

Unit 2

“Tis a pestilence that walketh in Darkness...”

The Smallpox epidemic during the American Revolution

Introduction: This lesson examines the small pox epidemic in Boston during the American Revolution. It looks at how John and Abigail Adams viewed and interpreted the epidemic that was raging around them. It is designed to be taught during two class periods.

Skill Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- 1) read and interpret primary source documents in historical context;
- 2) identify the characteristics of 18th century letter writing;
- 3) write a coherent essay comparing the 18th century and 21st century attitudes toward smallpox;
- 4) work cooperatively to read, analyze and discuss John and Abigail Adams’s letters.

Content Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- 1) identify and explain why smallpox was such a major health issue in 18th century America;
- 2) identify and explain why some people in the 18th century were fearful of inoculation and others were not;
- 3) compare contemporary news and concerns about smallpox with 18th century concerns;
- 4) understand why small pox was such a concern for 18th century individuals.

Documents:

Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 10 August 1776

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 12 August 1776

Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 26 June 1776

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 13-14 July 1776

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 29 July 1776

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 30-31 July 1776

Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 13 April 1777

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 16-18 March 1776

Learning Activities:***Day One:***

- 1) Write out the words: “A pestilence that walketh in Darkness” on the black board or overhead and have students “free” write for 3 to 5 minutes.
- 2) Write out students’ thoughts and ideas on the board.
- 3) Introduce students to smallpox and ask them what they know about it, what they think they know and what they would like to know.
- 4) Connect smallpox to contemporary society by raising such questions as the current threat of a smallpox epidemic and the complications of inoculating the general American public. What are the positives and negatives of the issues?
- 5) Tell students that they are going to be reading the letters of John and Abigail Adams in which they discuss the smallpox epidemic in 18th century America. Provide the students with the letter from John to Abigail on 10 August 1776 and the letter from Abigail to John on 12 August 1776 (Handout 8) and have them answer the comprehension questions for home work.

Day Two:

- 1) Explain to students that by the time John and Abigail Adams were writing these letters, Boston had a long history with smallpox epidemics. Describe the role of Cotton Mather and his learning from a black slave about inoculation and the subsequent controversies.

- 2) Describe how John Adams's relative Dr. Zabdiel Boylston had been a proponent of inoculation and introduced it to Great Britain.
- 3) Discuss the dangers and fears of inoculation among the 18th century public. Describe how this opposition was frequently grounded in religion and the apprehension that it would further the disease.
- 4) Divide the class into five groups and provide each group with a handout containing an Adams letter and questions relating to it. (Handouts 9A-E.)
- 5) Tell the students to read the letters together and to be prepared to describe the content of the letter to the class and to answer the assigned questions.
- 6) Provide students with large sheets of poster paper to write out their answers.

Optional Activity:

The Evacuation of the City of Boston

- 1) Describe George Washington's success at fortifying Dorchester Heights and the subsequent alarm expressed by the British staff.
- 2) Describe the harshness of the previous winter for the American troops, and why this was a much needed psychological and military victory.
- 3) Have students read the letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 16-18 March 1776 and answer the questions relating to it (Handout 10).
- 4) Have students illustrate a political cartoon of the evacuation of Boston based on Abigail Adams's letter (Handout 11).

Handout 8

Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 10 August 1776 [excerpt]

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760810ja>

I am happy to think that you, and my oldest son, are well through the distemper, and have sufficient Receipts. Nabby, I believe is also through. The Inflammation in her Arm, and the single Eruption, are nearly as much Evidence, as I had to shew -- and I have seen Small Pox enough since I had it, to have infected 100 Armies. Tommy, I shall hear by next Post, is happily recoverd of it, I think. Charley, my dear Charley! I am sorry, that it is still pretty clear, that you have not taken it. But never fear, you will have it.

This Suspence and Uncertainty must be very irksome to you. But Patience and Perseverance, will overcome this, as well as all other Difficulties. Dont think of Time, nor Expence. 1000 Guineas is not worth so much as security to a Wife, a good one I mean, and four Children, good ones I mean, against the small Pox. It is an important Event in a Mans Life, to go thro that distemper. It is a very great Thing, for a whole Family, to get well over it.

