

LESSON PLAN #5: Abigail as Political and Historical Observer

[1] **Curriculum framework(s):** 8.32 Identify and analyze the point(s) of view in a literary work. 13.25 Analyze and explain the structure and elements of nonfiction works.

[2] **Goal of the lesson:** To illustrate the political viewpoints of Abigail Adams.

[3] **Expected student outcomes:** Students will be able to understand the political significance of Abigail's era.

[4] **Assessment of expected student outcomes:** Successful completion of class assignment.

[5] **Instructional procedures:** 45 minutes

Vocabulary: ignominiously; propagated; extirpated.

Activities: Questions for letters may be done either individually or in groups.

- 1) What is Abigail's view on slavery? Why is that significant?
- 2) How does Abigail tie politics and family into her letters?
- 3) In the letter of 2 March 1776, how do you imagine her daily life was impacted by news that her husband might be on a ship to England (and he hadn't told her this)?
- 4) What is her view on Tories? Support.
- 5) What details in the letters indicate that Abigail is experiencing war? Focus in particular in the letter of 18-20 June 1775. (N.B. This letter refers to Bunker Hill Day, and the death of their close family friend Dr. Joseph Warren).
- 6) What is telling about her query regarding "the load of Guilt upon their souls?"
- 7) What does Abigail's letter demonstrate about the emotions of civilians during war?
- 8) Assess her military strategy questions to her husband. What does this show about Abigail?
- 9) Notice she quotes Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*) in the midst of her turmoil and concern about the war in 1776. What is the significance of quoting Shakespeare, and why does she quote him?
- 10) What is her attitude toward wartime casualty? Support.
- 11) Note in the 1776 epistle her closing remarks and random thoughts to her husband about the children and the apology for her "incorrect Letter." What is your response to these?
- 12) What hallmarks these letters as epistles from the 18th century? On the other hand, how might her concerns be similar to those concerns we have today?

Homework: Read the next letters in the unit, and complete an Epistolary Analysis.

[6] **Material and resources:**

- 1) Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 22 September 1774
- 2) Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 18-20 June 1775
- 3) Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 2-10 March 1776

Student Name _____ Date _____

Epistolary Analysis

Date of letter(s)	Location of letter writer
Sender	Recipient

Topic of letter(s)	
Theme(s) of the letter(s)	
Significant quotes	
Historical details in the letter(s)	

Allusions, metaphors, similes and other figures of speech (give examples)	
Tone	
Images	
Diction	
Evidence of sarcasm or satire	
Vocabulary words	

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 22 September 1774

Boston Garison Sepbr. 22 1774

I have just returnd from a visit to my Brother, with my Father who carried me there the day before yesterday, and call'd here in my return to see this much injured Town. I view it with much the same sensations that I should the body of a departed Friend, only put off[f] its present Glory, for to rise finally to a more happy State. I will not despair, but will believe that our cause being good we shall finally prevail. The Maxim in time of peace prepair for war, (if this may be call'd a time of peace) resounds throughout the Country. Next tuesday they are warned at Braintree all above 15 and under 60 to attend with their arms, and to train once a fortnight from that time, is a Scheme which lays much at heart with many.

Scot has arrived, and brings news that he expected to find all peace and Quietness here as he left them at home. You will have more particulars than I am able to send you, from much better hands. There has been in Town a conspiracy of the Negroes. At present it is kept pretty private and was discoverd by one who endeavourd to diswaid them from it-he being threatned with his life, applied to justice Quincy for protection. They conducted in this way-got an Irishman to draw up a petition ~~letting~~ to the Govener telling him they would fight for him provided he would arm them and engage to liberate them if he conquerd, and it is said that he attended so much to it as to consult Pircy upon it, and one [Lieut.?] Small has been very buisy and active. There is but little said, and what Steps they will take in consequence of it I know not. I wish most sincerely there was not a Slave in the province. It allways appeared a most iniquitious Scheme to me-fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have. You know my mind upon this Subject.

I left all our little ones well, and shall return to them to night. I hope to hear from you by the return of the bearer of this and by Revere. I long for the Day of your return, yet look upon you much safer where you are, but know it will not do for you. Not one action has been brought to this court, no buisness of any sort in your way. All law ceases, and the Gosple will soon follow, for they are supporters of each other. Adieu. My Father hurries me. Yours most sincerely,

Abigail Adams

A scanned image of the original letter is available at the following site:

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17740922aa>

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 22 September 1774 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 18-20 June 1775

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 and 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 and 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 and has not ceased yet and tis now ~~illegible~~ 3 o'clock Sabbath afternoon.

