

John Adams

“Great is the guilt of an unnecessary war.”

—John Adams



Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What do you know about the American Revolution?
2. What is a colony? What is a colonist?
3. What was Adams known for before he became the second president of the United States?
4. What do you know about John Adams’s presidency?
5. What does the term “Founding Father” mean?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match as many meanings and words as you can before you read.
Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| ___ 1. deacon | a) a colonist who rejected British rule in favor of US independence |
| ___ 2. witty | b) to force something on someone |
| ___ 3. patriot | c) a church cleric (below a priest or minister) |
| ___ 4. brawl | d) to convince |
| ___ 5. impose | e) having a quick, clever sense of humor |
| ___ 6. delegate | f) to write (from the beginning) |
| ___ 7. persuade | g) a large physical fight |
| ___ 8. nominate | h) a set time period |
| ___ 9. draft | i) a representative |
| ___ 10. treaty | j) excellent |
| ___ 11. term | k) a formal agreement between groups or nations |
| ___ 12. outstanding | l) to recommend a person for a leadership position or award |

Reading

1. John Adams was the second president of the United States and one of the nation's Founding Fathers. He was born in Massachusetts in 1735. His father was a farmer, a **deacon**, and a local politician. He encouraged his son to seek a career outside of farming. John took his father's advice. At the age of 16, he went to study at Harvard. After he graduated, he became a teacher. He soon realized that he didn't like teaching. In fact, he often let an older student teach while he read a book or a newspaper. Finally, John left teaching to become a lawyer.
2. In 1761, John met Abigail, a minister's daughter. Abigail was smart and **witty**, and very well-read. She and John had a lot in common. In 1764, John and Abigail got married. They were unusual for their time because they were true partners, best friends as well as husband and wife. Abigail, like John, loved politics, and both she and John were passionate about the **patriot** cause. John Adams valued Abigail's opinions and advice throughout their married life.
3. In 1768, John and Abigail moved to Boston, where John became a very successful lawyer. In one case, he defended a group of British soldiers who had killed some Americans in a street **brawl**. Although Adams did not like the British government, he wanted the British soldiers to have a fair trial. He won the case. Because of his fairness, he earned the respect of both sides, the British and the Americans.
4. From the 1760s on, John Adams actively protested British rule. He was tired of the high taxes and unfair regulations that the British had **imposed** on the colonists. In 1774, Adams and other colonists organized a big meeting to discuss colonists' rights. This meeting was called the First Continental Congress. Twelve of the thirteen colonies sent **delegates** to Philadelphia to attend. Adams was a delegate. George Washington was also a delegate. A Second Continental Congress was organized in 1775.
5. Adams played a very important role in both Continental Congresses. He helped to **persuade** Congress to break **ties** with England. He **nominated** George Washington to be Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. He also convinced Thomas Jefferson to **draft** the Declaration of Independence. After the Continental Congress broke ties with England, Adams was sent to Europe as a diplomat for the United States. In France, he helped to negotiate the **Treaty** of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War.
6. In 1789, George Washington was elected president of the United States. John Adams was elected vice president. He served for two **terms** under Washington. In 1796, Adams was elected president of the United States. He was not a very successful president. Despite preventing a war with France, most of his other decisions and policies were unpopular with the American people. He was president for only one term. In 1800, he lost the election to Thomas Jefferson. Although he was not an **outstanding** president, John Adams is honored as one of the most important Founding Fathers of the United States.

Comprehension

A. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information in your notebook.

- _____ 1. Adams's father was a minister in his church.
- _____ 2. John Adams and his wife, Abigail, shared many ideas and interests.
- _____ 3. John Adams was not a good teacher or a good lawyer.
- _____ 4. Adams was a skillful negotiator.
- _____ 5. Adams resigned after his first term as president.

B. Ask & Answer

Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner.

Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

1. Why did John Adams decide to leave teaching and become a lawyer?
2. How was Abigail Adams different from some other politicians' wives of Adams's time?
3. Why did Adams defend the British soldiers who had killed some colonists in a street brawl?
4. Why did John Adams decide to protest British authority and rule?
5. Who organized the First Continental Congress? Why?
6. How did John Adams contribute to the First and Second Continental Congress?
7. Why was the Treaty of Paris important?
8. Who was president when John Adams was vice president?
9. Why didn't John Adams serve a second term as president?

Vocabulary Practice

Choose the word that most closely matches each definition.

