

ELA: Grade 7, Lesson 8, *John and Abigail Adams*

Lesson Focus: Learn more about the relationship and attitudes toward men and women between John and Abigail Adams 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 how they explain the relationship between and John and Abigail Adams.

Academic Vocabulary: tyrants, impunity, intimation

TN Standards: 7.RI.KID.1, 7.RI.KID.2, 7.RI.KID.3, 7.RI.CS.4, 7.RI.CS.5, 7.L.VAU.5

Teacher Materials:

- Copy of “An Introduction to the correspondence between John and Abigail Adams”
- Copy of John and Abigail Adams’ letters
- White board or Poster paper

Student Materials:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Hard surface to write on

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 third in this week’s 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 and Abigail Adams!</p> <p>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 <p>Ok, let’s begin!</p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>

<p>Intro (5:00)</p> <p>This week, our 7th grade lessons have been focused on something that we all see bloom in the spring. If you are new to the lessons, I'll let you try to guess what that is. If you've been watching, shhhhhhh. So what blooms in the Spring, and you can find in literature from all over the world? Daffodils? Good answer, but no. Roses, hmmm...you're getting close. Sometimes this has to do with roses. Oh, alright. I'll just tell you. It's love. Love seems to always bloom in the Spring. In our last two lessons we looked at love through the eyes of one of America's great authors, Edgar Allen Poe. Today, we're lucky enough to read letters between a couple that was truly in love. So much so that they were together for over 50 years. They weren't just any couple, they were one of America's original power couples. Can you guess who? Nope, not Beyonce and Jay-Z. We need to go a little farther back into time. We're going to read the letters of John and Abigail Adams.</p> <p>Today our goal is to read and understand a letter from Abigail Adams to her husband. We will begin with me showing you what that looks like, and then there will be time for you to practice on your own with my support. Finally, I will assign you independent work you can complete after the video ends.</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>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud (7:00)</p> <p>Alright, let's get started. So, before we actually read the letter, we have to figure out who this John and Abigail Adams were right? We'll do that in a couple of ways. First, I'm going to share a few facts with you. John Adams was one of our nation's Founding Fathers. In fact he was involved in the committee that was a part of revising our Declaration of Independence after Thomas Jefferson wrote it. He also became the country's second president. Do you see what I mean about power couple?</p> <p>The other way we can gain some background knowledge is to read this short piece about the couple.</p> <p>[teacher will project "An Introduction to the correspondence between John and Abigail Adams"]</p> <p>I'm going to read this aloud with you. I'll read straight through it the first time. Then we'll go back and talk about it. Be sure to follow along.</p> <p>An Introduction to the correspondence between John and Abigail Adams</p>	<p>Students follow along, comprehending the text.</p>

<p>The roughly 1200 letters of correspondence between John and Abigail Adams traces one of the most fascinating, romantic, and inspirational partnerships in American history. He was her “Lysander” (a famous Greek military hero) and she was his “Miss Adorable.” More importantly, they were both each other’s “Dearest Friend.”</p> <p>John and Abigail were incredibly close and their correspondence proves it. The letters, written over 50 years of marriage, reveal a marriage that was full of affection, intimacy, mutual respect, humor, and love.</p> <p>Additionally, these exchanges provide readers with a unique window into the founding of the United States and into the lives of two of its founders. Not only was Abigail John Adams’ wife and true love, she was his intellectual equal and they shared a common outlook on the world.</p> <p>Their letters record conversations about the American independence and the Revolutionary War, the rights of women and the immorality of slavery. She was his primary political advisor and managed their household when he was often away from home.</p> <p>Following the end of his political career, John and Abigail retired together at their home in Massachusetts. No more letters were written.</p> <p>They were truly partners, weren’t they? It sounds like she had a bigger impact on the country than anyone at the time knew.</p>	
<p>Guided Practice (20:00)</p> <p>Now, let’s reread it, but this time stop to think about a few things.</p> <p>An Introduction to the correspondence between John and Abigail Adams</p> <p>[read first 5 lines]</p> <p>The roughly 1200 letters of correspondence between John and Abigail Adams traces one of the most fascinating, romantic, and inspirational partnerships in American history. He was her “Lysander” (a famous Greek military hero) and she was his “Miss Adorable.” More importantly, they were both each other’s “Dearest Friend.”</p> <p>[pause]</p>	<p>Students follow along and think and act as instructed, gradually gaining confidence and competence.</p>

Wow, 1200 letters? I know that sounds like a lot, but when you really think about how many texts most people send in one day, 1200 letters over a lifetime really doesn't seem like that much does it? Anyway, notice that they even had cute little names for each other.

