



Day 4 American Revolution  
130 Minutes

The Adams Family

# Differentiated Lesson Plan: John & Abigail Adams — What Makes a Founding Father (or Mother)?

**Grade Level:** 6–8

**Time:** One extended class period (70–80 minutes) **or** two standard periods

**Unit Context:** American Revolution / Founding Era

**Focus Figures:** John Adams and Abigail Adams

---

## Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Define what it means to be a **Founding Father** (and consider who else belongs in that category)
  - Explain John Adams's contributions and controversies
  - Analyze Abigail Adams's role through letters and primary sources
  - Use reading comprehension strategies across biographies and primary texts
  - Evaluate why historical reputations change over time
- 

## Essential Questions

- What qualifies someone as a **Founding Father**?
- Why has John Adams sometimes been underappreciated in history?

- How did Abigail Adams influence the founding era without holding office?
- 

## Materials

- John Adams article
  - Abigail Adams article
  - John Adams Interactive Comprehension Story
  - “Remember the Ladies” primary source activity
  - Additional reading comprehension options from [LearnAboutAmerica.com](https://www.learnaboutamerica.com)
- 

## Lesson Sequence

---

### 1. Discussion Opener: What Is a Founding Father? (5 minutes)

Prompt (projected or spoken):

*What do you think makes someone a “Founding Father”? Is it writing laws? Fighting wars? Leading people?*

#### Teacher Facilitation

- Create a quick class list (leadership, sacrifice, ideas, risk, influence)
- Then introduce the framing idea:

*For a long time, John Adams was not as celebrated as Washington or Jefferson. Only recently—through books and shows—has his importance been reexamined. After today’s lesson, think about why he may have developed a bad reputation.*

(Do **not** answer yet—this becomes a through-line.)

---

## 2. Article Study: John Adams — The Birth of a Patriot (10 minutes)

Students read the **John Adams article**.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/people-of-the-revolutionary-war/john-adams>

### Key Content Focus

- Early life and education
- Opposition to the Stamp Act
- Defense of British soldiers after the Boston Massacre
- Marriage to Abigail Adams
- Political leadership and presidency
- Alien and Sedition Acts
- Election loss to Thomas Jefferson
- Later life and reconciliation

### Differentiation Options

- **Support:** Chunked text + guiding questions
- **On-Level:** Standard comprehension questions
- **Challenge:** Reputation analysis (Why did Adams anger people?)

### Guiding Question

*How could someone strongly support liberty but still defend British soldiers?*

### Optional Writing Assignment - And Justice for All

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/revolutionary-war-writing-activities/and-justice-for-all>

In 1770, tensions between Boston colonists and British soldiers exploded in the Boston Massacre, leaving five civilians dead. Outraged citizens demanded revenge, and the soldiers involved were put on trial for murder. Few dared to defend them — except John Adams, a well-known Patriot leader who believed that every person, even an enemy, deserved a fair trial. Despite risking his reputation and safety, Adams argued that the soldiers had acted in confusion and fear, not malice. Most were found not guilty. Years later, Adams reflected on the decision, saying, “It was one of the best pieces of service I ever rendered my country.” He believed that upholding justice, even when unpopular, was essential to

the kind of nation America should become. Writing Prompt: John Adams risked his popularity to defend people most of his neighbors hated. Would you have done the same? Why or why not?

Then, connect this theme to your own life or a story you know:

- When has someone stood up for fairness, even when others disagreed?
  - Why is it important to protect justice — not just for friends, but for everyone?
- 

### 3. Article Study: Abigail Adams — A Founding Voice (10 minutes)

Students read the **Abigail Adams article**.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/people-of-the-revolutionary-war/abigail-adams>

#### Key Content Focus

- Background and family life
- Letters to John Adams
- Political advice and influence
- “Remember the Ladies” ideas
- First First Lady to live in the White House
- Later life and legacy

#### Optional In-depth Article:

“My Dearest Friend” article - The Letters Between John and Abigail Adams

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/people-of-the-revolutionary-war/my-dearest-friend-letters>

#### Discussion Prompt

*If Abigail Adams had lived today, what kind of role might she have had in government or politics?*

#### Differentiation

- Highlighted excerpts for struggling readers
- Full article + inference questions for advanced readers

---

## 4. Interactive Reading: John Adams Comprehension Story (15 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-people/adventures-through-the-lives-and-times/adventures-through-the-life-and-times-of-john-adams>

### Activity Description:

In this interactive experience, students travel through key moments in John Adams's life, reading narrated passages, viewing illustrated scenes, and answering comprehension questions at each location.

### Why This Works

- Multimodal learning (visual + text + audio)
- Built-in comprehension checks
- Printable score report provides accountability

### Teacher Role

- Circulate
- Prompt students to connect scenes to earlier discussion:
  - *Does this moment improve or hurt Adams's reputation?*

---

## 5. Primary Source Analysis: "Remember the Ladies" (15 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/primary-source-super-comprehension/remember-the-ladies-primary-sources-super-comprehension>

Students complete the **Remember the Ladies** primary source activity.

### Activity Structure

Students work through three tabs:

1. **Main Idea & Details**
2. **Inference**
3. **Contextual Vocabulary**

## Instructional Focus

- Close reading
- Understanding historical voice
- Recognizing Abigail Adams's forward-thinking ideas

## Discussion Prompt

*Why do you think Abigail's ideas were not acted on at the time?*

---

## 6. Synthesis Discussion: Reputation & Legacy (5–7 minutes)

Return to the opening question.

### Whole-Class Prompts:

- Why might John Adams have been overshadowed by other Founders?
- How did his personality affect his reputation?
- Should Abigail Adams be considered a Founding Mother? Why or why not?

Encourage evidence-based responses from readings.

---

## Reading Comprehension Options

- [John Adams Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 800
  - [John Adams Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1100
  - [John Adams Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1100
  - [Abigail Adams Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 900
  - [Abigail Adams Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 750
  - [Abigail Adams Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 900
- 

## Differentiation Summary

- Multiple reading levels

- Choice-based activities
  - Visual, textual, and primary-source learning
  - Scaffolded literacy skills
- 

## Why This Lesson Works

- ✓ Broadens the definition of “Founding Father”
- ✓ Elevates Abigail Adams’s role authentically
- ✓ Challenges simplistic hero narratives
- ✓ Integrates biography, primary sources, and interactive literacy
- ✓ Encourages historical empathy and critical thinking