

PBS Lesson Series

ELA: Grade 7, Lesson 9, *John and Abigail Adams*

Lesson Focus: Continue to learn more about the relationship between John and Abigail Adams and their attitudes toward men and women by reading their letters to one another.

Practice Focus: To think about attitudes toward gender through the eyes of John and Abigail Adams in 1776

Objective: Students will understand letters and the relationship between and John and Abigail Adams and understand the historical context around the letters.

Academic Vocabulary: coarse, repeal, latitude

TN Standards: 7.RL.KID.1, 7.RL.KID.2, 7.RL.CS.4, 7.RL.CS.5, 7.L.VAU.5

Teacher Materials:

- Letters packet

Student Materials:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Hard surface to write on
- Notes from previous lesson if possible

Teacher Do	Students Do
<p>Opening (1 min)</p> <p>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today’s lesson is for all our 7th graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the 4th in this series.</p> <p>My name is ____ and I’m a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools. I’m so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</p> <p>If you didn’t see our previous lesson, you can find it at www.tn.gov/education. You can still tune in to today’s lesson if you haven’t seen any of our others. But it might be more fun if you first go back and watch our other lessons, since today we’ll be talking about things we learned previously.</p> <p>Today we will be learning about John Adams and his wife Abigail. We’ll also think a little more about the context in which these letters were written. Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Pencil• Some paper• A hard surface to write on• And your notes from the last lesson, if you were able to watch. If not, that’s ok. We’re going to review what we covered in the last lesson and you can begin your notes with this lesson.	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>

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Ok, let's begin!	
Intro (2 minutes) The last 7th grade virtual classroom covered a little bit of the background on Abigail and her husband John. We also read a letter from Abigail to John. As we took the letter line by line, we found out some pretty interesting things about Abigail. Let's start, though, with the historical background we covered. John Adams was a part of the committee that worked on revising the Declaration of Independence before it was voted upon and passed. We also found out he was the 2nd President of the United States. Obviously, he had plenty of power in the country. [long pause] He was married to a woman named Abigail. They were completely in love with each other and were married for 50 years. We know about their love for one another, and more, because of letters we have access to that they wrote back and forth. We read one of those letters from Abigail in our previous lesson. [long pause] We found out in that letter, dated 4 months before the Declaration of Independence was voted upon, that Abigail was a very strong women with very strong opinions about what should be made law in the new country. She asked her husband to remember women should be thought of as friends and not as just empty containers walking around. She also threatened that if women weren't remembered as the document was being written, there could be a revolt from the women of the country. So, I don't know about you, but I'd say John better take her letter seriously. Today, we're going to find out if he did. [To introduce today's lesson, the teacher says:] Today our goal is to read and understand John's letter. We'll then look at both John's letter and Abigail's letter in the context of the time period. We will begin with me showing you what that looks like, and then there will be time for you	<p>Students recall key concepts, vocabulary, and information from the previous lesson and reflect on and evaluate the independent work they completed after that lesson.</p> <p>Students prepare to follow the gradual-release trajectory, understanding they will be doing more listening at first and more "doing" toward the end of the lesson.</p>

<p>to practice on your own with my support. Finally, I will assign you independent work you can complete after the video ends.</p>	
<p>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud (7 minutes) Today we're going to read John Adams' response to his wife Abigail's letter. I think you'll find while he totally understands her feelings, he also works to remind her that he has a whole country to think of. We'll chat about that in a few minutes. Before we start, I want to remind you about taking notes. For those of you who watched the previous lesson, just continue to take notes as you have been. If you didn't have a chance to watch the previous lesson, don't worry. I'm going to go over how to take your notes in a few minutes. First, let's read John's letter to Abigail to get a feel for what he is saying.</p> <p>[teacher reads letter in entirety]</p> <p>April 14, 1776</p> <p>As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government everywhere. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient—that schools and Colledges were grown <u>turbulent</u>—that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew <u>insolent</u> to their Masters.</p> <p>But your Letter was the first <u>Intimation</u> that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented. —This is rather too coarse a Compliment but you are so saucy, I wont blot it out.</p> <p>Depend upon it, We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems. Altho 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 <u>obliged</u> 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 <u>Despotism of the Peticoat</u>, I hope General Washington, and all our brave Heroes would fight. I am sure every good Politician would plot, as long he would against <u>Despotism, Empire, Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, or Ochlocracy</u>. —</p> <p><i>Note: The spelling and language have not been changed from the original letter.</i></p>	<p>Students follow along, comprehending the text. They use teacher think-alouds and tips (e.g., definitions of words) to support their comprehension, and they think or write as directed in response to prompts and questions.</p>