- **What were they?**

[pause]

Yes, Lysander and Miss Adorable. Awwwww. I think the most important part of this paragraph though says they were each other's dearest friend. They really were truly in love. Let's go on.

[teacher reads lines 6-9.5]

John and Abigail were incredibly close and their correspondence proves it. The letters, written over 50 years of marriage, reveal a marriage that was full of affection, intimacy, mutual respect, humor, and love. Additionally, these exchanges provide readers with a unique window into the founding of the United States and into the lives of two of its founders.

Obviously then, these letter follow their whole lives together.

- **But, they're just not a stack of love letters are they?**
- **By reading these letters what can we really learn more about?**

Exactly! These letters can give us insight into how the country was founded. Remember, as a woman, Abigail couldn't physically be a part of shaping the Declaration of Independence, but she certainly could influence it through her husband. A lot of her political thoughts are in her letters to John. Let's read on.

[teacher reads lines 9.5-13]

Not only was Abigail John Adams' wife and true love, she was his intellectual equal and they shared a common outlook on the world. Their letters record conversations about the American independence and the Revolutionary War, the rights of women and the immorality of slavery. She was as

[student answers question]

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[student answers question]

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his primary political advisor and managed their household when he was often away from home.

This is a great place to talk about why it is so important to slow down and try to figure out the meaning of words when we don't know them. Let's look at the word Intellectual. I looked up intellect and it means "the ability to reason and understand."

- If that's the definition, then what is meant by "Abigail was John's intellectual equal?"

Perfect, I'm thinking if they are equal and intellect is being able to reason and understand well, then I'm coming to the conclusion John was smart, but Abigail was just as smart as he was.

I have one more thing to point out before we dive into the letters today. That is, the passage says she was his primary political advisor.

- What do you think is meant by that?

Yes, if primary means something like first, then Abigail was the first person that John would listen to before making a political decision. Great job!

Finally,

[teacher reads lines 14-15]

Following the end of his political career, John and Abigail retired together at their home in Massachusetts. No more letters were written.

Alright, speaking of letters, I just happen to have one today from Abigail to John. Like before, I'm going to read the entire letter first so that you can get a feel for it. Then we'll dive a little more deeply into it today to figure out just what they are saying. We'll revisit them in our next time together and discuss more deeply the political messages in them. Ready?

[teacher reads Abigail's letter]

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 not 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 imitation of the Supream Being make use of that power only for our happiness.

Note: The spelling and language have not been changed from the original letters.

Whew, alright. So let's work on this a few lines at a time. It will help you to take out a piece of paper and pencil and take a few notes as we go.

[teacher models on chart paper/white board]

Please write at the top of your paper "Letter from Abigail." As we talk about the lines in this letter, I would 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.

[Teacher reads]

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams
March 31, 1776

I have a couple of quick questions here.

- First, who is this letter from?

[pause after asking each question to allow students time to write answers]

I would write "line 1" and then "Letter from Abigail".

Student will begin to take notes here as questions are asked.

[Teacher writes]

- Also, what is the date on this letter, and why is that important?

It's dated March 31, 1776.

- If the United States' official date of independence is in July of 1776, what does that tell us about when this letter was written?

Awesome! I would write [teacher writes] "line two: Letter was written before the Declaration of Independence was official."

So when I ask questions, it will really help you to write a quick answer on your sheet. Ready?

Let's read on.

[teacher reads lines 4-7]

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.