At the same Time that I am in a State of suspence, Uncertainty and Anxiety about my best, dearest, worthyest, wisest Friend, in this World, and all my Children, I am in a State of equal Suspence, Uncertainty, and Anxiety about our Army at N. York and Ticonderoga, and consequently about our Country and Posterity. The Lives of Thousands, and the Liberties of Millions are as much in Suspence, as the Health of my family. But I submit to the Governace of infinite Wisdom.

Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 10 August 1776 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 12 August 1776 [excerpt]

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760812aa>

Yours 30 of July reachd me by Saturdays post, and found me with Johnny and Tommy quite Recoverd from the small Pox. When I first came to Town I was made to believe that the small pox was a very light disorder, and one might pass through it with little or no complaints. Some such instances no doubt there are, and Light it is in comparison of the Natural way, or what it formerly was. As I never saw the disease before I have with those much more experienced been deceived in it now.

Nabby was the first person who had complaints of our number, hers came on about the 8th day attended with a voilent pain in a tooth which she had which was defective. She was cold and shivery, then a voilent Heat insued; the doctor supposed it the Symptoms of the disorder, a day or

4) Name some of Abigail Adams's main concerns her letter. What is she thankful for?

5) Based on these letters, what is it that John and Abigail value in life?

6) What options would Abigail Adams have in trying to avoid small pox? Are there any? If so, what are they?

Handout 9A (Group 1)

Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 26 June 1776

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760626ja>

I have written so seldom to you, that I am really grieved at the Recollection. I wrote you, a few Lines, June 2 [John to Abigail, 02 June 1776] and a few more June 26. These are all that I have written to you, since this Month began. It has been the busiest Month, that ever I saw. I have found Time to inclose all the News papers, which I hope you will receive in due Time.

Our Misfortunes in Canada, are enough to melt an Heart of Stone. The Small Pox is ten times more terrible than Britons, Canadians and Indians together. This was the Cause of our precipitate Retreat from Quebec, this the Cause of our Disgraces at the Cedars. -- I dont mean that this was all. There has been Want, approaching to Famine, as well as Pestilence. And these Discouragements seem to have so disheartened our Officers, that none of them seem to Act with Prudence and Firmness.

But these Reverses of Fortune dont discourage me. It was natural to expect them, and We ought to be prepared in our Minds for greater Changes, and more melancholly Scenes still. It is an animating Cause, and brave Spirits are not subdued with Difficulties.

Amidst all our gloomy Prospects in Canada, We receive some Pleasure from Boston. I congratulate you on your Victory over your Enemies, in the Harbour. This has long lain near my Heart, and it gives me great Pleasure to think that what was so much wished, is accomplished. I hope our People will now make the Lower Harbour, impregnable, and never again suffer the Flagg of a Tyrant to fly, within any Part of it.

The Congress have been pleased to give me more Business than I am qualified for, and more than I fear, I can go through, with safety to my Health. They have established a Board of War and Ordinance and made me President of it, an Honour to which I never aspired, a Trust to which I feel my self vastly unequal. But I am determind to do as well as I can and make Industry supply, in some degree the Place of Abilities and Experience. The Board sits, every Morning and every Evening. This, with Constant Attendance in Congress, will so entirely engross my Time, that I fear, I shall not be able to write you, so often as I have. But I will steal Time to write to you.

The small Pox! The small Pox! What shall We do with it? I could almost wish that an innoculating Hospital was opened, in every Town in New England. It is some small Consolation, that the Scoundrell Savages have taken a large Dose of it. They plundered the Baggage, and stripped off the Cloaths of our Men, who had the Small Pox, out full upon them at the Cedars.

