

Abigail Adams

Literature Annotation: *Abigail Adams* by Alexandra Wallner, New York: Holiday House, 2001. This story traces the life of Abigail Smith, a strong, intelligent and independent New Englander whose biography spans two centuries of enormous political change that gave birth to our nation. Her marriage to John Adams – colonial patriot and future President – took her from Massachusetts to France, to Great Britain and, finally, to the White House as First Lady. Abigail Adams is portrayed as a woman ahead of her time unafraid to voice her opinions for the greater good of our country.

Grade Level: 5th Grade

Duration: 2-3 Class Periods

Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC):

Economics Standard: Students will develop economic reasoning to understand the historical development and current status of economic principles, institutions, and processes needed to be effective citizens, consumers, and workers participating in local communities, the nation, and the world.

- 4.A.1.a Identify opportunity cost of economic decisions, such as whether or not to buy products on which British taxes were imposed (Grade 5)
- 4.A.2.a Describe how limited resources and unlimited economic wants caused colonists to choose certain goods and services (Grade 5)
- 4.B.1.a Identify examples of tradition, such as the economic roles of men and women (Grade 5)

History Standard:

- 5.B.2.c Analyze the different roles and viewpoints of individuals and groups, such as women, men, free and enslaved Africans, and Native Americans during the Revolutionary period (Grade 5)

Reading Standard:

- 1.D.1 Develop and apply vocabulary through exposure to a variety of texts (Grade 5)
- 1.E.3 Use strategies to make meaning from text (during reading) (Grade 5)

Objectives: Students will be able to...

- define and give examples of a traditional economy.
- describe the life and work of women during the American Revolution.
- define scarcity and give examples of scarcity during the American Revolution.
- describe the way women reacted to scarcity situations during the American Revolution.

Economic Vocabulary/Concepts:

Scarcity: the condition that results from the imbalance between relatively unlimited economic wants and the relatively limited resources, goods and services available to satisfy those wants.

Traditional economy: a system where the economic decisions that people and groups make to answer the basic economic questions of "what," "for whom" and "how" generally repeat the decisions made at an earlier time or by an earlier generation. In other words, people do what they have always done.

Materials:**Teacher:**

- *Abigail Adams* by Alexandra Wallner
- Overhead projector
- Transparency of Teacher Resource Sheet #1, “Remember the Ladies”
- Teacher Resource Sheet #2, “The Currency of Colonial Massachusetts”
- Transparency of Student Resource #3, “Abigail’s Economy”
- Transparency of Student Resource # 5, “Abigail Adams to John Adams April 20, 1777” (USE FOR MODELING ACTIVITY)

Student:

- Student Resource Sheet #1, “Traditional Economy”
- Student Resource Sheet #2, “Women and the American Revolution”

Per Student Group:

- Student Resource Sheet #3, “Abigail’s Economy” to each group
- Group #1: Student Resource Sheet #4, “Abigail Adams to John Adams: April 17, 1777”
- MODELING EX: Student Resource Sheet #5, “Abigail Adams to John Adams: April 20, 1777”
- Group #2: Student Resource Sheet #6, “Abigail Adams to John Adams: July 30-31, 1777”
- Group #3: Student Resource Sheet #7: “Abigail Adams to John Adams: August 22, 1777”
- Group #4: Student Resource Sheet #8: “Abigail Adams to John Adams: September 10, 1777”

Resources:

Abigail’s War: The American Revolution through the Eyes of Abigail Adams
<http://www.masshist.org/DIGITALADAMS/AEA/education/>

Motivation

1. Display Teacher Resource Sheet #1, “Remember the Ladies.” Ask: When was this letter written? What was Abigail Adams talking about? What does she mean “independency”? What does she mean by “remember the ladies”?
2. Remind students that this letter was written in 1776, during the American Revolution. Abigail was writing to her husband, John Adams, who was attending the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Ask students to recall what they know about the role of women during the time of the Revolution. Discuss.

Lesson Development

1. Define “traditional economy.” Explain that in a traditional economy what has been done in the past continues to occur with skills being passed down from parent to child.
2. Explain to students that they are going to be learning about Abigail Adams and the role of women during the time of the American Revolution. Tell them that as you read the book *Abigail Adams* by Alexandra Wallner, they should record the examples and non-examples of a traditional economy that they hear.

