

# RESOURCES

## FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

### Books

Adams, John. *The Portable John Adams*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2004. A wide selection of writings by Adams, including diary entries, letters, essays and his most important political works.

Hogan, Margaret and C. James Taylor, editors. *My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007. Nearly 300 of the Adamses' letters, offering valuable insights into political, social and cultural life during the early days of America.

McCullough, David. *John Adams*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001. An epic biography, and winner of the Pulitzer Prize, that chronicles Adams's days as a country lawyer, his role as a revolutionary leader and his tenure as America's first Vice President and second President.

### Websites

[www.poweroftheletter.com](http://www.poweroftheletter.com)

In today's world, it's easy to forget the value of a heartfelt, handwritten letter. We learn a great deal about our history

by reading written correspondence that has been preserved. Letters are tangible artifacts, but they're also important communication tools that we use to demonstrate sincerity, respect, emotion and intimacy. That's why HBO and the United States Postal Service are partnering on the "Power of the Letter" campaign. To participate in this campaign, visit [www.poweroftheletter.com](http://www.poweroftheletter.com). You'll be able to send a free greeting card featuring quotes from the letters of John and Abigail Adams—and you'll experience the enduring, personal and powerful nature of the written word.

[www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/letter/](http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/letter/)

Digital versions and transcripts of the more than 1,100 letters exchanged between John and Abigail Adams.

[www.nps.gov/adams](http://www.nps.gov/adams)

A virtual tour of the Adams National Historical Park, featuring birthplaces of Presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams and the story of four generations of the Adams family.



THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION

## Exploring Colonial WILLIAMSBURG

Numerous scenes from *John Adams*—including Adams's 1776 visit to Continental Army troops encamped in Harvard Yard and Philadelphia's yellow fever epidemic of 1793—were filmed in the Historic Area of Colonial Williamsburg in Williamsburg, Virginia. The world's largest living history museum, Colonial Williamsburg features hundreds of buildings that have been restored, reconstructed and furnished to reflect life in colonial times. The educators' section of Colonial Williamsburg's website—at [www.history.org/history/teaching](http://www.history.org/history/teaching)—offers an array of resources, including lesson plans, a live electronic tour and hands-on activity kits.

## STARTING POINTS FOR RESEARCH AND WRITING

**1. The power of letters.** More than 1,100 of John and Abigail Adams's letters are online at the Massachusetts Historical Society (see Web address above). Working with a partner, visit the website and select two letters—one written by John, a second by Abigail—to analyze and share with classmates. What do these letters reveal about political, social and cultural issues? What do they say about daily life? What conclusions can you draw about John and Abigail's personalities through these primary-source documents? Your instructor may ask you to read your selected letters aloud to classmates.

**2. A controversial measure.** One of the most hotly debated aspects of John Adams's presidency was his decision to sign into law the Alien and Sedition Acts. Through research on the Web or at your

library, find out more about what these acts did and why Adams enacted them into law. What impact did the acts have? In your view, do the Alien and Sedition Acts tarnish Adams's reputation and legacy? Why or why not? Defend your position in a brief essay.

**3. The question of slavery.** Four of America's first five Presidents—Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Monroe—were slaveholders from Virginia. Where did John Adams stand on the question of slavery? Gather evidence from Adams's letters, speeches and other writings that reveal his stance on this issue. Then select one of the other four Presidents named above and find out how he justified his support for slavery. Write the text of a debate that Adams might have had with the President you have chosen.

**4. Amending the Constitution.** After the election of 1800—which John Adams narrowly lost to Thomas Jefferson—members of Congress recognized the need to change the system of voting within the Electoral College. What occurred to prompt this change, and to what extent did the Twelfth Amendment remedy this problem? Find out more about how and why this piece of legislation was enacted.

**5. The election of 2008.** Using what you have learned about John Adams's values and philosophy through your viewing and reading, what position do you think he would take on the major issues of the 2008 presidential campaign? Choose one or more issues facing Americans today—such as the Iraq war, the economy, health care or global warming—and draft a speech that Adams could deliver on this topic.

Teacher's Guide to Accompany inTIME Magazine  
Developed by TIME Learning Ventures

# JOHN ADAMS

## HE UNITED THE STATES OF AMERICA



PATRIOT, REVOLUTIONARY, diplomat, orator, President—in each of these roles, John Adams played a crucial part in guiding the new nation through its tumultuous early decades. Adams comes to life in a seven-part miniseries based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography by historian David McCullough. This is a production that, in the view of McCullough, will change young people's understanding of America's origins. "It isn't just that you're going to give them information," he says. "They're going to come away *feeling* what happened. I don't think you really can know something, really know it in your heart as well as your mind, unless you feel it. That's the power of this medium." (See page 2 for additional insights from McCullough.)

This guide is designed to give educators strategies and resources for viewing and discussion of the HBO miniseries and of John Adams's life. *John Adams* chronicles a turbulent period, and the filmmakers do not shy away from portraying violence as well as brief nudity. Accordingly, teachers may find it useful to preview the miniseries prior to assigning it to students.