Tis expected they will come out over the Neck to night, and a dreadful Battle must ensue. Almighty God cover the heads of our Country men, and be a shield to our Dear Friends. How ~~many have~~ fallen we know not -- the constant roar of the cannon is so ~~illegible~~ ~~distressing~~ that we can not Eat, Drink or Sleep. May we be supported and sustaind in the dreadful conflict. I shall tarry here till tis thought unsafe by my Friends, and 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.

Tuesday afternoon [20 June]

I have been so much agitated that I have not been able to write since Sabbath day. When I say that ten thousand reports are passing vague and uncertain as the wind I believe I speak the Truth. I am not able to give you any authentick account of last Saturday, but you will not be destitute of inteligence. Coll. Palmer has just sent me word that he has an opportunity of conveyance. Incorrect as this scrawl will be, it shall go. I wrote you last Saturday morning. In the afternoon I received your kind favour of the 2 june, and that you sent me by Captn. Beals at the same time. -- I ardently pray that you may be supported thro the arduous task you have before you. I wish I could contradict the report of the Doctors Death, but tis a lamentable Truth, and the tears of multitudes pay tribute to his memory. Those favorite lines ~~of~~ Collin continually sound in my Ears

*How sleep the Brave who sink to rest,
By all their Countrys wishes blest?
When Spring with dew'ey fingers cold
Returns to deck their Hallowed mould*

*She their shall dress a sweeter Sod
Than fancys feet has ever trod.
By fairy hands their knell is rung
By forms unseen their Dirge is sung
[There] Honour comes a pilgrim grey
To Bless the turf that wraps their Clay
And freedom shall a while repair
To Dwell a weeping Hermit there.*

I rejoice in the prospect of the plenty you inform me of, but cannot say we have the same agreeable view here. The drought is very severe, and things look but poorly.

Mr. Rice and Thaxter, unkle Quincy, Col. Quincy, Mr. Wibert all desire to be rememberd, so do all ~~the rest of our the~~ family. Nabby will write by the next conveyance.

I must close, as the Deacon [waits]. I have not pretended to be perticular with regard to what I have heard, because I know you will collect better intelligence. The Spirits of the people are very good. The loss of Charlstown affects them no more than a Drop in the Bucket. -- I am Most sincerely yours,

Portia

A scanned image of the original letter is available at the following site:

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17750618aa>

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 18 - 20 June 1775 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 2-10 March 1776

Saturday Evening ~~Febr~~y March 2, [1776]

I was greatly rejoiced at the return of your servant to find you had safely arrived, and that you were well. I had never heard a word from you after you left New York, and a most ridiculous story had been industerously propagated in this and the neighbouring Towns to injure the cause and blast your Reputation, viz. that you and your President had gone on board a Man of War from N-y and sailed for England. I should not mention so idle a report, but that it had given uneasiness to some of your Friends, not that they in the least credited the report, but because the Gaping vulgar swallowed the story. One man had deserted them and proved a traitor, an other might &c. I assure you such high Disputes took place in the publick house of this parish, that some men were collerd and draged out of the shop, with great Threats for reporting such scandalous lies, and an unkle of ours offerd his life as a forfeit for you if the report proved true.

However it has been a nine days marvel and will now cease. I heartily wish every Tory was Extirpated [from] America, they are continually by secret means undermining and injuring our cause.

I am charmed with the Sentiments of Common Sense; and wonder how an honest Heart, one who wishes the welfare of their country, and the happiness of posterity can hesitate one moment at adopting them; I want to know how those Sentiments are received in Congress? I dare say their would be no difficulty in procuring a vote and instructions from all the Assemblies in New England for independancy. I most sincerely wish that now in the Lucky Minuet it might be done.

I have been kept in a continual state of anxiety and expectation ever since you left me. of It has been said to morrow and to morrow for this month, but when the dreadfull to morrow will be I know not -- but hark! the House this instant shakes with the roar of Cannon. I have been to the door and find tis a cannonade from our Army, orders I find are come for all the remaining Militia to repair to the Lines a monday night by twelve o clock. No Sleep for me to Night; and if I cannot who have no guilt upon my Soul with regard to this Cause, how shall the misirible wretches who have been the procurers of this Dreadfull Scene and those who are to be the actors, lie down with the load of Guilt upon their Souls.

Sunday Eve March 3

I went to Bed after 12 but got no rest, the Cannon continued firing and my Heart Beat pace with them all night. We have had a pretty quiet day, but what to morrow will bring forth God only knows.

