

*Abigail's War:  
The American Revolution  
through the Eyes of  
Abigail Adams*

*A Primary Source-Based Activity Book  
for Elementary-School-Age Children*

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<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/index.html>**

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## *Abigail's Life*

Abigail Smith was born on November 11, 1744, in Weymouth, Massachusetts. As a girl, Abigail never went to school, but she did learn to read and write. She loved to read, especially Shakespeare and certain authors of her time.

On October 25, 1764, Abigail married John Adams. Abigail and John had six children, but only four of them lived to be adults. John was a lawyer, and he moved back and forth between Boston and Braintree, depending on where he needed to be to do his job. John later became a member of the Continental Congress, and he was also a diplomatic envoy to several countries in Europe.

Because of John's jobs as a lawyer and government official, he often had to travel long distances and be away from home for long periods of time (months, and even years!). With John away from home so much, Abigail was responsible not only for raising her children but also for managing the family farm, running the household, keeping an eye on tenants (people who lived on land owned by the Adams family), and taking care of many extended family members! Even though Abigail's days were always busy from start to finish, she still found time at the end of the day to write letters to her husband, John. Abigail told John about their children, the family budget, gossip about friends and neighbors, and events taking place in the colony. Many of the letters Abigail and John wrote to one another have been saved, and this is one reason we know so much about the daily lives of the Adams family.

Abigail also witnessed many of the events of the Revolutionary War, including the Battle of Bunker Hill. She and her son John Quincy watched the battle from the top of a nearby hill. Abigail saw soldiers march through her town on a regular basis, and she struggled to provide food and clothes for her family during the difficult war years. She described many of these events in her letters to John. In this unit, we will be taking a closer look at some of Abigail's letters from the war years as well as learning more about her daily life in 1770s Massachusetts.

### **Additional Information**

In 1783, John Adams helped negotiate the peace treaty that finally ended the war between the United States and Great Britain. For eight years he was vice president under president George Washington, and in 1797 he became the second president of the United States. Abigail and John were the first president and first lady to live in the White House in Washington, D.C. After John's term as president was over, he and Abigail moved back to Massachusetts. Abigail died on October 28, 1818, at the age of seventy-three; John died on July 4, 1826 (the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence), at the age of ninety.

To learn more about the Adams family, visit the Massachusetts Historical Society's website, which includes a web page entitled, "Adams Biographical Sketches," written by the Adams Papers editorial project, <http://www.masshist.org/adams/biographical.cfm>

*What Is a Primary Source?*

## Examples of Primary-Source Documents

*From a letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, October 18, 1780. In this excerpt, Abigail describes the story of Benedict Arnold, a Continental soldier who committed treason against America during the Revolutionary War.*

As to politicks if I begin I shall not know where to end, yet I must tell you of a horrid plot, just ready to have been sprung, which would have given us a shock indeed. Arnold, you know him unprincipald as the . . . He missirable wretch had concerted a plan to give up West point where he commanded with its dependancies, into the hands of the Enemy. He had made returns of every important matter to them; with a plan (but a little before concerted, between the General officers) and State of the Army. Major Andry was the person upon whom these papers were found. An officer in the British Army, sensible, bold, and enterprizing, universally beloved by them, & regreated with many tears – he was young & very accomplished, but taken in our Camp as a Spy, he was tried, condemned, and Executed. Arnold upon the first allarm that Andry was taken, conveyd himself on Board a ship of war & deserted to the Enemy.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 18 October 1780 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

*From a 1775 broadside sent to Philadelphia that describes the events of the Battle of Bunker Hill.*

By an Express arrived at Philadelphia on Saturday evening, last we have the following account of the battle at Charlestown, on Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, Instant.

On Friday night, the 17<sup>th</sup> Instant, fifteen hundred of the Provincials went to Bunker's-Hill, in order to intrench there, and continued intrenching till Saturday ten o'clock, when 2000 Regulars marched out of Boston, landed in Charlestown, and plundering it of all its valuable effects, set fire to it in ten different places at once.

Broadside, *By An Express Arrived at Philadelphia on Saturday Evening ...*, Lancaster: printed by Francis Bailey, June 26th 1775 [electronic edition]. "*The Decisive Day Has Come*": *The Battle of Bunker Hill*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/bh/broadside.html>.











*The Battle of  
Bunker Hill*

# The Battle of Bunker Hill

The Battle of Bunker Hill took place on Saturday, June 17, 1775, and it did NOT take place on Bunker Hill!! The battle actually took place on Breed's Hill, which is a smaller hill near Bunker Hill. A group of no more than 1,000–1,500 patriot soldiers attempted to defend the hill against more than 2,000 British regulars.

