

Revolutionary Mothers: Abigail Adams 1744-1818



Abigail Adams was born in 1744 in Weymouth, Massachusetts to Reverend William Smith and Elizabeth Quincy Smith. Her mother's side of the family, the Quincys, were very well known in the Massachusetts colony. As a child, Mrs. Smith taught Abigail and her sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, to read and write. Although Abigail never attended school, she keenly read the books available to her in her family's library. Even as a child, Abigail demonstrated great intelligence, curiosity, and forward-thinking.

Abigail met John Adams, a Harvard graduate, in 1759, and they were married on October 25, 1764. At the time, John was pursuing a career as a lawyer. The young couple lived on a farm in Braintree, and then later moved to Boston as John's law firm expanded over time. Over the next 10 years, Abigail gave birth to 5 children: Abigail, John Quincy, Susanna, Charles, and Thomas.

John Adams played a very important role in the colonies' fight for independence from Great Britain. His work as a member of the Continental Congress and as a foreign diplomat kept John away from home for great lengths of time. Abigail wrote to her husband in 1773, "Alas, how many snowbanks divide thee and me..." During this time, Abigail wrote many letters to her husband. These letters describe in detail the challenges faced by Abigail and women like her during the time of the American Revolution. Their difficulties included struggling to get by during wartime shortages, running a farm with little help, raising and educating children alone, as well as a general sense of loneliness. Abigail's letters to John offer much insight into their relationship, as well as their political conversations.

As evidenced in her letters, Abigail was a strong supporter of women's rights. In her most famous letter to John, written in March 1776, she wrote, "...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". Both Abigail and John were also deeply opposed to slavery. They felt that it was a great threat to the young nation of America.

John Adams became the first Vice President of the United States, and later became the second President, and Abigail's role as his wife changed. She became responsible for formally entertaining guests and was the first hostess of the White House, since she and John were its first residents. During these years, Abigail remained a strong influence on her husband's political decisions.

John ran for President for a second term but was defeated. He and Abigail retired to Quincy in 1801. Abigail died on October 28, 1818, of typhoid fever. She is buried in a cemetery in Quincy. John Adams died in 1826, during their son John Quincy's first term as President.

Comprehension Questions:

1. How did Abigail's early education affect her later in life? How do you think her life would have been different if her mother had not taught her to read and write at a young age?
2. Describe how Abigail's role as John Adams's wife changed over the course of their marriage. What different "jobs" did she have? Which one do you think was the hardest for her? Why?
3. What were two causes that were very important to Abigail? What does this tell you about Abigail?
4. How do we know so much about the relationship between Abigail and John Adams?
5. What do you think Abigail Adams is BEST remembered for?

Activities:

1. Below is the passage from Abigail's famous 1776 letter to her husband about women's rights, and a passage from his response.
Abigail: *"...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"*
John: *:...as to your extraordinary code of laws, I cannot but laugh...Depend upon it, we know better Than to repeal our masculine systems..."*

Rewrite each passage into your own words. Then, with your partner, act out a conversation between John and Abigail about women's rights.
2. Do some research on John Adams. Make a list of the 5 most important things you learn about his political career. Then create a flip book to illustrate these 5 most important accomplishments.
3. Complete a bio-cube on Abigail Adams using the website:
http://readwritethink.org/materials/bio_cube/
4. Visit the Adams Historical National Park website at :
<http://www.nps.gov/adam/historyculture/places.htm>. Read through the information about the Adams family's different homes. Create a timeline showing 4 of the places the Adams family lived. Include information on who lived there, when, and why. This can include the home of John Quincy Adams as well.
5. Write 10 questions that you would like to ask Abigail Adams if you could interview her. Then write answers to each question, as though you were Abigail.

Revolutionary Mothers: Catherine (Caty) Greene 1755-1814



Catherine “Caty” Littlefield was born on February 17, 1755 on Block Island, off the coast of Rhode Island. Caty’s mother died when she was 10 years old, and she was sent to live with an aunt and uncle in East Greenwich, RI. Caty’s uncle was the governor of Rhode Island. In her aunt and uncle’s care, Caty learned to read and write, and also met many influential people of the time. A frequent visitor of her aunt’s was Benjamin Franklin, as was Nathaniel Greene, a wealthy merchant. Caty and Nathaniel began a courtship and were married in 1774. At the time, Caty was 18 and Nathaniel was 30.