3. After reading, discuss student examples and non-examples of traditional economies.
Examples: *only boys went to school, men got involved in government & politics, girls learned housework, women took care of children, women gave dinner parties, women did laundry*
Non-example: *Abigail managed the family's money*
4. At this point, students might not see any non-examples. Refer back to page 5 of *Abigail Adams* (begins with "At this time, the British Stamp Act required..."). Explain to them that prior to the Revolutionary War era it was not proper for women to manage family money, businesses, or farms. The Revolutionary War changed this. Because many men were away fighting in the war, women were left to take care of things at home. They faced many challenges during this time.
5. Distribute Student Resource Sheet #2, "Women and the American Revolution." Read with the students. Check for understanding. Ask students to re-visit Student Resource Sheet #1. Ask them to record any non-examples of traditional economy they may have discovered.
6. Display Teacher Resource Sheet #2, "The Currency of Colonial Massachusetts." Discuss with students.
7. Break the class into four groups giving each group one of the letters from Abigail Adams to John Adams (Student Resource Sheets # 4,6, 7 and 8) as well as a copy of "Abigail's Economy" (Student Resource Sheet #3). Explain that the letters contain 18th century spelling. Model the activity using Student Resource #5. Reinforce the fact that not all of the goods are mentioned in every letter so there will be blanks in the columns.
 - Have students read their assigned document and discuss.
 - After some discussion, have them complete the column on the chart that matches their letter and take notes relative to Part 2.
 - Display Student Resource Sheet #3. As groups report out, have students complete the remaining columns on their chart.
8. Discuss their notes on Part 2 of "Abigail's Economy."

Assessment: Have students respond to the following prompt:

During the Revolutionary War, women faced many economic challenges. Write a note to your teacher describing what you learned about their economic challenges and how the women overcame them.

Be sure to include the following information:

- the economic challenges faced by women during the Revolutionary War
- how the women overcame the challenges
- the part that scarcity played in the challenges
- the role of a "traditional economy" in creating the challenges

Now, write your note to your teacher.

Remember the Ladies



“I long to hear that you have declared an independancy—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 favourable to them than your ancestors.”

Abigail Adams
Letter to her husband,
John Adams
March 31, 1776

http://www.masshist.org/adams/manuscripts_1.cfm##

The Currency of Colonial Massachusetts

During the years of the American Revolution, Massachusetts residents used the British system of currency. People like Abigail Adams used pound, shillings, and pence. Pounds were worth the most, then shillings, and then pence. (“Pence” is the plural form of the word “penny.”)

£ = pound

s. = shilling

d. = pence

£1 (1 pound) = 20s. (20 Shillings)

1s. (1 shilling) = 12d. (12 pence)

Traditional Economy

Traditional Economy

Dictionary Definition:

Definition in MY OWN words:

Visual:

Examples:

Non- Examples:

Women and the American Revolution

During the Revolutionary War, many men from the colonies joined the army to fight against the British. They had to leave their jobs and their families behind. There were fewer farmers to plant crops, store owners to sell goods, and blacksmiths to shoe horses and make nails. Now alone, women like Abigail Adams had to support their families. They had to figure out how to purchase or get goods that were hard to find and expensive; they had to run farms and shops on their own, often without enough hired help; and they had to continue their regular work as caretakers. Such women became financial experts as they managed their families' budgets and business affairs during these difficult years.

Abigail's Economy

Part 1: Not all goods were easily available during the American Revolution. As you read your assigned letter from Abigail to John Adams, place an “**S**” in the correct column next to the good if it was “**scarce**” or an “**ABE**” if the good was “**available but expensive**.” Only some of the goods are mentioned in each letter.

| Good | April 17, 1777 | April 20, 1777 | July 30-31, 1777 | August 22, 1777 | September 10, 1777 |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Indian Corn | | | | | |
| Rye | | | | | |
| Beef | | | | | |
| Veal | | | | | |
| Butter | | | | | |
| Mutton | | | | | |
| Lamb | | | | | |
| Pork | | | | | |
| Sugar | | | | | |
| Molasses | | | | | |
| Cotton | | | | | |
| Wool | | | | | |
| Rum | | | | | |
| Coffee | | | | | |
| Chocolate | | | | | |
| Tea | | | | | |

Part 2: In the space below, explain how Abigail and other women responded to scarcity during the American Revolution. Provide examples that support your explanation.

**Abigail Adams to John Adams
April 17, 1777**

You give me an account in one of your Letters of the removal of your Lodgings. The extravagance of Board is greater there than here tho here every thing is at such prices as was not ever before known. Many articles are not to be had tho at ever so great a price. Sugar, Molasses, Rum, cotton wool, Coffe, chocolate, cannot all be consumed. Yet there are none, or next to none to be sold, perhaps you may procure a pound at a time, but no more. I have sometimes stoped 15 or 20 Butchers in a day with plenty of meat but not a mouthfull to be had unless I would give 4 pence per pound and a pence per pound for bringing. I have never yet indulged them and am determined I will not whilst I have a mouthfull of salt meat, to Eat, but the act is no more regarded now than if it had never been made and has only this Effect I think, that it makes people worse than they would have been without it.