### Before Viewing

To provide background on the life and times of John Adams, you might distribute copies of the inTIME magazine created to accompany the miniseries. Ask students to turn to the Notebook feature on page 4 and to respond to the quotes in the Verbatim section. What is the origin of the "Join, or Die" cartoon,

and what do the initials stand for? How was this image adapted during the Revolutionary era? Next, invite students to read the profile of Adams on pages 2 and 3, along with the timeline at the bottom of these pages. As a class, make a list of scenes from Adams's life that you would dramatize if you were creating a miniseries on him. Ask: Where would you choose to start your exploration of Adams's life? Why?

### While Viewing

As students watch *John Adams*, ask them to consider the following argument made by historian David McCullough: "John Adams hasn't received the attention he deserves." As they view the miniseries, have them note moments in Adams's life for which he deserves to be remembered. In addition, have students reflect on the following description of John Adams: "He united the states of America." What evidence do students find within the miniseries to support this point?

### After Viewing

*John Adams* can spark a lively class discussion on a variety of topics. Subjects to explore include:

### Image of John Adams

Ask: How is John Adams portrayed in the series? What do you see as his strengths and weaknesses? What words would you use to characterize his personality? Which scenes shed the most light on his views and values?

### A Controversial Decision

In Part 1 of the miniseries, Adams agrees to defend British soldiers accused of firing at colonists during the Boston Massacre. Why does

### IN THIS GUIDE

- ▶ Q&A with David McCullough
- ▶ Analyzing a Letter by John Adams
- ▶ Resources for Further Exploration
- ▶ Starting Points for Research
- ▶ Episode Synopses



Adams make this controversial decision? What is the outcome of the case? What price does Adams pay for this decision? Do you see a contradiction between Adams's identity as an American patriot and his role as a defender of British soldiers? Explain.

### The President and First Lady

How is Abigail Adams depicted in the series? In what ways does she influence her husband's political decisions? Describe a scene in which you gain insight into her character. What do you see as her core values? Now imagine that you could interview Abigail Adams. What three questions would you ask her?

### The Continental Congress

What role did John Adams play at the Continental Congress? What do you see as his most important contribution as a member of the Congress? (To explore this topic further, distribute the reproducible worksheet on page 3 of this guide.)

### The White House Years

What were some of the key challenges that Adams faced as President? What did Adams see as his greatest legacy? Do you agree? In your estimation, how should Adams be remembered?

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THE ABOVE RESOURCES, EXCLUDING [WWW.POWEROFTHELETTER.COM](http://WWW.POWEROFTHELETTER.COM), ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH HBO.

# BEHIND THE BOOK

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID MCCULLOUGH

DAVID MCCULLOUGH SPOKE with journalist David D'Arcy about the process of writing and researching the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography *John Adams*. Excerpts from their wide-ranging interview, which aired on Public Radio stations, appear below.

### Q: What is still most misunderstood, in your view, about John Adams?

**A:** Adams is himself a great story because of his very humble origins. He was a farmer's son. His mother was almost certainly illiterate. And he grew up under what by today's terms would be considered extreme hardship. But because he got a scholarship to go to Harvard back when Harvard was really a very small proposition compared to today—four buildings, faculty of seven—he discovered books. And as he said, he read forever. If you want an example of what education can do to transform an individual, and consequently transform society and history, Adams is a perfect one.

### Q: Why did Adams take on the job of defending the British soldiers who shot at the crowd in the Boston Massacre?

**A:** Well, I think that's one of the most noble acts of his entire life. And it ought to be a subject that's taught in

every school. Nobody wanted to defend those soldiers. [The British] had cut down American citizens with their musket fire. And they came to Adams, Sam Adams and others, and said, "Will you defend these soldiers? Nobody else will." There was every indication that if he did that, his chances of ever amounting to something as a patriot or as a politician or a lawyer or anything thereafter would be greatly reduced. He would be seen as a bad guy. But he believed that you had to have equal justice before the law. If nobody else was going to defend them, then he would. And then of course he won, he got them off. It was brilliant.

That's where he was at his best: at calling forth to people to do what is right. When he got up in the Continental Congress in Philadelphia to make the case for passing the Declaration of Independence, he was up against one of the greatest lawyers of his day, John Dickinson, who was against signing the Declaration of Independence. It wasn't that he was against the great cause, but he was against signing that piece of paper then. And he gave a brilliant



presentation of his case. Then Adams stood up and argued for the other side. And they voted with Adams. It was never a foregone conclusion that they would vote for the Declaration of Independence. That happened on July 2. That's the day we really ought to be celebrating when we celebrate July 4: July 2 is when they voted to sign it.

### Q: How extensively were you involved in the HBO production?

**A:** They invited me to look at the script, to advise on every detail of the film at every stage all along the way. And then they invited me to come down to the production site, which was outside of Richmond, to give a talk to the entire group. And I said, in essence, that you have the chance to reach the people of this country—and particularly the young people—with a film that will change their view about the reality of the origins of the country. And it isn't just that you're going to give them information. They're going to come away *feeling* what happened. I don't think you really can know something, really know it in your heart as well as your mind, unless you feel it. That's the power of this medium.

