, would remember the influence of her grandmother in her life well into adulthood. What lessons have you learned from your grandparents or other elders in your family?

- How can readers be sure that an author is using a primary source thoughtfully? (In order to have a clear sense of the appropriateness of the use of a source, readers need to go to the primary source themselves. Your child may have discovered this in today's Activity 1. Emphasize with your child that nonfiction books are written about true events and are factually based, but they are still written by human beings who may have particular interests, agendas, or biases that will lead them to interpret evidence in different ways. An author interested in women's roles in society may read a letter very differently from an author whose primary interest is in colonial era medicine or in the political ideas of John Adams, for example.)
- Did Abigail Adams advocate that women and men to be treated exactly the same in society? (No. She wanted women to have access to legal protections and rights that would protect them from abusive husbands and suggested that women shouldn't have to follow laws in which they had no part in approving, but she did not suggest that women and men should have identical political or economic roles. She still viewed marriage and motherhood as women's primary roles, and the private sphere of home and family -- not the public sphere of work and politics -- as the most suitable place for them to contribute to society.)

Things to Review

- Review your child's responses to the questions about the day's reading.
- Review your child's response to the letters between Abigail and John Adams in Activity 1.
- Review your child's activity page about women's roles from Activity 2.