The patriot troops, under the leadership of William Prescott, among others, set up their lines of defense at the top of Breed's Hill. The British, led by Generals William Howe, Henry Clinton, and John Burgoyne, launched a frontal assault by marching their lines up the hill toward the patriots. Some think that the British made a tactical error by choosing to march on the patriots from the front when they could have attacked by sea from the rear. The British charged up Breed's Hill three times. The first two times they were forced to retreat as the patriots fired upon them. By the third assault, however, the patriots had run out of ammunition. A small group of patriots remained on the hill, fighting off the British with rocks, gun parts, and whatever else they could find, while the majority of the soldiers retreated down the back of the hill. The battle lasted about two and one-half hours, and by the end more than 1,000 British troops were killed or wounded and one-third of the patriots were killed, wounded, or captured.

Even though the patriots lost at Bunker Hill, many were proud of the colonials' performance. The Battle of Bunker Hill proved that the patriot troops, who were for the most part inexperienced, poorly supplied, and not well organized, could hold their own against the well-trained, professional British regulars. After the battle, the British realized that they would not have an easy time fighting against the Americans! The Battle of Bunker Hill was also important because it showed the Americans that what they really needed was a single leader to take charge of the patriot troops and organize them into a powerful military force.

Abigail Adams, along with many of other local residents, watched the Battle of Bunker Hill unfold while she stood atop a hill, called Penn's Hill, near her home, which was about ten miles away from Charlestown. When she heard the first cannons on the morning of June 17, she took her son John Quincy with her to watch the fighting. The skies that day were sunny and clear, so people from miles away could see signs of what was happening on Breed's Hill. Abigail wrote about the events of that day in letters to her husband, John, who was in Philadelphia at the time. In this section, we will read part of the letter that she wrote on June 18, 1775, one day after the battle, but first we will read part of a letter written later that summer by William Prescott and sent to John Adams.

To learn more about the Battle of Bunker Hill, visit the Massachusetts Historical Society's website, which includes an on-line exhibition entitled "*The Decisive Day is Come*": *The Battle of Bunker Hill*." <http://www.masshist.org/bh/>

## Letter from William Prescott to John Adams

*Colonel William Prescott wrote to John Adams to describe the Battle of Bunker Hill, in which he fought as a patriot.*

Camp at Cambridge August 25, 1775

Sir

I have recd. a Line from my Brother which informs me of your desire of a particular Account of the Action at Charlestown, it is not in my Power at present to give so minute an Account as I should choose being ordered to decamp and march to another Station.

On the 16 June in the Evening I recd. Orders to march to Breeds Hill in Charlestown with a party of about one thousand Men . . . We arrived at the Spot, the Lines were drawn by the Enginier and we began the Intrenchmant about 12, o Clock and plying the Work with all possible Expedition till Just before sun rising, when the enemy began a very heavy Canonading and Bombardment . . . The Enemy continuing an incessant Fire with their Artilary. About 2, o Clock in the afternoon on the seventeenth the Enemy began to land a northeasterly Point from the Fort . . . another party of the Enemy landed and fired the Town. . . . I commanded my Lieut Coll. Robinson & Majr. Woods Each with a detachment to flank the Enemy, who I have reason to think behaved with prudence and Courage.

I was now left with perhaps 150 Men in the Fort, the Enemy advanced and fired very hotly on the Fort and meeting with a Warm Reception there was a very smart firing on both sides, after a considerable Time finding our Amunition was almost spent I commanded a cessation till the Enemy advanced within 30 yards when we gave them such a hot fire, that they were obliged to retire nearly 150 yards before they could Rally and come again to the Attack. Our Amunition being nearly exhausted could keep up only a scattering Fire. The Enemy being numerous surrounded out [our] little Fort began to mount our Lines and enter the Fort with their Bayonets, we was obliged to retreat through them while they kept up as hot a fire as it was possible for them to make. We having very few Bayonets could make no resistance. We kept the fort about one hour and twenty Minutes after the Attack with small Arms.

William Prescott

Letter, William Prescott to John Adams, August 25, 1775 [electronic edition]. *"The Decisive Day Has Come": The Battle of Bunker Hill*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/bh/prescott.html>.

**Letter from William Prescott to John Adams,  
August 25, 1775**

Answer the following questions about William’s letter in complete, cursive sentences.

1. What is the date of this letter? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Why does William Prescott say that he is writing to John Adams? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. On June 16, 1775, how many men marched with Prescott to Breed’s Hill? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Prescott describes the enemy’s assault as “incessant Fire.” What does the word *incessant* mean? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. According to Prescott, how close (in yards) did the British get to the patriots? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Why did the patriots have to retreat? What were they running out of?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. How long were the patriots able to defend the fort from the British? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. How do you think the patriots felt when they had to retreat? Why do you think they felt that way?

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## Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams

*In this letter, Abigail writes about the Battle of Bunker Hill, which she watched from a hill near her home.*

Sunday June 18 1775

Dearest Friend

The Day; perhaps the decisive Day is come on which the fate of America depends. My bursting Heart must find vent at my pen. I have just heard that our dear Friend Dr. Warren is no more but fell gloriously fighting for his Country – saying better to die honourably in the field than ignominiously hang upon the Gallows. Great is our Loss. He has distinguished himself in every engagement, by his courage and fortitude, by animating the Soldiers & leading them on by his own example. A particular account of these dreadful, but I hope Glorious Days will be transmitted you, no doubt in the exactest manner.