Handout 9B (Group 2)

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 13 – 14 July 1776

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760713aa>

Boston July 13, 1776

I must begin with apoligising to you for not writing since the 17 of June. I have really had so many cares upon my Hands and Mind, with a bad inflammation in my Eyes that I have not been able to write. 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. My unkl's maid with his Little daughter and a Negro Man are here. We had our Bedding &c. to bring. A Cow we have driven down from [Braintree] and some Hay I have had put into the Stable, wood &c. and we have really commenced housekeepers here. The House was furnished with almost every article (except Beds) which we have free use of, and think ourselves much obliged by the fine accommodations and kind offer of our Friends. All our necessary Stores we purchase jointly. Our Little ones stood the operation Manfully. Dr. Bulfinch is our Physician. Such a Spirit of innoculation never before took place; the Town and every House in it, ~~as~~ are as full as they can hold. I believe there are not less than 30 persons from Braintree. Mrs. Quincy, Mrs. Lincoln, Miss Betsy and Nancy are our near Neighbours. God Grant that we may all go comfortably thro the Distemper, the phisick part is bad enough I know. I knew your mind so perfectly upon the subject that I thought nothing, but our recovery would give you eaquel pleasure, and as to safety there was none. The Soldiers innoculated privately, so did many of the inhabitants and the paper curency spread it everywhere. I immediately determined to set myself about it, and get ready with my children. I wish it was so you could have been with us, but I submit.

I received some Letters from you last Saturday Night 26 of June. You mention a Letter of the 16 which I have never received, and I suppose must relate something to private affairs which I wrote about in May and sent by ~~illegible~~ Harry.

As to News we have taken several fine prizes since I wrote you as you will see by the news papers. The present Report is of Lord Hows comeing with unlimited powers. However suppose it is so, I believe he little thinks of treating with us as independant States. How can any person yet dreem of a settlement, accommodations &c. They have neither the spirit nor feeling of Men, yet I see some who never were call'd Tories, gratified with the Idea of Lord Hows being upon his passage with such powers.

Sunday july 14

By yesterdays post I received two Letters dated 3 and 4 of July and tho your Letters never fail to give me pleasure, be the subject what it will, yet it was greatly heightned by the

prospect of the future happiness and glory of our Country; nor am I a little Gratified when I reflect that a person so nearly connected with me has had the Honour of being a principal actor, in laying a foundation for its future Greatness. May the foundation of our new constitution, be justice, Truth and Righteousness. Like the wise Mans house may it be founded upon those Rocks and then neither storms or temptests will overthrow it.

I cannot but feel sorry that some of the most Manly Sentiments in the Declaration are Expunged from the printed copy. Perhaps wise reasons induced it.

Poor Canady I lament Canady but we ought to be in some measure sufferers for the past folly of our conduct. The fatal effects of the small pox there, has led almost every person to consent to Hospitals in every Town. In many Towns, already arround Boston the Selectmen ~~fillegible~~ have granted Liberty for innoculation. I hope the necessity is now fully seen.

I had many dissagreeable Sensations at the Thoughts of comeing myself, but to see my children thro it I thought my duty, and all those feelings vanished as soon as I was innoculated and I trust a kind providence will carry me safely thro. Our Friends from Plymouth came into Town yesterday. We have enough upon our hands in the morning. The Little folks are very sick then and puke every morning but after that they are comfortable. I shall write you now very often. Pray inform me constantly of every important transaction. Every expression of tenderness is a cordial to my Heart. Unimportant as they are to the rest of the world, to me they are every Thing.

We have had during all the month of June a most severe Drough 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 which I have never mentiond in hopes it would have been in my power to have remedied it, but all hopes of that kind are at an end. It is the loss of your Grey Horse. About 2 months ago, I had occasion to send Jonathan of an errant to my unkle Quincys (the other Horse being a plowing). Upon his return a little below the church she trod upon a rolling stone and lamed herself to that degree that it was with great difficulty that she could be got home. I immediately sent for Tirrel and every thing was done for her by Baths, ointments, polticeing, Bleeding &c. that could be done. Still she continued extream lame tho not so bad as at first. I then got her carried to Domet but he pronounces her incurable, as a callous is grown upon her footlock joint. You can hardly tell, not even ~~now~~ by your own feelings how much I lament her. She was not with foal, as you imagined, but I hope she is now as care has been taken in that Respect.