Monday Evening

Tolerable quiet to day. The Militia have all musterd with 3 days provision and are all march'd by 8 o clock this afternoon tho their notice was no longer than 8 o clock Saturday, and now we have scarcly a Man but our regular guards either in W. [Weymouth], H. [Hingham] or B. [Braintree] or M. [Milton] and the Militia from the more remote towns are call'd in as Sea coast Guards. Can you form to yourself an Idea of our Sensations. [Palmer] is chief [Colonel], [Bass] is Leit. [Colonel] and [Soper] Major and Hall Captain.

I have just returnd from [Penn's] Hill where I have been sitting to hear the amazing roar of cannon and from whence I could see every shell which was ~~been~~ thrown. The sound I think is one of the Grandest in Nature and is of the true Speicies of the Sublime. Tis now an incessant Roar. But O the fatal Ideas which are connected with the sound. How many of our dear country men must fall?

Twesday morning

I went to bed about 12 and rose again a little after one. I could no more sleep than if I had been in the ingagement. The ratling of the windows, the jar of the house and the continual roar of 24 pounders, the Bursting of shells give us such Ideas, and realize a scene to us of which we could scarcly form any conception. About Six this morning, there was quiet; I rejoiced in a few hours calm. I hear we got possession of Dorchester Hill Last Night. 4 000 thousand men upon it to day -- lost but one Man. The Ships are all drawn round the Town. To night we shall realize a more terrible scene still. I sometimes

think I cannot stand it -- I wish myself with you, out of ~~the~~ hearing as I cannot assist them. I hope to give you joy of Boston, even if it is in ruins before I send this away. -- I am too much agitated to write as I ought, and languid for want of rest.

Thursday Fast day

All my anxiety, and distress, is at present at an End. I feel dissapointed. This day our Militia are all returning, without effecting any thing more than taking possession of Dorchester Hill. I hope it is wise and just, but from all the Muster and Stir I hoped and expected more important and decisive Scenes; I would not have sufferd all I have for two such Hills. Ever since the taking of that we have had a perfect calm nor can I learn yet what Effect it has had in ~~Town~~ Boston. I do not hear of one persons escapeing since.

I was very much pleased with your choise of a committe for Canada. All those to whom I have venturd to shew that part of your Letter approve the Scheme of the Priest as a master stroke of policy. I feel sorry that [General] Lee has left us, but his presence at New York was no doubt of great importance as we have reason to think it prevented Clinton from landing and gathering together such a nest of virmin as would at least have distressd us greatly. But how can you spair him from there? Can you make his place good -- can you supply it with a man eaqually qualified to save us? How do the Virginians realish the Troops said to be destined for them? Are they putting themselves into a State of Defence? I inclose to you a Copsy of a Letter sent by Capt. Furnance [Furnass] who is in Mr. Ned Churchs imploy and who came into the Cape about 10 days ago. You will learn the Sentiments of our Cousin by it, some of which may be true, but I hope he is a much better divine than politician.

I hear in one of his Letters he mentions certain intercepted Letters which he says have made much Noise in England, and Laments that you ever wrote them.

What will he and others say to Common Sense? I cannot Bear to think of your continuing in a State of Supineness this winter.

*"There is a tide in the affairs of Men
Which taken, at the flood leads on to fortune;
omitted, all the ~~voiyage~~ voyage of their life
is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves,
or lose our ventures."*

Shakespear

Sunday Eve March 10

I had scarcely finished these lines when my Ears were again assaulted with the roar of Cannon. I could not write any further. My Hand and heart will tremble, at this domestick fury, and firce civil Strife, which cumber all our parts. Tho,

*Blood and destruction are so much in use
And Dreadfull objects so familiar,*

Yet is not pitty ~~choak~~ chok'd, nor my Heart grown Callous. I feel for the unhappy wretches who know not where to fly for safety. I feel still more for my Bleeding Country men who are hazarding their lives and their Limbs. -- A most Terible and incessant Cannonade from half after 8 till Six this morning. I hear we lost four men kill'd and some wounded in attempting to take the Hill nearest the Town call'd Nook Hill. We did some work, but the fire from [the ships Beat off our Men so that they did not secure it] but retired to the fort upon the other Hill.

I have not got all the perticuliars I wish I had but, as I have an opportunity of sending this I shall endeavour to be more perticuliar in my next.

All our Little ones send duty. Tommy has been very sick with what is call'd the Scarlet or purple fever, but has got about again.

If we have Reinforcements here, I believe we shall be driven from the sea coast, but in what so ever state I am I will endeavour to be therewith content.

*Man wants but Little here below
Nor wants that Little long.*

You will escuse this very incorrect Letter. You see in what perturbation it has been written and how many times I have left of. Adieu pray write me every opportunity. Yours.

Tooks Grammer is the one you mention.

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