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but the God of Israel is he that giveth strength & power unto his people. Trust in him at all times, ye people pour out your hearts before him. God is a refuge for us. – Charlestown is laid in ashes. The Battle began upon our intrenchments upon Bunkers Hill, a Saturday morning about 3 o'clock & has not ceased yet & tis now 3 o'clock Sabbath afternoon.

Tis expected they will come out over the Neck to night, & a dreadful Battle must ensue. Almighty God cover the heads of our Country men, & be a shield to our Dear Friends. How [many have] fallen we know not – the constant roar of the cannon is so [distressing] that we can not Eat, Drink or Sleep. May we be supported and sustained in the dreadful conflict. I shall tarry here till tis thought unsafe by my Friends, & then I have secured myself a retreat at your Brothers who has kindly offerd me part of his house. I cannot compose myself to write any further at present. I will add more as I hear further.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 18 – 20 June 1775 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

## **Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, June 18, 1775**

Answer the following questions about Abigail's letter in complete, cursive sentences.

1. What is the date of the letter? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Abigail is writing about the Battle of Bunker Hill. On what date did the battle take place?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Abigail writes, "My bursting Heart must find vent at my pen." What does it mean to have a bursting heart?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Abigail writes about the death of her good friend Dr. Warren. What are some of the adjectives and phrases that she uses to describe Dr. Warren and his actions?

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

5. How does Abigail describe the town of Charlestown?

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6. At what time does Abigail write that the battle began on Saturday?

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7. What does Abigail think of the “constant roar of the cannon”?

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8. Abigail describes the battle as both “dreadful” and “Glorious.” Why do you think she uses these two terms which have very different meanings? What is “dreadful” about the battle? What is “Glorious” about it?

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## **Put Yourself in Abigail's Shoes . . .**

Now that we have read the June 18, 1775, letter by Abigail Adams, it is time for you to put yourself in her shoes and imagine what it would have been like to be with Abigail on the day of the Battle of Bunker Hill. You may use what you know from reading Abigail's letter, as well as William Prescott's letter, and information from our social studies books. Follow the directions below to create a journal entry describing your own "experience" at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

You will be creating a one- to two-page journal entry from the point of view of a Massachusetts resident who sees the Battle of Bunker Hill from Penn's Hill in Braintree. Use the following questions as a guide for your writing. Use the graphic organizer provided by your teacher to organize your thoughts and write your notes/ideas on a separate piece of paper. You must use cursive when you write on your workbook pages!!

1. Create a character. Are you a man or a woman? A child or an adult? How old are you? Are you a farmer, a businessman, a soldier, or something else?
2. You are standing with Abigail Adams and her son on the top of Penn's Hill. What led you to the top of the hill? Did you hear the sounds of battle? Did someone tell you what was going on?
3. What do you see from your vantage point? What do you hear? What are the people around you saying and doing?
4. What are you feeling as you watch the battle unfold? Are you scared? Worried about your home? Your friends? Your children or your husband/wife?

5. As a patriot who supports the colonies in their fight for independence, how do you feel about the battle? Are you proud of the patriot soldiers? Why is the Battle of Bunker Hill so important to the patriot cause?
  
6. Do you have any other thoughts about the day and the impact it has had on you?

**\*\*Once you have planned your thoughts with a graphic organizer, you may begin writing on your workbook pages. If you run out of room, use white-lined paper and staple that sheet into your activity book when you are finished!\*\***





*Abigail's Economy:  
Shopping during the American  
Revolution*

# Money and the American Revolution

During wartime, countries often experience **inflation** and **currency devaluation**. **Inflation** occurs when prices of goods and services keep going up and up but most people aren't earning more money. When this happens, people can't buy certain items they used to be able to buy because prices have climbed but they don't have any more money than they did before. **Currency devaluation** often occurs with inflation. Currency that is devalued is money that is not worth as much as it used to be. For example, before a period of inflation, let's say a pound of chocolate costs \$1.00; with inflation, however, its price may rise to \$2.00. The one-dollar bill that used to be able to purchase the chocolate can no longer do so—it is not worth enough to pay for the chocolate. It has been **devalued**.

The American colonies went through a long period of inflation and currency devaluation during the Revolutionary War. Because British ships were blocking many harbors, the colonies had a hard time importing the goods they needed. As a result, merchants had to charge higher prices for the few goods they could get so they wouldn't lose too much money. For example, a pound of chocolate in 1776 may have cost twice as much as it did in 1773. Because of this inflation of prices, most colonists found that their money was worth less and less; it was becoming devalued. People often found it difficult to find and purchase necessary goods for their families.

During the Revolutionary War, many men from the colonies joined the army to fight against the British. They had to leave their jobs and their families behind. There were fewer farmers to plant crops, store owners to sell goods, and blacksmiths to shoe horses and make nails. Now alone, women like Abigail Adams had to support their families. They had to figure out how to purchase or get goods that were hard to find and expensive; they had to run farms and shops on their own, often without enough hired help; and they had to continue their regular work as caretakers. Such women became financial experts as they managed their families' budgets and business affairs during these difficult years. In this unit, we will learn first-hand about some of the economic struggles encountered by Abigail Adams during the war years, and we will put ourselves in her shoes as we take two shopping trips in the 1770s.