I suppose you have heard of a fleet which came up pretty near the Light and kept us all with our mouths open ready to catch them, but after staying near a week and making what observations they could set sail and went of to our great mortification who were [prepared?] to for them in every respect. If our Ship of 32 Guns which [was] Built at Portsmouth and waiting only for Guns and an other of [. . .] at Plimouth in the same state, had been in readiness we should in all probability been Masters of them. Where the

Handout 9C (Group 3)

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 29 July 1776

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760729aa>

Boston July 29, 1776

I write you now, thanks be to Heaven, free from paine, in Good Spirits, but weak and feeble. All my Sufferings produced but one Eruption. I think I can have no reason to be doubtfull with regard to myself as the Symptoms run so high and my Arm operated in the best manner. The small pox acts very odly this Season, there are Seven out of our Number that have not yet had it, 3 out of our 4 children have been twice innoculated, two of them Charles and Tommy have not had one Symptom. I have indulged them in rather freer living than before and hope they will not long remain doubtfull. Mrs. Cranch and Cotton Tufts have been in Town almost 3 weeks and have had the innoculation repeated 4 times and can not make it take. So has Mrs. Lincoln. Lucy Cranch and Billy are in the same State. Becky Peck who has lived in the same Manner with us, has it to such a degree as to be blind with one Eye, swell'd prodigiously, I believe she has ten Thousand. She is really an object to look at; tho she is not Dr. Bulfinches patient. Johnny has it exactly as one would wish, enough to be well satisfied and yet not be troublesome. We are ordered all the Air we can get, and when we cannot walk we must ride, and if we can neither walk nor ride, we must be led. We sleep with windows open all Night, and Lay upon the Carpet or Straw Beds, Mattrass or any thing hard, abstain from Spirit, Salt and fats, fruit we Eat, all we can get, and those who like vegetables unseasond may Eat them, but that is not I. -- This doubtfull Buisness is very dissagreeable as it will detain us much longer, but there are several instances now of persons who thought they had had it, and were recoverd, and lived away freely, and now are plentifully dealt by. Mr. Joseph Edwards wife for one, and queer work she makes of it you may be sure. The Doctors say they cannot account for it, unless the free presperation throws it off. Every physician has a number of patients in this doubtfull State. Where it does take and the patient lives any thing free, they have a Doze of it. Cool weather is much fitter for the small pox. I have not got rid of any terrors of the small pox but that of not being liable to it again, which you will say is a very great one; but what I mean is that I should dread it more now than before I saw it, were I liable to it. If we consider the great numbers who have it now, computed at seven thousand, 3 thousand of which are from the Country, tis very favorable, tho not so certain as it was last winter with many patients. Mr. Shaw who was

innoculated at the same time when I and 3 of my children were out of the same Box, and has lived lower by his account than we have, has a full portion of it for all of us. There is no accounting for it. We did not take so much phisick as many others neither. If this last does not take I shall certainly try them with some wine . . .

The Continental Troops are near all gone from this Town, all I believe who are in a Marching State. The small pox has been General amongst them and exceeding favourable.

I have requested of Judge Cushing to write you an account of his circuit and he has promised to do it. Both he and his Lady are under inoculation. When I came into Town I was in great hopes that if we did well we should be able to return in about 3 weeks, and we should have been able to have effected it, if it had operated as formerly. Now I fear it will be 5 weeks before we shall all get through but I must not complain. When I cast my eye upon Becky whose Symptoms were not half so high as mine or some of the rest of us, and see what an object she is I am silenced, and adore the Goodness of God towards us.

