

John Adams letter to his son John Quincy Adams

My Child

Yours of March 20/31 I have received.

I am well pleased with your learning German for many Reasons, and principally because I am told that Science and Literature flourish more at present in Germany than any where. A Variety of Languages will do no harm unless you should get an habit of attending more to Words than Things.

But, my dear boy, above all Things, preserve your Innocence, and a pure Conscience. Your morals are of more importance, both to yourself and the World than all Languages and all Sciences. The least Stain upon your Character will do more harm to your Happiness than all Accomplishments will do it good. – I give you Joy of the safe Arrival of your Brother, and the Acknowledgement of the Independance of your Country in Holland. Adieu.

John Adams to John Quincy Adams, 28 April 1782, in *Adams Family Correspondence*, vol. 4, ed. L. H. Butterfield, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973), 317.

1. What principle (s) is John Adams trying to pass on to his son?

2. What beliefs would you like to pass on to your son or daughter? Look back at the personal philosophy statement you wrote in Lesson 5.

Lesson 6
Classwork

Name:
Date:

John Quincy Adams was fifteen when his father wrote the letter you just read. Young John Quincy Adams was away from home living and studying in Europe.

What kind of advice, knowledge, or principles would you like to pass on to your children? Write a letter to your son or daughter that includes your personal beliefs or philosophy about life that you would like to pass on to your family.

My _____,

Date _____

Lesson 6
Homework

Name:
Date:

This is a letter from John Adams to his son John Quincy Adams, written in 1801. At the time of this letter, John Adams is living full-time in Massachusetts after failing to be re-elected to the Presidency. In February of 1801, Thomas Jefferson had become the third President of the United States. Mr. Adams is sixty-six years old and John Quincy Adams is now thirty-four years old and has a family.

Quincy Sept. 12, 1801

My Dear Son,

The 11th of September is reckoned among the happiest days of my Life: The Navy Officers who composed the Court Martial on Capt. Little, came out to visit me with Mr. Shaw who brought me good favor of the 9th dated at Philadelphia; informing me of your Arrival on that day with my Daughter and Grandson in as good health as could be expected. You do not expressly say whether you intend to accompany Mrs. Adams to Washington or not. If you do it will be much more than three weeks before I shall have the pleasure to embrace you. But knowing that you are on American ground, I shall not be impatient However this may be I hope you will consider my House as your home for yourself your Lady and son, as well as for your and her Servants and Domesticks. We can accommodate you all as well as Destiny intends that you and I ought to be accommodated, at least untill you have Time to deliberate on your future Arrangements.

It is fortunate that your Brother was the first to see you in America. He can tell you every thing, and will not deceive you. He is prudent as well as intelligent, honest as well as candid.

I have many projects in my head to communicate to you, for your Establishment, which however must be a very modest very humble very unassuming. I shall leave them all to your choice knowing – very well knowing that your Judgment is better than that of your affectionate Father.

John Adams

J.Q. Adams Esq.

John Adams to John Quincy Adams, 12 September 1801; Letterbook 7 March 1797-20 June 1797; Massachusetts Historical Society.

What does the letter reveal about how John Adams feels about his son?

Lesson 6
Homework

Name:
Date:

Below a letter written by John Adams in 1815. At this time, John Adams is eighty years old and he is writing to his grandsons, George Washington Adams and John Adams 2nd, as they are traveling to Europe.

Quincy May 3rd. 1815

Dear George and John

I adress myself to both of you as equally dear to me and because the difficulty with which I write, will not allow me to write seperately to each. Our anxiety for you and for your Father Mother, Brother, Uncle Aunt and little first and Second Cousin: have been greater than you can conceive. Some relief however We have received from Vessels you met at Sea, one of which brought a Letter from Mr. Ticknor to his Father and another from Mr. Everett to his mother, both agreeing that you were all well and you pursued your Studies as you ought. You have now been out Eighteen days and may be near the Port of your destination. You will find yourselves on your Arrival at Liverpool in a new World. Every thing will surprise you. Be upon your guard. Remember your youth and inexperience, your total Ignorance of the great World, be always modest, ingenuous, teachable, never assuming or forward, treat all People with respect; preserve the Character of youthful Americans, let nothing unbecoming ever escape your lips or your Behaviour. You have Characters to Support, Reputations to acquire; I may Say, you have the Character of your Country, at least of its Chil[d]hood and youth to Support.

I could have wished that you Should have read before your departure Dr. Watts's Improvement of the Mind and even Mr. Lock's conduct of the Understanding. You will there find better Advice than I can give you.

I wish you to have each a Pencil Book, always in your Pockett, by which you may minute on the Spot any remarkable thing you may See or hear. A pocket Ink horn, any cheap thing of the kind, and a Sheet or two of paper, ought always to be about you. A Journal; a Diary is indispensible. "Studium Sine Calamo, Somnium." Without a minute Diary, your Travels, will be no better than the flight of Birds, through the Air. They will leave no trace behind them. Whatever you write preserve. I have burned, Bushells of my Silly notes, in fitts of Impatience and humiliation, which I would now give anything to recover. "These fair Creature are thyself." And would be more useful and influential in Self Examination than all the Sermons of the Clergy.

Enter into no disputes, upon public affairs, national or European. Say you are too young, too inexperienced, too little read, and too ill informed, to hazard your Judgment on any of these great Things. Leave to your Father the Interests and honor of your Country. There they will be Safe. Be not provoked by any misrepresentations of your Country. This is a hard Lesson but you must learn it.

Write to me my dear Boys by every Ship. While my heart beats it will be anxious for your good Behaviour and consequent happy and useful Lives.

John Adams

John Adams to George Washington Adams and John Adams 2d., 3 May 1815 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://masshist.org/digitadams>.

To view a digital image of this letter, go to <http://www.masshist.org/adams/apmanuscripts/JA1815May3p1lg.html>

1. What is John Adams's message to his grandsons?

2. Why do you think it is important for John Adams to communicate this message to his grandsons?