## The Currency of Colonial Massachusetts

During the years of the American Revolution, Massachusetts residents used the British system of currency. They did not have dollars, pennies, dimes, nickels, and quarters; instead, people like Abigail Adams used **pounds**, **shillings**, and **pence**. Pounds were worth the most, then shillings, and then pence. The symbol for a pound looks like this: £. Shillings are abbreviated as: s. Pence is the plural form of the word penny; in the eighteenth century it was abbreviated d. (for *denarius*, the Roman penny).

£1 (1 pound) = 20s. (20 shillings)  
 1s. (1 shilling) = 12d. (12 pence)

So:

$\begin{array}{r} \text{£ } 1 \quad 12 \text{ shillings, } 8 \text{ pence} \\ + \text{£ } 2 \quad 9 \text{ shillings, } 2 \text{ pence} \\ \hline \text{£ } 3 \quad 21 \text{ shillings, } 10 \text{ pence} \\ \text{OR } \text{£ } 4 \quad 1 \text{ shilling, } 10 \text{ pence} \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} \text{£ } 1 \quad 12\text{s.} \quad 8\text{d.} \\ \text{£ } 2 \quad 9\text{s.} \quad 2\text{d.} \\ \hline \text{£ } 3 \quad 21\text{s.} \quad 10\text{d.} \\ \text{£ } 4 \quad 1\text{s.} \quad 10\text{d.} \end{array}$
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Try these examples below:

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{£ } 4 \quad 8\text{s.} \quad 9\text{d.} \\ + \text{£ } 2 \quad 3\text{s.} \quad 5\text{d.} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{£ } 8 \quad 6\text{s.} \quad 2\text{d.} \\ + \quad \quad 17\text{s.} \quad 12\text{d.} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{£ } 6 \quad 17\text{s.} \\ + \text{£ } 1 \quad 7\text{s.} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{£ } 3 \quad 4\text{s.} \quad 5\text{d.} \\ + \text{£ } 2 \quad 8\text{s.} \quad 6\text{d.} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

## Abigail's Economy

In these **excerpts** from two of Abigail Adams's letters to her husband, John, Abigail writes about the prices of goods in town. As we read, see if you can make an observation about what seems to be happening to prices during the year 1777.

**From a letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams,  
April 20, 1777:**

There is a general cry against the Merchants, against monopolizers &c. who tis said have created a partial Scarcity. That a scarcity prevails of every article not only of Luxery, but even the necessaries of life is a certain fact. Every thing bears an exorbitant price. The act which for a while was in some measure regarded & stemed the torrent of oppression is now no more Heeded than if it had never been made; Indian Corn at 5 shillings, Rye 11 and 12 shillings, but none scarcely to be had even at that price, Beaf 8 pence, veal 6 pence & 8 pence, Butter 1 & 6 pence; Mutton none, Lamb none, pork none, Sugar mean Sugar £4 per hundred, Molasses none, cotton wool none, Rum N.E. 8 shillings per Gallon, Coffee 2 & 6 per pound, Chocolate 3 shillings.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 20 - 21 April 1777 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

**From a letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams,  
September 10, 1777:**

What can be done? Our money will soon be as useless as blank paper.... Butter is 3 shillings, cheeses 2, Mutton 18 pence, Beef 18 pence, Lamb 1 & 4 pence. Corn at no price, none to be had. Barly 8 shillings a Bushel, Rye none, sold only by way of Barter. Sugar 15 pounds per hundred, Coffe 10 shillings per pound, Molasses 24 per Gallon, Rum 28 ditto.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 10 September 1777 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

**A note about sugar:**

In these two letters, Abigail gives the price of sugar in "pounds [£] per hundred." The expression refers to the measurement *hundredweight*, or one hundred pounds. So, in Abigail's letters, "£4 per hundred" means that 100 pounds of sugar costs £4, and "15 pounds per hundred" means that 100 pounds of sugar costs £15. In both letters, Abigail is giving prices for "mean sugar," which is a form of sugar much like the brown sugar we know today. This type of sugar is less "refined," or less processed, than white sugar.

## Abigail's Economy, Part 2

Now that we have read two excerpts from Abigail's letters in 1777, let's take a closer look at how the prices of goods changed during that year.

	<u>April 1777</u>	<u>September 1777</u>
Sugar:	£4 per hundred	£15 per hundred
New England Rum:	8s. per gallon	24s. per gallon
Corn:	5s. per bushel	not available
Rye:	11–12s. per bushel	not available

1. In general, what happened to the prices of sugar and rum between April and September 1777?

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2. What happened to the prices of corn and rye?

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3. Two years later, in 1779, America was still at war. What do you think happened to the prices of goods between 1777 and 1779? Make a prediction.