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<p>Alright, there is a lot there, but just like before we'll take it a couple of lines at a time until we fully understand what he's saying.</p> <p>First, let's talk about taking notes.</p> <p>[teacher models on chart paper/white board while discussing how to do it]</p> <p>Since this letter is going to be from John, I will write at the top of my paper "Letter from John." As we talk about the lines in this letter, I will write down the line number and then write down what we talk about. We'll be using these notes later. Let me show you what I mean.</p> <p>[teacher projects John's letter]</p> <p>I'm thinking the date is pretty important for a couple of reasons, so I look at the date and notice it was written in April. I'm going to write down line 2 and something like "letter written April 14, 1776". Then I'm going to ask myself what's so important about that date. The first reason it's important is because it was written before the Declaration of Independence was finalized. Therefore, John was still thinking about things that would be included in the Declaration.</p> <p>[teacher writes notes]</p> <p>I'm going to write in my notes, "letter was written before the Declaration of Independence."</p> <p>Then I remembered Abigail's letter was written on March 31st. Abigail's letter took almost 15 days to get to John.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why? <p>Well, remember there was no US Postal Service or Amazon, so communication was very slow.</p> <p>[teacher writes in notes]</p> <p>I think I'm going to add into my notes the letter took 15 days to arrive.</p> <p>Alright, got it? Awesome. Let's dive into this letter then.</p>	<p>Students will practice taking notes</p>
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<p>Guided Practice (16 minutes)</p> <p>[teacher reads lines 4 to 5.5]</p> <p>As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government everywhere.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wow, he says he cannot but laugh at the letter. Do you think he's taking Abigail's letter seriously? <p>It's a little confusing since he uses "cannot" and "but" right next to each other, which sounds like he didn't laugh. However, the line is just really abbreviated version of "he cannot do anything but laugh at the letter," which gives this a whole different meaning! He absolute laughed at her – he couldn't help it! Listen to the next line again.</p> <p>[teacher rereads]</p> <p>We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government everywhere.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you think John and the other representatives have been receiving?• How do you know? <p>Awesome, yes. He and others have been receiving a lot of letters about what should and shouldn't be law, and that people who don't get their way will cause an uprising. I found it in line 5 where it says "our struggle has loosened the bands of government everywhere."</p> <p>So, let me ask again.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you think that John is taking Abigail's letter seriously? <p>I totally agree. I think that he is taking Abigail seriously.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Then why would he say he cannot but laugh? <p>Correct! He's been getting so many letters like hers, he finds it funny that he's just received one more, and from his wife none the less. However, that doesn't mean he's taking her letter less seriously.</p>	<p>Students follow along and think and act as instructed, gradually gaining confidence and competence.</p> <p>Students will take notes based on questions that are asked.</p>
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- In fact, knowing what you know about their relationship, how seriously do you think he would take her letter?

Oh yes. Because they are so close, and he considers her a friend, her words would carry quite a bit of weight.

[teacher model]

Remember to keep taking notes. So, here I might write lines 4 and 5. Even though John says he laughs, he still respects his wife's words.

Good job! Let's go on.

[teacher continues reading lines 5.5-8]

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.

These two lines refer to the idea "that bands of government have been loosened." Before I ask you my next question, let's think about two vocabulary words. The first one is turbulent. I'll model how I use context clues to figure out a close enough meaning.

[teacher models]

I'm going to look before and after the word to see if there is anything that might help me to understand it. I see disobedient. Well, I know what that is. It says "children and apprentices were disobedient" which isn't good, so that must mean something at schools and colleges isn't good either. I'm going to look at the next line. "Indians slighted their guardians." I'm not sure what slighted means either, but I'm seeing a pattern of stuff that doesn't seem good going on. For now, I'm going to think turbulent is something that is not good. As I continue to read, I come across the word insolent. I have to look that one up. Insolent means "showing a lack of respect," so I'm close enough. Turbulent means something not so good.

Now I'm going to reread the passage inserting the definitions that I've either looked up or tried to figure out in context. Here it goes.

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<p>[teacher rereads]</p> <p>That Children and Apprentices were disobedient—that schools and Colleges were not doing something good—that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew disrespectful to their Masters. Now let's try to answer a couple of questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• First, what is John saying is happening around the country with all sorts of people groups? <p>Yes! Everyone is rising up and wanting rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• So why does John find Abigail's letter a little amusing now? <p>You got it. Now, on top of every other group that wants some kind of rights in the new country, women do too.</p> <p>[pause]</p> <p>You're doing a great job! Let's keep going!</p> <p>[teacher reads lines 10-11.5)</p> <p>But your Letter was the first <u>Intimation</u> that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented.</p> <p>[pause]</p> <p>Hmmm, so there's a word there we might not know. Intimation means a hint. So, John says Abigail's letter was his first hint another tribe might be wanting to have a say too.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is the other tribe he is talking about? <p>Well, he could be talking about his wife here, but I'm focusing on the word tribe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When you think of the word tribe, do you think in terms of singular or plural? <p>Good, definitely plural.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• So who is the tribe he is talking about?	
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Great! The tribe here is women. Now women want to have a say too.