Somebody said that God is in the details. Boy, did they care about details—everything, including the vocabulary, the lines. It's a great screenplay. I have a feeling that if John and Abigail Adams came back and saw it, they'd say, "Pretty amazing. You got us. That's it. That's the way it was."

## THE GREAT QUESTION OF

# INDEPENDENCE

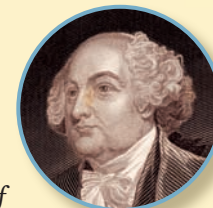
## ANALYZING A LETTER FROM JOHN ADAMS TO ABIGAIL ADAMS

PHILADELPHIA JULY 3RD, 1776

... The hopes of reconciliation, which were fondly entertained by multitudes of honest and well-meaning though weak and mistaken people, have been gradually and at last totally extinguished. Time has been given for the whole people, maturely to consider the great question of independence and to ripen their judgments, dissipate their fears, and allure their hopes, by discussing it in news papers and pamphlets, by debating it in assemblies, conventions, committees of safety and inspection, in town and county meetings, as well as in private conversations, so that the whole people in every colony of the 13, have now adopted it, as their own Act. This will cement the Union, and avoid those heats and perhaps convulsions which might have been occasioned by such a Declaration six months ago.

But the day is past. The second day of July 1776 will be the most memorable epocha in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations, as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the Day of Deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other from this time forward forever more.

You will think me transported with enthusiasm but I am not. I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure, that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet through all the gloom I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is more than worth all the means. And that posterity will triumph in that day's transaction, even although we should rue it, which I trust in God we shall not.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

ON JULY 2, 1776, the Continental Congress made a momentous decision: The thirteen American colonies voted to declare independence from Great Britain. John Adams reflected on the enormity of this event in a letter to his wife Abigail—one of the more than 1,100 letters that the couple exchanged during their marriage. An excerpt from Adams's letter appears at right. As you read this letter, underline passages that reveal Adams's views on "the great question of independence," and circle passages in which Adams predicts how the events of July 2, 1776, will be remembered. Then use the questions below to deepen your understanding of this historic document.

### For Discussion or Writing

1. At the beginning of this passage, Adams refers to "hopes of reconciliation." What is *reconciliation*? With whom did "multitudes of ... people" hope to achieve reconciliation? What is Adams's view of these people?
2. According to Adams, what change took place during the first six months of 1776 regarding British colonists' view of independence?
3. What prediction does Adams make about July 2, 1776? What forms of celebration does Adams say ought to be used to remember the vote to declare independence? Of these, which are still used in your community?
4. Reread the final paragraph of this letter. Why is Adams not "transported with enthusiasm"? What does he mean when he tells Abigail, "Yet through all the gloom I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory"?
5. In your opinion, is Adams optimistic or pessimistic about America's future in this letter? Point to specific lines in the text to support your answer.

Permission granted to reproduce for classroom use.

### For Further Exploration

Working in pairs or small groups, conduct research to find out why July 4—and not July 2, as Adams predicted—is observed as Independence Day. What happened in the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776? What date appears on the Declaration of Independence? When was the Declaration adopted by the Continental Congress? When was it actually signed? In your opinion, would it be more logical to observe Independence Day on July 2 instead of July 4? Discuss—or stage a class debate on this question.

## EPISODE SYNOPSIS

**Part 1 "Join or Die"** After the 1770 Boston Massacre, Adams takes an unpopular stand by defending accused British soldiers. Adams heads to Philadelphia to join the Continental Congress—and faces an uncertain future.

**Part 2 "Independence"** After the 1775 Battle of Lexington and Concord, Adams argues for independence, persuading Thomas Jefferson to draft a declaration. Benjamin Franklin and Adams convince delegates, and the Continental Congress votes to declare independence on July 2, 1776.

**Part 3 "Don't Tread on Me"** Adams heads first to France in 1777, demanding that France increase its naval commitment to America, and then to Holland to solicit funds for the war.

**Part 4 "Reunion"** Learning of the British surrender to Washington, Adams returns to France and sends for Abigail, who joins him in Paris. Adams is named Ambassador to Britain, and he and Abigail move to London. Adams returns home, realizing that he and Abigail weren't meant "to sit in the shade of life."

**Part 5 "Unite or Die"** Elected America's first Vice President, Adams is frustrated by his exclusion from President Washington's inner circle. Adams is elected President in 1796—by a mere three electoral votes over Jefferson.

**Part 6 "Unnecessary War"** Adams keeps the nation out of war, despite French aggression. Adams loses a bid for a second term and returns to Massachusetts.

**Part 7 "Peacefield"** Restless in retirement, Adams starts writing his memoirs, then endures a series of family tragedies. Adams resumes a correspondence with Jefferson that lasts the rest of his life.