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# The Convention at Concord, July 14, 1779

In July 1779, representatives from several Massachusetts towns met in Concord, Massachusetts, to talk about the problem of currency devaluation in Massachusetts. On July 14, 1779, the representatives attending the Convention decided to set price limits for various goods and merchandise to keep their currency from being devalued any further. Thereafter, shopkeepers would not be able to charge customers any more for goods than the prices posted. Below are the new price limits, set by the convention, on the items that Abigail Adams mentions in her letters of 1776 and 1777. As we read, think about how these new price limits compare to the old prices Abigail was paying two years before. Are the limits higher than what she paid or lower?

Sugar	£ 11	4 s.	per hundred
New England Rum	£ 4	16 s.	per gallon
Molasses	£ 4	7 s.	per gallon
Cotton Wool	£ 1	16 s.	per pound
Indian Corn	£ 4	10 s.	per bushel
Rye	£ 6		per bushel
Beef		6 s.	per pound
Veal		4 s.	per pound
Butter		12 s.	per pound
Coffee		18 s.	per pound
Chocolate		24 s.	per pound

Prices taken from pages 2 and 3 of: *Extracts from the proceedings of the convention at Concord, and of the town of Boston: containing the regulation of the prices of merchandize, provisions, etc. : Published by order of the town.* (Boston: Printed by Benjamin Edes and Sons, 1779); Microfiche, New York: Readex Microprint, 1985 (Early American imprints. First series; no. 16209). <http://www.masshist.org/online/db.cfm?queryID=222>

**“In short one hundred pound two year ago would  
purchase more than two will now.”  
—Abigail Adams, April 20, 1777**

Using the chart below, we can compare the prices of goods in Boston in April and September 1777 as well as the limits set on prices in 1779. Did prices increase or decrease as the war went on? How would this affect the lives of citizens like Abigail Adams?

	<u>April 1777</u>	<u>Sept. 1777</u>	<u>1779 Limits</u>
Sugar (per hundred)	£4	£15	£11 4s.
Rum (per gallon)	8s.	28s.	£4 16s.
Molasses (per gallon)	-	24s.	£4 7s.
Corn (per bushel)	5s.	-	£4 10s.
Rye (per pound)	11–12s.	-	£6
Beef (per pound)	8d.	18d.	6s.
Veal (per pound)	6–8d.	-	4s.
Butter (per pound)	1s. 6d.	3s.	12s.
Coffee (per pound)	2s. 6d.	10s.	18s.
Chocolate (per pound)	3s.	-	24s.

The Boston Committee of Correspondence,  
June 21, 1779

The Boston Committee of Correspondence realized that the citizens of Massachusetts were struggling to “make ends meet.” Inflation, along with devaluation of the currency, made it difficult to purchase even the most basic necessities. In order to make the Continental Congress in Philadelphia aware of Boston’s situation and to ask for help, the Boston Committee of Correspondence wrote a letter on June 21, 1779, to be distributed in Philadelphia. Part of this letter appears below.

GENTLEMEN,

By the inclosed Votes and Proceedings of a large and respectable Body of the Inhabitants of this Town, which we have the Pleasure to transmit to you, and to request a Communication of them to your Inhabitants you will perceive how greatly we are alarmed at the depreciating State of our Currency, or more properly Speaking, with the rapid Rise of every Article of Life.

We are fully sensible that the Enemies of America apprehending themselves shaded from Danger in this Mode of Attack, are letting every Engine at Work, to batter down and totally destroy the Credit of our Money, apprehending, that if this could be effected, neither the Magnanimity of our General, the Bravery and Virtue of our Troops, nor even the Wisdom of Congress, would be sufficient to secure our Country from their implacable Malice.

. . . we are constrain'd to call upon you by every Principle of Liberty and Love of your Country, to co-operate with us in the glorious Attempt of appreciating our Money.

Boston Committee of Correspondence. *Boston, June 21, 1779. Gentlemen, By the inclosed votes and proceedings...of the inhabitants of this town...you will perceive how greatly we are alarmed at the depreciating state of our currency....* (Boston : Printed by Benjamin Edes and Sons, 1779); Microfiche, New York : Readex Microprint, 1985 (Early American imprints. First series; no. 19400). <http://www.masshist.org/online/db.cfm?queryID=221>

# *A Shopping Trip in April 1777!*

It is April 1777, and your mother has asked you to go into Boston and try to purchase some items for her. She has given you £6. You **MUST** purchase all of the items on her list, but if you have any money left over, you may buy other items. The items available in Boston are listed below with their prices. Use the tally sheet on the next page to list your purchases and add up your total cost. Don't forget to label your numbers using proper monetary abbreviations (£, s., d.) and change from pence to shillings and shillings to pounds!

