

## Lesson One: For Fifth Grade

### *A Letter from John Adams in Philadelphia to Abigail Adams (11-17 June 1775)*

#### **Background:**

This letter, written by future President John Adams to his wife Abigail in June of 1775, is one of over 1100 exchanged by the couple when their duties force them to live apart:

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/letter/>

John is serving in the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, while Abigail manages family and farm in Braintree, just south of Boston. On June 17, just two months after the beginning of the American Revolution, John Adams describes to his “dearest friend” the appointment of George Washington as commander of the Continental Army. Washington will take charge of the American troops camped in Cambridge, just across the river from where the British army occupies Boston. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17750611ja>

#### **Framing Questions:**

*Notice the words Adams chooses to describe Washington’s character. What do those words tell you about Washington? What do they tell you about Adams? What qualities does Adams admire in the new General?*

*Why does Adams use the word “cementing”? What needs to be cemented and why? Why is Washington the man for the job?*

*How does Adams want the people of Massachusetts to act toward Washington? Why might he be worried about Washington’s welcome in this colony?*

#### **Further Investigation:**

*Read the paragraph in which Adams describes the Continental Congress. According to him, why did the delegates from other colonies view New Englanders with suspicion? What factors were beginning to change their attitudes?*

*In the next paragraph, Adams explains why progress is slow. What images (similes) does he use for comparison? How could you put this in your own words?*

*What things can Adams say in a letter to his trusted wife that he probably could not say anywhere else or to anyone else? Based on your conclusion, how might you explain the importance of letter-writing to John Adams?*