Her Dr. says she is not dangerous. Col. Warren has sufferd as much pain as I did, but has more to shew for it, he is very cleverly spatterd. Mrs. Warren is now struggling with it, to one of her constitution it operates in faintings and langour. It did so upon Betsy Cranch, yet when it found its way through, it operated kindly. -- I believe you will be tired of hearing of small pox, but you bid me write every post and suppose you are anxious to hear how we have it. The next post I hope to tell you that ~~we~~ they all have it, who now remain uncertain.

I am at all times and in all States unfeignedly yours.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 29 July 1776 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

Questions:

- 1) Why does Abigail Adams say that the “smallpox acts very oddly this Season?”

- 2) Describe how Abigail and her children are living. Point out three examples.

3) According to Abigail, what are the weather conditions that are best for smallpox?

4) What are the doctors saying about the smallpox?

Handout 9D (Group 4)

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 30 – 31 July 1776

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760730aa>

July 30 1776

I wrote you by the post, but as Capt. Cuznow [Cazneau] goes to morrow perhaps this may reach [you] first. As to myself I am comfortable. Johnny is cleverly. Nabby I hope has gone thro the distemper, the Eruption was so trifling that to be certain I have had innoculation repeated. Charles and Tommy have neither had Symptoms, nor Eruption. Charles was innoculated last Sabbath evening a second time, Tommy to Day, the 3 time from some fresh matter taken from Becky Peck who has enough for all the House beside.

This Suspence is painfull. I know not what to do with them. It lengthens out the Time which I can but ill afford, and if they can have it, I know not how to quit till I can get them through. Youth youth is the time, they have no pains but bodily, no anxiety of mind, no fears for themselves or others, and then the Disease is much lighter. The poor Doctor is as anxious as we are, but begs us to make it certain if repeated innoculations will do it. There are now several patients who were innoculated last winter and thought they passd through the Distemper, but have now taken it in the natural way.

Mrs. Cranch and two of her children are in this uncertain State, with a great number of others which I could mention. Tis a pestilence that walketh in Darkness. Mrs. Warren with whom I was yesterday, lay the whole day in a State little better than nonexistence. I greatly feard she would not survive it, but to day she is revived and many pocks appear upon her. But tis a poor Buisness at the best, where I entertaind one terror before, I do ten now. The Season of the year is very unfit for the Distemper, the Tone of every persons vessels are relaxed, very little Spring in the Air, and the medicine too powerfull for weak constitutions.

3) How does she describe the mood and conditions of the townspeople?

4) What kind of state is Tommy in?

Handout 9E (Group 5)

Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 13 April 1777

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17770413jasecond>

April 13, 1777

I have spent an Hour, this Morning, in the Congregation of the dead. I took a Walk into the Potters Field, a burying Ground between the new stone Prison, and the Hospital, and I never in my whole Life was affected with so much Melancholly. The Graves of the soldiers, who have been buried, in this Ground, from the Hospital and bettering House, during the Course of the last Summer, Fall, and Winter, dead of the small Pox, and Camp Diseases, are enough to make the Heart of stone to melt away.

The Sexton told me, that upwards of two Thousand soldiers had been buried there, and by the Appearance, of the Graves, and Trenches, it is most probable to me, he speaks within Bounds.

To what Causes this Plague is to be attributed I dont know. It seems to me, that the Want of Tents, Cloaths, soap, Vegetables, Vinegar, Vaults &c. cannot account for it all.

Oatmeal and Peas, are a great Preservative of our Enemies. Our Frying Pans and Gridirons, slay more than the Sword.

Discipline, Discipline is the great Thing wanted. There can be no order, nor Cleanliness, in an Army without Discipline. We have at last, determined on a Plan for the Sick, and have called into the Service the best Abilities in Physick and Chirurgery, that the Continent affords. I pray God it may have its desired Effect, and that the Lives and Health of the Soldiers may be saved by it.

Disease has destroyed Ten Men for Us, where the Sword of the Enemy has killed one.