## *McCarthy's General Store, Boston* *Items for Sale:*

**Sugar\* - 10 pence per pound**  
**Butter - 1 shilling, 6 pence per pound**  
**New England Rum - 8 shillings per gallon**  
**Indian Corn - 5 shillings per bushel**  
**Rye - 12 shillings per bushel**  
**Beef - 8 pence per pound**  
**Veal - 8 pence per pound**  
**Coffee - 2 shillings, 6 pence per pound**  
**Chocolate\*\* - 3 shillings per pound**  
**Penny Candy - 1 penny per piece**  
**Drawing paper - 1 shilling per piece**  
**Drawing pencils - 1 shilling per box**

\*The price of sugar was £4 per one hundred pounds of sugar. We can use this information to calculate the price of one pound of sugar:

£1 = 20s. and £4 = 80s.

80s. = 960 pence per one hundred lbs. of sugar.

960 pence/100 lbs. = 9.6 pence/1 lb.

We rounded the price up to an even 10 pence for this activity.

\*\*In the eighteenth century, colonists drank their chocolate. Chocolate was sold in the form of a paste or a tablet, which people dissolved in milk or water to make a kind of cocoa. Not until the nineteenth century did inventors learn how to make chocolate into the candy bars we know today.



# *A Shopping Trip in September 1777!*

It is now September 1777, and your mother has again asked you to go into Boston and try to purchase some items for her. She has given you £6. You **MUST** try to purchase all of the items on her list, but if you have any money left over, you may buy other items. Because it is now September, you may not be able to find every item on the list – purchase as many as you can find! The items available in Boston are listed below with their prices. Use the tally sheet on the next page to list your purchases and add up your total cost. Don't forget to label your numbers using proper monetary abbreviations (£, s., d.) and change from pence to shillings and shillings to pounds!

## *McCarthy's General Store, Boston* *Items for sale:*

**Sugar - 3 shillings per pound**  
**New England Rum - 28 shillings per gallon**  
**Molasses - 24 shillings per gallon**  
**Beef - 18 pence per pound**  
**Butter - 3 shillings per pound**  
**Coffee - 10 shillings per pound**  
**Penny Candy - 2 pence per piece**  
**Drawing paper - 3 shillings per piece**  
**Drawing pencils - 2 shillings per box**

\*The price of sugar was £15 per one hundred pounds of sugar. We can use this information to calculate the price of one pound of sugar:

£1 = 20s. and £15 = 300s.

300s. = 3,600 pence per one hundred lbs. of sugar.

3,600 pence/100 lbs. = 36 pence/1 lb. = 3 shillings/1 lb.



# *Shopping in 1777*

Using your results from your two shopping trips, answer the questions below in complete, cursive sentences.

1. Were you able to find an purchase everything on the April 1777 shopping list? If not, what items were you unable to find?

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2. What was the total cost of the shopping list items in April 1777 (not including any extra purchases you made)?

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3. Were you able to make any extra purchases in April 1777? If yes, what did you buy?

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4. Did you have any money left over after you made all of your purchases in April 1777? If so, how much?

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5. Were you able to find and purchase everything on the September 1777 shopping list? If not, what items were you unable to find?

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6. What was the total cost of the shopping list items in September 1777 (not including any extra purchases you made)?

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7. Were you able to make any extra purchases in September 1777? If yes, what did you buy?

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8. Did you have any money left over after you made all of your purchases in September 1777? If so, how much?

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## *Local Government Gets Involved!*

### *Help the Colonists with Their Money Troubles!*

You are attending the Chelmsford town meeting in the year 1778. Because you own some property—and are a man!—you are “qualified” to join your neighbors at town meeting to discuss and vote on issues that affect your town. Your townspeople are complaining that the prices of goods and services are too high. You have just created a list of possible money-saving strategies, and you would like to share your best idea with your fellow Chelmsfordians. Choose one of the ideas from the brainstorming page, and in the space below create an illustrated advertisement to convince the people of the town to adopt your idea. Use color and detail and be sure to include a good explanation of why your idea will help them save money!

*Everyday Abigail:  
Daily Life during the  
Revolutionary War*



# Abigail's Chores

Below is a list of chores and activities that a woman like Abigail Adams would have completed during a typical week. Some of the chores may be similar to those on your own list. As you compare lists, think about how the chores that appear on both lists are different now from what they may have been like 200 years ago. For example, when doing laundry, Abigail did not have a washing machine or dryer. How does this make her chore of doing laundry different from ours today?

Take care of children

Educate children

Farming: plant, grow, harvest, and preserve food; plow fields, tend livestock, etc.

Sewing: spin and card wool, weave, quilt, make clothing

Supervise servants

Shop

Pay bills

Cook (maintaining fire)

Clean: wash dishes, dust, sweep, etc.