1. (*verb*) – to try to obtain or achieve something
 - a) seek
 - b) protest
 - c) nominate
2. (*adjective*) – clever and funny
 - a) studious
 - b) successful
 - c) witty
3. (*noun*) – a rough, noisy fight, usually between more than two people
 - a) treaty
 - b) draft
 - c) brawl
4. (*verb*) – to show that you are not happy with something
 - a) protest
 - b) support
 - c) establish
5. (*adjective*) – well-educated, capable of deep thought, interested in academic subjects
 - a) successful
 - b) intellectual
 - c) resentful
6. (*verb*) – to be angry about an unfair situation
 - a) impose
 - b) resent
 - c) organize
7. (*adjective*) – strong deep feelings or belief
 - a) fair
 - b) diplomatic
 - c) passionate
8. (*noun*) – the leader of a church
 - a) minister
 - b) deacon
 - c) patriot
9. (*verb*) – to write the first copy of something that will be changed later
 - a) organize
 - b) draft
 - c) honor
10. (*verb*) – to convince, to make someone change his or her mind by presenting good reasons
 - a) persuade
 - b) impose
 - c) nominate
11. (*noun*) – a close connection or relationship between people or countries
 - a) tie
 - b) right
 - c) role
12. (*noun*) – a person who loves her or his country and will fight to defend it
 - a) patriot
 - b) delegate
 - c) intellectual

Discussion

1. In your opinion, what were the most important roles that Adams played in the American Revolution?
2. How was Abigail Adams different from many other women of her time?
3. Why did Adams decide to defend the British soldiers? What did his decision show about his character?
4. The colonists lived under British rule, but they did not have the right to vote. Did that situation affect their actions and decisions? If yes, how? If no, why not?
5. John Adams said, "People and nations are forged in the fires of adversity." Was Adams talking about himself or his new country? Explain.
6. John Adams was descended from Puritans. Adams said that the Puritans were "bearers of freedom, a cause that still has a holy urgency." How does Adams's statement relate to his political ideas and achievements?

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students read a biography about the second president of the US. They discuss John Adams's important roles in the American Revolution and review related vocabulary.

LEVEL: Int – Adv

TIME: 1–2 hours

TAGS: John Adams, Adams, presidents, president, second president, 2nd, US, American Presidents, colonies, American Revolution, Independence

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

Answers will vary.

- A colony is made up of a group of people who have settled in a new land. A colonist is a person who is a member of a colony.
- Adams was a well-known lawyer. He was also a political activist, a political writer, a highly influential delegate to the First and Second Continental Congresses, and an effective negotiator and diplomat.
- He was not an outstanding president. Many of his policies were very unpopular with Americans and with his fellow politicians.
- The term “Founding Father” means a leader who helps to establish a new country.

B. VOCABULARY REVIEW

- | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. c | 3. a | 5. b | 7. d | 9. f | 11. h |
| 2. e | 4. g | 6. i | 8. l | 10. k | 12. j |

Comprehension

A. TRUE OR FALSE?

- F – Adams’s father was a deacon in his church.
- T
- F – Adams didn’t like teaching, but he was a successful lawyer.
- T
- F – Adams lost the election after his first term.

B. ASK & ANSWER

- Teaching bored him. / He didn’t like teaching.
- Abigail Adams and John Adams were intellectual equals.
- He felt that the British soldiers were entitled to (should have) a fair trial.
- He was tired of the high taxes and unfair regulations that were imposed by the British.
- Adams and other colonists organized the First Continental Congress to discuss colonists’ rights.
- He convinced Congress to break ties with England.
- The Treaty of Paris officially ended the Revolutionary War.
- Adams was George Washington’s vice president.
- Most of his policies were unpopular with the American people.

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Answer Key cont.

Vocabulary Practice

- | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. a | 3. c | 5. b | 7. c | 9. b | 11. a |
| 2. c | 4. a | 6. b | 8. a | 10. a | 12. a |

Discussion

Use these questions for writing or speaking practice. For writing practice, you can assign one to each student or allow students to choose one. For speaking practice, discuss in groups or as a class.

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Favor*, *Humor*, *Honored*, *Honor*, and *Practice*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Favour*, *Humour*, *Honoured*, *Honour*, and *Practise* (when used as a verb; *Practice* when used as a noun). Make it a challenge for your students to find these words in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spellings.