Upon my Return from my pensive melancholly Walk, I heard a Piece of disagreeable News-That the ship Morris, Captain Anderson from Nantz, with Cannon, Arms, Gunlocks, Powder &c. was chased into Delaware Bay by two or three Men of War -- that she defended herself manfully against their Boats and Barges, but finding no Possibility of getting clear, she run aground. The Crew, and two French Gentlemen Passengers got on shore, but the Captain, determined to disappoint his Enemy in Part, laid a Train and blew up the ship, and lost his own Life unfortunately in the Explosion. I regret the Loss of so brave a Man much more than that of the ship and Cargo. The People are fishing in order to save what they can, and I hope they will save the Cannon. The French Gentlemen, it is said have brought Dispatches from France to the Congress. I hope this is true. If it is, I will let you know the Substance of it, if I may be permitted to disclose it.

Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 13 April 1777 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

Handout 10

The Evacuation of Boston

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 16-18 March 1776

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760316aa>

[Braintree] March 16 1776

I last Evening Received yours of March 8. I must confess my self in fault that I did not write sooner to you, but I was in continual Expectation that some important event would take place and give me a subject worth writing upon. Before this reaches you I imagine you will have Received two Letters from me; the last I closed this Day week; I since that time there has been some movements amongst the Ministerial Troops as if they meant to evacuate the Town of Boston. Between 70 and 80 vessels of various sizes are gone down and lay in a row in fair sight of this place, all of which appear to be loaded and by what can be collected from our own observations and from deserters they have been plundering the Town. I have been very faithless with regard to their quitting Boston, and know not how to account for it, nor am I yet satisfied that they will leave it-tho it seems to be the prevailing opinion of most people; we are obliged to place the Militia upon Guard every Night upon the shoars thro fear of an invasion. There has been no firing since Last tuesday, till about 12 o clock last Night, when I was waked out of my sleep with a smart Cannonade which continued till nine o clock this morning, and prevented any further repose for me; the occasion I have not yet heard, but before I close this Letter I may be able to give you some account of it.

By the accounts in the publick papers the plot thickens; and some very important Crisis seems near at hand. Perhaps providence see's it necessary in order to answer important ends and designs that the Seat of War should be changed from this to the Southeren colonies that each may have a proper sympathy for the other, and unite in a seperation. The Refuge of the Believer amidst all the afflictive dispensations of providence, is that the Lord Reigneth, and that he can restrain the Arm of Man.

Orders are given to our Army to hold themselves in readiness to March at a moments warning. I'll meet you at Philippi said the Ghost of Caesar to Brutus.

Sunday Noon

*Being quite sick with a voilent cold I have tarried at Home to day; I find the fireing was occasiond by our peoples taking possession of Nook Hill, which they kept in spite of the Cannonade, and which has really obliged our Enemy to decamp this morning on board the Transports; as I hear by a mesenger just come from Head Quarters. Some of the Select Men have been to the lines and inform that they have carried of *[every thing they**

could possibly] take, and what they could not they have [burnt, broke, or hove into the water. This is I believe fact,] many articles of good Household furniture having in the course of the week come on shore at Great Hill, both upon this and Weymouth Side, Lids of Desks, mahogona chairs, tables &c. Our People I hear will have Liberty to enter Boston, those who have had the small pox. The Enemy have not yet come under sail. I cannot help suspecting some design which we do not yet comprehend; to what quarter of the World they are bound is wholly unknown, but tis generally Thought to New york. Many people are elated with their quitting Boston. I confess I do not feel so, tis only lifting the burden from one shoulder to the other which perhaps is less able or less willing to support it. -- To what a contemptible situation are the Troops of Britain reduced! I feel glad however that Boston is not destroyed. I hope it will be so secured and guarded as to baffel all future ~~attem~~ attempts against it. -- I hear that General How said upon going upon some Eminence in Town to view our Troops who had taken Dorchester Hill unperceived by them till sun rise, "My God these fellows have done more work in one night than I could make my Army do in three months" and he might well say so for in one night two forts and long Breast Works were sprung up besides several Barracks. 300 & 70 teems were employed most of which went 3 load in the night, beside 4000 men who worked with good Hearts.