Here is the next line. Listen and think about the tone of the line. Remember we discussed tone in a previous lesson with Poe. It's the attitude an author takes toward what he or she is writing about.

[read]

This is rather too coarse a Compliment but you are so saucy, I wont blot it out.

The compliment he's talking about is referring to her and the other women as a tribe.

- Why would John say that calling them a tribe is too coarse or rough?

Good, we often think of American Indians when we hear the word, "tribe." Do you remember what Americans at this time thought of American Indian tribes? [Pause.] Yes, they lived very differently from each other and sometimes and conflicts, and the Americans often thought they were more advanced and better than the American Indians. American Indians were thought of as primitive, so referring to Abigail and other women as a tribe would be far from a compliment. John didn't want to say that women were primitive or too simple.

Let's look at the word saucy. John calls Abigail saucy, meaning that she is very bold.

- Why would John say comparing her to a tribe might be a little harsh, but he's going to say it because she's being really bold right now?

I would agree! John doesn't seem to be too happy with her because of her boldness, so he's going to admit the word tribe might be a little harsh, but she should not be so bold either.

- Now for our tone question. What do you think about the tone in these lines?

Awesome! You got it. I think it might be a little angry. Great job!

Commented [MM1]: Is this right?

Commented [PN2R1]: Many of the significant tribes fought alongside the British and Loyalists during the Revolutionary War. I don't have the text, so I'm not sure if this letter was written during the war or when John Adams was president. It would change the wording a bit (colonists instead of Americans). It's not wrong to say that American Indians were viewed as "savages" and inferior. Does this change work for you?

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[teacher reads lines 14-16.5]

Depend upon it, We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems. Altho they are in full Force, you know they are little more than Theory. We dare not exert our Power in its full Latitude.

Repeal means to take back and Masculine means having qualities of a man. I'm going to reread this again, this time paying attention to what John is saying about giving women more rights.

[teacher reads again]

Depend upon it, We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems. Altho they are in full Force, you know they are little more than Theory. We dare not exert our Power in its full Latitude.

- What is John saying in line 14?

Wow, right? He basically says there is no way the new laws are going to roll back the current system that puts men at the top. Now remember, this is a different time period from present day. We'll touch more on that in our final lesson this week.

Then in line 15, he says "We dare not exert our power in its full latitude"

- Does he think they are using all of the power as men already?

Nope. You're right. He thinks as men, they really have a lot more power than they are currently using, and they probably won't use any more.

Again, I know it's easy to not like John here, but remember this is a different time period.

In fact listen to what he says next.

[teacher reads]

We are obliged to go fair, and softly, and in Practice you know We are the subjects. We have only the Name of Masters...

- Does John really think men have as much power as he says?

You're right, he says "we have only the *name* of masters".

- What is the tone he takes toward Abigail now?

Correct, he seems to soften a little here doesn't he? He explains himself a little better in the next line.

[teacher reads line 17 to the end]

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. I am sure every good Politician would plot, as long he would against Despotism, Empire, Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, or Ochlocracy.

Again, there are a couple of vocabulary words I had to look up. Despotism is the complete rule of something and a petticoat is a piece of clothing women would wear under their dresses.

- How does the fact that John says he has to be careful not to give up complete control to women, justify saying he has to at least keep up the appearance that men are in charge?

Good, in fact it would almost be like only women could have a say in government. The one thing he feels very strongly about is whatever the new leaders choose for the new government, he would hope any good politician would fight against...

[teacher reads lines 20 and 21]

Despotism, Empire, Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, or Ochlocracy.

- Using your context clues and knowing what Despotism is, what do you think John says any good politician should fight against?

Awesome! Any form of government that has one or only a few people with complete control over everyone else. Great job!

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• With all of that knowledge now, why do you think John says that he hears his wife and her concerns, but he can't promise that only women will be thought of when crafting new laws? <p>You got it! That would make women deciding the laws for everyone. The very thing he and other politicians are fighting against.</p> <p>Wow! You did a great job today! See how important it is to be able to apply reading strategies to historical documents? The more you learn about how to be a better reader, the easier it is to read really tough documents like the one we just spent time on. I'm very proud of you!</p>	
<p>Independent Work (30 seconds)</p> <p>[teacher writes assignment on chart paper]</p> <p>Now I'd like you to try something for me. Please go back over the notes you took today. Find a spot in John's letter that you highly agree or disagree with. Name that spot and write a paragraph to explain your opinion.</p> <p>You were awesome today!</p>	<p>Student finds a part of John's letter they high agree or disagree with. They name the spot and write a paragraph to explain their feelings.</p>
<p>Closing (30 seconds)</p> <p>I enjoyed working on John Adams' letter with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee's At Home Learning Series! Bye!</p>	