Laundry

Collect rents from tenants

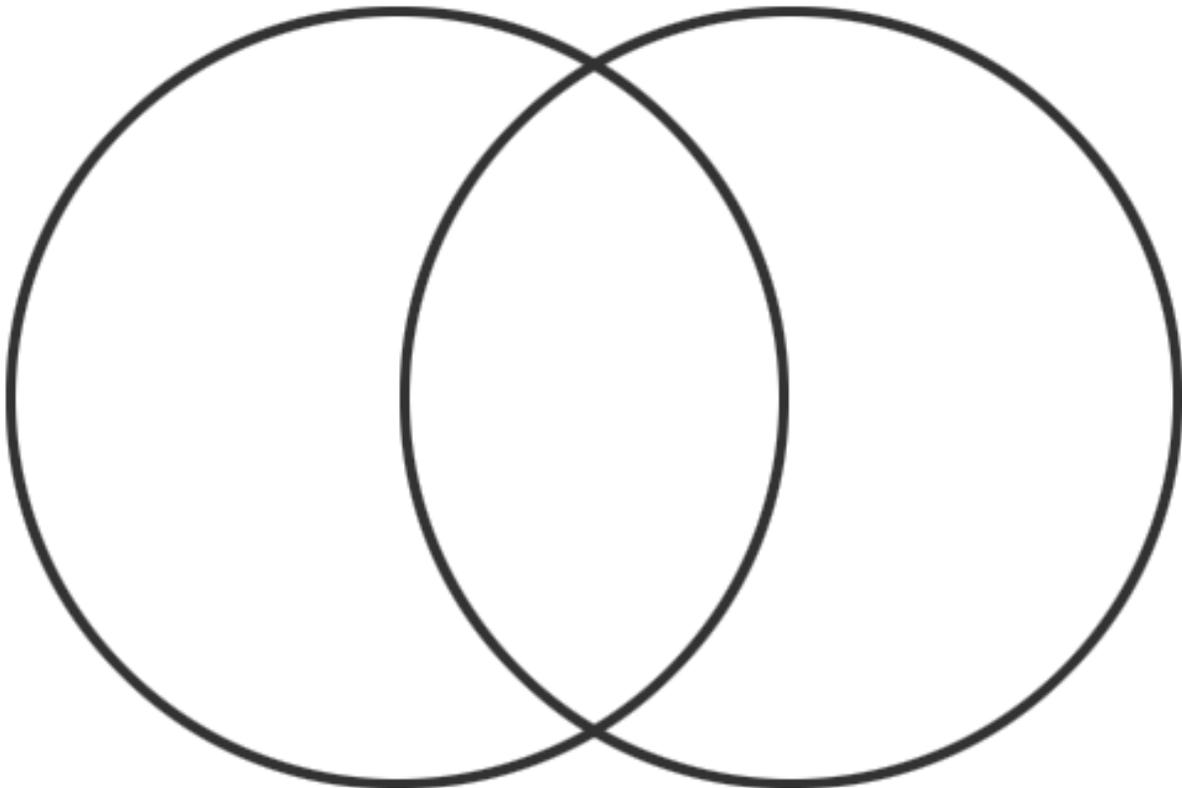
Take care of elderly or ill neighbors and relatives

Take care of visitors, soldiers, etc.

Carpentry (fix furniture, farm tools, etc.)

**Venn Diagram: Compare and contrast a chore of today with a 1770s chore**

Using the Venn Diagram below, compare and contrast a chore that is done in your family today with how it was done by Abigail Adams in the 1770s. Think about ways in which the chore is similar and also how Abigail might have done the chore differently. For example, your family may eat the same kinds of foods as the Adamses did, but do you cook that food in the same way? Be specific, write in cursive, and use as many details as you can!



## In Abigail's Own Words . . .

As you know, Abigail wrote many letters to her husband, John, while he was away from home. In many of those letters, she describes her daily chores and activities. We will now read some **excerpts** from her letters in which she writes about her day-to-day life.

### **May 24, 1775**

Tis a fine growing Season having lately had a charming rain, which was much wanted as we had none before for a fortnight. Your meadow is almost fit to mow. . . . Our House has been upon this alarm in the same Scene of confusion that it was upon the first — Soldiers comeing in for lodging, for Breakfast, for Supper, for Drink. . . . Sometimes refugees from Boston tierd & fatigued, seek an assilum for a Day or Night, a week — you can hardly imagine how we live.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 24 May 1775 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

### **September 8-10, 1775**

You may remember Isaac was unwell when you went from home. His Disorder increasd till a voilent Dysentery was the consequence of his complaints, there was no resting place in the House for his terrible Groans. . . . Two days after he was sick, I was seiz'd with the same disorder in a voilent manner. . . . The next person in the same week was Susy. . . . Our Little Tommy was the next, and he lies very ill now — there is no abatement at present of his disorder. I hope he is not dangerous. Yesterday Patty was seizd and took a puke. Our House is an hospital in every part. . . . By the first safe conveyance be kind eno to send me 1 oz. of turkey Rhubub, the root, and to procure me 1

quarter lb. of nutmegs . . . 1 oz. cloves, a of cinnamon. . . . So much sickness has occasiond a scarcity of Medicine.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 8 – 10 September 1775 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

### **September 25, 1775**

The desolation of War is not so distressing as the Havock made by the pestilence. Some poor parents are mourning the loss of 3, 4 & 5 children, and some families are wholly striped of every Member.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 25 September 1775 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