Now in your notes write lines 4-7

[teacher demonstrates]

Anything we talk about here should probably be written in this section. Here we go.

- Abigail Adams is expressing her hope that the 2nd Continental Congress will declare American independence from Great Britain. What is she hoping for in this declaration? I'll give you a hint. There are two things.

You got it! The first thing that she is hoping for is in line 6. That is he makes sure the ladies are remembered as it is being written. The second thing is also in line 6. That is, the writers will think about women's need more than those men that have gone before.

Let's read the next few lines.

[teacher reads lines 7.5-8.5]

Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. Now, before I ask my next question, look at the word tyrant. I'm going to try to figure out the word in context. So, if I look before the word, I see unlimited power. Then I read the sentence with the tyrant in it.

[teacher reads with a think aloud]

Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. Hmm...if I go back to the first part of the line and see unlimited power, men could be this. I'm guessing that the word means pushy or bossy.

- If that's the case, what is Abigail worried about if husbands are given unlimited power?

Awesome. She is very afraid that men could take advantage of having so much power. She is warning John to make sure powers are divided more equally.

I think these next lines show just how strong of a person Abigail was. Listen to this.

[teacher reads lines 8.5-11]

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.

Let's first look at the word foment. Foment simply means to start.

- If foment is start, then what is Abigail warning her husband could happen if women aren't remembered while writing the new laws?

Uh oh. She is saying if women don't feel like they are being remembered, they might start a rebellion and even not obey the laws that are written.

Let's read the next two lines.

[read lines 13-15]

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of not 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.

- According to Abigail, what does she say will allow a man to be happy in a relationship?

Sure. Instead of being the boss in the relationship, be more like a friend with your wife. That will make you a much happier man.

[read lines 15.5-17.5]

Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity.

- Here is an interesting twist. According to this line, do you think she thinks all men are bossy and want to boss their wives around?

I think you're right. She makes sure her husband understands she's not grouping all men into this, but...

- What makes you think all men aren't being grouped into this thinking based on the line we just read?

Right again! She mentions the words "vicious and Lawless". Therefore, she also knows there are men out there that would take advantage of the laws if written without women in mind to consider themselves over their wife.

In fact, here's what she goes on to say.

[read lines 17.5-18.5]

Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex.

So, let me help you again with a couple of these words. I looked up abhor and vassals. Abhor means hate, and vassals is an empty container. So now I'm going to go back and reread with words that I know replacing the ones I didn't.

[teacher rereads]

<p>Men of Sense in all Ages hate those customs which treat us only as the empty containers of your sex.</p> <p>That might make it a little easier right? Always take the time to look up words you don't know.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is she saying about men of sense or smart men? <p>You got it! Smart men hate any laws or customs that look at women as just empty containers and not thinking people. Pretty powerful huh? Let's finish Abigail's letter.</p> <p>[Read lines 18.5-end]</p> <p>Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Supream Being make use of that power only for our happiness.</p> <p>There is another vocab word I had to look up- providence. Providence means under the care of God. Let's use our replacement strategy to get the real meaning.</p> <p>[teacher reads]</p> <p>Regard us then as Beings placed by the care of God under your protection and in imitation of the Supream Being make use of that power only for our happiness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does that help?• So, if she says treat us as if we were placed into your protection by God and imitate God, how is she saying they should use their power? <p>You got it again! Men's power should be used to be sure that their wives are happy.</p> <p>Wow, she was a strong woman with strong ideas huh? How awesome is that? We're going to stop there today. The next time we meet, we're going to see how her husband John responds to her letter.</p>	
<p><u>Independent Work</u> (3:00)</p> <p>[teacher will write assignment on chart paper]</p> <p>I'd like you to take a few minutes before we meet again and go over your notes about our discussion of the letter from Abigail.</p>	<p>Students will write back to Abigail discussing their feelings about her letter to John.</p>

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<p>Then write a letter back to Abigail as if you are writing as John. Next time, we'll compare your letter and John's letter to Abigail to see if you have any of the same thoughts!</p>	
<p><u>Closing</u> (1 min) I enjoyed working on the letter from Abigail Adams 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>	