

# Abigail Adams

1744—1818



**WHY SHE MADE HISTORY** Abigail Adams was an early supporter of women's rights. She wrote many letters to her husband, President John Adams, which described what society was like during that time.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Abigail Adams's desire to communicate with her husband recorded history at the same time.*

As the wife of one president and mother of another, Abigail Adams witnessed American history in the making. But she also carved out her own niche as a writer and as one of the first people to advocate women's rights.

Abigail Adams was born in 1744 in Weymouth, Massachusetts. Poor health kept her from receiving a proper education, but Abigail Adams was intelligent and interested in learning. She read many of the books in her family's private library, and even taught herself French.

In 1764, Abigail married John Adams. During the 1770s, he spent a lot of time away from home, participating in the fight for independence. Abigail Adams, who stayed home to raise their four children and run the family farm, began writing many letters to her husband. She also wrote to other leaders of the Revolution, including Thomas Jefferson. Abigail was well versed in literature, history, and political philosophy. Her letters influenced these leaders, as well as expressed her ideas and feelings about life in the newly born nation.

While her husband was attending the Continental Congress of 1776, Abigail Adams wrote, "I desire



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## VOCABULARY

**suffrage** the right to vote

you would remember the ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors [were].” During this time, women had very few rights. Nationwide women’s **suffrage** would not occur until 1920.

John Adams, who was the first vice president, became president in 1797. He and Abigail and their children became the first presidential family to live in the White House in 1800. Her intelligence and personality earned Abigail Adams a reputation as one of the most distinguished and significant first ladies in American history. John Quincy Adams, John and Abigail’s eldest son, returned to the White House when he was elected president in 1824.

Many of the letters Abigail Adams wrote to her husband and others were later published by her grandson. Her writing provides a window into life, society, and politics during the founding of the nation. The letters illustrate what it was like to be a woman, a wife, and a mother in 18th century America. They reveal her interest in politics, her intelligence, and her avid patriotism.

### **WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

1. What did Abigail Adams write about in her many letters?

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2. **Make Inferences** Why do you think these letters are important today?

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### **ACTIVITY**

3. Think about what you have read about Abigail Adams, and the letters she wrote. Write a personal letter to Abigail Adams. Use this as an opportunity to ask a question, or share a current event.