As to cloathing of any sort for myself or family I think no more of purchaseing any than if they were to live like Adam and Eve in innocence.

I seek wool and flax and can work willingly with my Hands, and tho my Household are not cloathed with fine linnen nor scarlet, they are cloathed with what is perhaps full as Honorary, the plain and decent manufactory of my own family, and tho I do not abound, I am not in want. I have neither poverty nor Riches but food which is convenient for me and a Heart to be thankfull and content that in such perilous times so large a share of the comforts of life are allotted to me.

I have a large Share of Health to be thankfull for, not only for myself but for my family.

**Abigail Adams to John Adams
April 20, 1777**

There is a general cry against the Merchants, against monopolizers &c. who tis said have created a partial Scarcity. That a Scarcity prevails of every article not only of Luxery, but even the necessaries of life is a certain fact. Every thing bears an exorbitant price. The act which for a while was in some measure regarded and stemed the torrent of oppression is now no more Heeded than if it had never been made; Indian Corn at 5 shillings, Rye 11 and 12 shillings, but none scarcely to be had even at that price, Beaf 8 pence, veal 6 pence and 8 pence, Butter 1 & 6 pence; Mutton none, Lamb none, pork none, Sugar mean Sugar £4 per hundred, Molasses none, cotton wool none, Rum N.E. 8 shillings per Gallon, Coffe 2 & 6 per pound, Chocolate 3 shillings.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 20 – 21 April 1777 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society.
<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

**Abigail Adams to John Adams
July 30-31, 1777**

You must know that there is a great Scarcity of Sugar and Coffe, articles which the Female part of the State are very loth to give up, expecially whilst they consider the Scarcity occasiond by the merchants having secreted a large Quantity. There has been much rout and Noise in the Town for several weeks. Some Stores had been open'd by a number of people and the Coffe and Sugar carried into the Market and dealt out by pounds. It was rumour'd that an eminent, wealthy, stingy Merchant (who is a Batchelor) had a Hogshead of Coffe in his Store which he refused to sell to the committee under 6 shillings per pound. A Number of Females some say a hundred, some say more assembled with a cart and trucks, march'd down to the Ware House and demanded the keys, which he refused to deliver, upon which one of them seiz'd him by his Neck and toss'd him into the cart. Upon his finding no Quarter he deliver'd the keys, when they tip'd up the cart and discharg'd him, then open'd the Warehouse, Hoisted out the Coffe themselves, put it into the trucks and drove off.

It was reported that he had a Spanking among them, but this I believe was not true. A large concourse of Men stood amaz'd silent Spectators of the whole transaction.

**Abigail Adams to John Adams
August 22, 1777**

Heaven has blessed us with fine crops. I hope to have 200 hundred Bushels of corn and a hundred & 50 weight of flax. English Hay we have more than we had last year, notwithstanding your ground wants manure. We are like to have a plenty of sause. I shall fat Beaf and pork enough, make butter and cheesse enough. If I have neither Sugar, molasses, coffe nor Tea I have no right to complain. I can live without any of them and if what I enjoy I can share with my partner and with Liberty, I can sing o be joyfull and sit down content

"Man wants but little here below
Nor wants that little long."

As to cloathing I have heithertoo procured materials sufficent to cloath my children and servants which I have done wholly in Home Spun. I have contracted no debts that I have not discharg'd, and one of our Labourers Prince I have paid seven months wages to since you left me. Besides that I have paid Bracket near all we owed him which was to the amount of 15 pounds lawfull money, set up a cider press &c.,

**Abigail Adams to John Adams
September 10, 1777**

What can be done? Our money will soon be as useless as blank paper. Tis True I have not much to be anxious about, but it will soon take all I have to pay my day labourers, mowing 12 shillings a day, and much obliged to them to come at that. Butter is 3 shillings, cheeses 2, Mutton 18 pence, Beaf 18 pence, Lamb 1 & 4 pence. Corn at no price, none to be had. Barly 8 shillings a Bushel, Rye none, sold only by way of Barter. Sugar 15 pounds per hundred, Coffe 10 shillings per pound, Molasses 24 per Gallon, Rum 28 ditto. What is to become of sallery people? With Hard money not one article of the produce of this Country but what I could purchase cheeper than ever it was sold, nor do they value offering 8 dollors for one.

Necessity is the Mother of invention. There is a Manufactory of Molasses set up in several Towns. Green corn Storcks ground and boild down to Molasses,tis said an acre will produce a Barrel. I have seen some of it, it both tastes and looks like Sugar Bakers molasses.

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 10 September 1777 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society.
<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>