

**Today you will read a biography of Abigail Adams, and then you will read two examples of correspondence between Abigail and her husband, John Adams, who served as President of the United States from 1797 to 1801. As you read these texts, you will gather information and answer questions that will help you understand John and Abigail Adams's relationship and opinions. When you are finished reading, you will write an analytical essay.**

Read the biography of Abigail Smith Adams. Then answer the questions.
---

### **Abigail Smith Adams (1744-1818)**

1 Abigail Adams was more than just a First Lady. Adams was politically minded and often stood up for those who lacked power such as slaves, women, and the colonies.

2 Abigail Smith Adams was born in Massachusetts on November 11, 1744. She came from a prestigious family and was related to Thomas Sheppard and other Congregational ministers. Like other women of her era, she had no formal education, but was curious and worked hard to teach herself. She read any books that were available and became knowledgeable about a variety of subject matters most women never considered.

3 Abigail Smith married John Adams in 1764. He was a young Harvard graduate teaching school and trying to launch a career in law. She moved to her husband's farm in Braintree, south of Boston, and eventually had three sons and two daughters. John Adams spent a lot of time away from home, traveling for both his legal work and as a political revolutionary, and later, as a diplomat. Abigail Adams supported the revolution as fervently as John, and she arguably suffered more because of it. Several times, battles raged near her home, while he was safe in Philadelphia or in Europe. From the beginning, it was she who managed their farm and took care of business so that he could devote himself to politics.

4 Through his letters it is clear that he trusted his wife to take care of his business matters and admired her self-sufficiency. Although married women at this time had limited property rights, Abigail Adams began to refer to their property and other affairs as her own instead of "ours". She also made investment decisions that enhanced the family's prosperity – something that

was not easily done during the turbulent 1780's and 1790's, when many wealthy men ended up in poverty.

5 John and Abigail Adams wrote letters to each other frequently. In these letters one can tell that they were close friends and often Adams advised her husband on matters of politics. In one of her most famous letters Abigail writes:

6 *"I long to hear that you have declared an independency—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would remember the ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation."*(1)

7 Her husband did not take this letter seriously, so Adams wrote a letter to her friend Mercy Otis Warren. She asked Warren to petition Congress with her and request that Congress establish some laws that favor women. After Warren never replied, Adams wrote one more letter to her husband, and essentially all of Congress, pointing out discrepancies. In this letter she said, "whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to men, emancipating all nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives."(2) Though John Adams did not take his wife's advice on this matter, there is evidence he considered the issue in relation to voter's rights as he forwarded her concerns on to Brigadier General Joseph Palmer.

8 Throughout his life John Adams continued to request his wife's advice and opinions on political matters. After he became president in 1797 John Adams was eager to have his wife at his side. He wrote, "I never wanted your Advice and assistance more in my life...The Times are critical and dangerous, and I must have you here to assist me."(3) As First Lady, Adams made a large impression on the public. She was an advocate for females and expressed original feminist theory, as well as insightful political thought.

9 After her husband lost his re-election in 1801, the couple retreated to their home in Quincy. While her main focus was on her family and home, Adams remained in correspondence with several political figures including President Thomas Jefferson – who had defeated her husband in a bitter election—and with Dolley Madison, who remained influential in Washington after the death of her husband, James Madison, the nation's third President.

10 Abigail Adams died October 28, 1818. Her son, John Quincy Adams, became president 6 years after she passed away. Her grandchild, Charles Francis Adams, published many of Adams' letters in 1848.

<http://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/abigail-smith-adams/>