### **May 14, 1776**

We have had fine Spring rains which makes the Husbandary promise fair — but the great difficulty has been to procure Labourers. There is such a demand of Men from the publick and such a price given that the farmer who Hires must be greatly out of pocket. . . . Mr. Belcher is now with me and has undertaken to conduct the Business. . . . I give him 2 Shillings per day. . . . We are just now ready to plant, the barley looks charmingly, I shall be quite a Farmeriss an other year. . . . When Bass returnd he brought me some Money from you. After the deduction of his account and the horse hire there remaind 15 pounds. I have Received 12 from Mr. Thaxter. . . . I have discharged the following debts — To my Father for his Horse twice 12 pounds. . . . To Mr. Hunt for the House 26. 15. 4. and the Rates of two years 1774, £4 14s. 8d. and for 1775. . . . Besides this have supported the family which is no small one you know and paid all little charges which have occurd in the farming way.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 14 May 1776 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

### **July 13-14, 1776**

I now date from Boston where I yesterday arrived and was with all 4 of our Little ones innoculated for the small pox. My unkle and Aunt were so kind as to send me an invitation with my family. Mr. Cranch and wife and family, My Sister Betsy and her Little Neice, Cotton Tufts and Mr. Thaxter, a maid who has had the Distemper and my old Nurse compose our family. A Boy too I should have added. 17 in all. . . . We had our bedding . . . to bring. A Cow we have driven down from [Braintree] and some Hay I have had put into the Stable. . . . We have had during all the month of June a most severe Drouth which cut of all our promising hopes of english Grain and the first crop of Grass, but since july came in we have had a plenty of rain and now every thing looks well. There is one Misfortune in our family. . . . It is the loss of your Grey Horse. . . . she trod upon a rolling stone and lamed herself. . . . I immediately sent for Tirrel and every thing was done for her by Baths, ointments, polticeing, Bleeding &c. that could be done. . . . I then got her carried to Domet but he pronounces her incurable.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 13-14 July 1776 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

### **April 17, 1777**

Many articles are not to be had tho at ever so great a price. Sugar, Molasses, Rum, cotton wool, Coffe, chocolate, cannot all be consumed. . . . I have sometimes stoped 15 or 20 Butchers in a day with plenty of meat but not a mouthfull to be had unless I would give 4 pence per pound and a pence per pound for bringing. I have never yet indulged them. . . . As to cloathing of any sort for myself or family I think no more of purchaseing any. . . . I seek wool and flax and can work willingly with my Hands, and tho my Household are not cloathed with

fine linnen nor scarlet, they are cloathed with what is perhaps full as Honorary, the plain and decent manufactory of my own family.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 17 April 1777 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

### **July 30-31, 1777**

I have nothing new to entertain you with, unless it is an account of a New Set of Mobility which have lately taken the Lead in [Boston]. You must know that there is a great Scarcity of Sugar and Coffe, articles which the Female part of the State are very loth to give up, expecially whilst they consider the Scarcity occasiond by the merchants having secreted a large Quantity. There has been much rout and Noise in the Town for several weeks. Some Stores had been open'd by a number of people and the Coffe and Sugar carried into the Market and dealt out by pounds. It was rumourd that an eminent, wealthy, stingy Merchant (who is a Batchelor) had a Hogshead of Coffe in his Store which he refused to sell to the committee under 6 shillings per pound. A Number of Females some say a hundred, some say more assembled with a cart and trucks, marchd down to the Ware House and demanded the keys, which he refused to deliver, upon which one of them seazd him by his Neck and tossd him into the cart. Upon his finding no Quarter he deliverd the keys, when they tipd up the cart and dischargd him, then open'd the Warehouse, Hoisted out the Coffe themselves, put it into the trucks and drove off. It was reported that he had a Spanking among them, but this I believe was not true. A large concourse of Men stood amazd silent Spectators of the whole transaction.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 30 -31 July 1777 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

**August 22, 1777**

The late call of Men from us will distress us in our Husbandry. . . . We can scarcely get a days work done for money and if money is paid tis at such a rate that tis almost imposible to live. I live as I never did before, but I am not agoing to complain. Heaven has blessed us with fine crops. I hope to have 200 hundred Bushels of corn and a hundred & 50 weight of flax. English Hay we have more than we had last year, notwithstanding your ground wants manure. We are like to have a plenty of sause. I shall fat Beaf and pork enough, make butter and cheesse enough. If I have neither Sugar, molasses, coffe nor Tea I have no right to complain. I can live without any of them. . . . As to cloathing I have heithertoo procured materials sufficient to cloath my children and servants which I have done wholly in Home Spun. I have contracted no debts that I have not discharg'd, and one of our Labourers Prince I have paid seven months wages to since you left me. Besides that I have paid Bracket near all we owed him which was to the amount of 15 pounds lawfull money, set up a cider press &c., besides procuring and repairing many other articles in the Husbandry way, which you know are constantly wanted. I should do exceeding well if we could but keep the money good, but at the rate we go on I know not what will become of us.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 22 August 1777 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.