From Pens Hill we have a view of the largest Fleet ever seen in America. You may count upwards of 100 & 70 Sail. They look like a Forrest. It was very lucky for us that we got possession of Nook Hill. They had placed their cannon so as to fire upon the Top of the Hill where they had observed our people marking out the Ground, but it was only to elude them for they began lower upon the Hill and nearer the Town. It was a very foggy dark evening and they had possession of the Hill six hours before a gun was fired, and when they did fire they over shot our people so that they were coverd before morning and not one man lost, which the enemy no sooner discoverd than Bunker Hill was abandoned and every Man decamp'd as soon as he could for they found they should not be able to get away if we once got our cannon mounted. Our General may say with Ceasar veni vidi et vici.

What Effect does the Expectation of commisioners have with you? Are they held in disdain as they are here. It is come to that pass now that the longest sword must decide the contest -- and the sword is less dreaded here than the commisioners.

You mention Threats upon [Braintree]. I [know of none], nor ever heard of any till you mentiond them. The Tories look a little crest fallen; as for Cleverly he looks like the knight of the woful countenance. I hear all the Mongrel Breed are left in Boston -- and our ~~pet~~ people who were prisoners are put into Irons and carried of.

As to all your own private affairs I generally avoid mentioning them to you; I take the best care I am capable of them. I have found some difficulty attending the only Man I have upon the place, being so often taking of. John and Jonathan have taken all the care in his absence, and performed very well. Bass got home very well. My Fathers horse came home in fine order and much to his satisfaction. Your own very poor. -- Cannot you hire a Servant where you are. I am sorry you are put to so much difficulty for want of

one. -- I suppose you do not think one word about comeing home, and how you will get home I know not.

I made a mistake in the Name of the Grammer -- tis Tandons, instead of Took. I wish you could purchase Lord Chesterfields Letters -- I have lately heard them very highly spoken of. I smiled at your couplet of Lattin, your Daughter may be able in time to conster it as she has already made some considerable proficiency in her accidents, but her Mamma was obliged to get it translated.

Pray write Lord Sterlings character. I want to know whether you live in any harmony with -- *[Most likely Robert Treat Paine]* and how you setled matters. I think he seems in better humour.

I think I do not admire the Speach from the Rostrum, tis a heavy unelegant, verbose performance and did not strike my fancy at all. I am very sausy suppose you will say. Tis a Liberty I take with you; indulgance is apt to spoil one. Adieu -- Yours most Sincerely.

P.S. Pray convey me a little paper. I have but enough for one Letter more.

Monday morning

A fine quiet night -- no allarms no Cannon. The more I think of our Enemies quitting Boston, the more amaz'd I am, that they should leave such a harbour, such fortifications, such intrenchments, and that we should be in peaceable possession of a Town which we expected would cost us a river of Blood without one Drop shed. Shurely it is the Lords doings and it is Marvelous in our Eyes. Every foot of Ground which they obtain now they must fight for, and *[may they purchase it at a Bunker Hill price.]*

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 16 - 18 March 1776 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

Comprehension Questions:

1) Point out three examples of how Abigail Adams describes what is happening in the city of Boston.

2) What is the general mood of the colonists in Boston?

3) What is the view from Pens Hill like?

4) The last paragraph of the letter is very reflective and contains many thoughts in it. Describe how Abigail cleverly used poetic language such as imagery and metaphors to convey her feelings.

5) If you were John Adams, how would you react at receiving such a letter?

Handout 11

Political Cartoon Assignment

Directions:

What is a political cartoon? Political cartoons are illustrations that give the reader a message or convey an opinion about political or social events of the day. They often use humorous metaphors to make their point. Most political cartoons can be found on the editorial pages of newspapers. Look at the *Boston Globe*, *New York Times* or *Boston Herald* for examples.

Using the letter that we have just read, illustrate a political cartoon that depicts the British evacuation of Boston. Your political cartoon can be drawn from the point of view of a loyalist or a colonist.