The couple was married for less than a year when Nathaniel was called away to war, where he eventually became a general. Caty was not content to stay at home and wait for her husband to return. During the time of the war and shortly after, the Greens had 5 children.

Caty was torn between her responsibilities as a mother and her desire to be near her husband. Caty also had a great desire to see events of the War unfold for herself; she longed to be where the action was. Caty would frequently visit Nathaniel’s headquarters whenever possible.

Visits to the camps offered Caty many social opportunities. Here, she became part of an elite social circle, attending and hosting dinner parties and dances. She made many social connections, and found this life a delightful escape from the boredom of everyday life. Nathaniel would often travel off to battles or other encampments for long time periods while Caty stayed behind. During one of their long separations, Nathaniel wrote to his wife, “How unhappy is war to domestic happiness”. Nathaniel went on to great success in the Revolutionary War, but did not see his wife again until after the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781.

After the war, Caty and Nathaniel were reunited in South Carolina, where together they and the army marched to reclaim the city of Charleston. The state of Carolina granted Nathaniel Greene rich farmland, a gesture of thanks for reclaiming their land from the British. The family moved into their new home, Mulberry Grove, and settled into the hard work of running a plantation. Caty was determined to help her husband recover from the exhaustion of the long War and make their plantation successful. However, Nathaniel died suddenly in 1786, apparently of sunstroke.

In 1792, Caty met a man named Eli Whitney, who was a tutor to her neighbor’s children. With Greene’s encouragement, Whitney moved into Mulberry Grove to work on developing his invention. Within a year, Whitney had completed the first cotton gin. In 1796, Caty married Phineas Miller, her children’s tutor. Despite their best efforts, Mulberry Grove became unsuccessful and had to be sold. Caty moved back to Rhode Island with her family. She died in 1814, and is buried on Cumberland Island in RI.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why did Caty visit the war encampments as often as she did?
2. What crops do you think would have been grown at Mulberry Grove, SC? Why?
3. Caty's second husband was her children's tutor. Why do you think the Greene children needed to have a tutor live with them?
4. Who was the famous inventor that lived with Caty and her family at Mulberry Grove? What was his most famous invention?
5. What do you think Nathaniel meant in his letter when he said, "How unhappy is war to domestic happiness"?

Activities:

1. Read a letter from Nathaniel to Caty Greene. It can be found at: <http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=897> . Circle the date the letter was written. Underline any words you don't recognize or can't read. Reading what you can in the letter, go back and write in words that you think make sense for some of the words you underlined. Choose one paragraph from the letter and rewrite it in your own words. Think: *What is the letter mainly about?*
2. Write a letter back to Nathaniel, as though you were Caty Greene. Try to respond to at least 2 things he mentioned in his letter to "you".
3. Draw a picture of one of the dinner parties that Caty attended. Add detail to show the kind of clothing the guests would wear, what they would be doing, and who they might be.
4. Look at the animated diagram of Eli Whitney's cotton gin at: <http://www.eliwhitney.org/cotton/patent.htm> . What do you think the invention was used for? How do you think it worked? After you answer these questions, read about the invention at : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotton_gin . How close were your guesses to how the machine really worked? Why was this an important invention of the time?
5. Create an acrostic poem about Caty Greene using the link: <http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/acrostic/> .

Revolutionary Mothers: Lydia Darragh 1729 – 1789



Lydia Barrington was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1729. In 1753 she married her tutor, William Darragh. The couple emigrated to America, where they settled in Philadelphia. Here, William continued to work as a tutor, and Lydia began working as a nurse, midwife, and mortician. As Quakers, the Darraghs were reluctant to become involved in the Revolutionary War, which was unfolding all around them. However, they also strongly supported the Patriot case. In 1777, when they had taken control of Philadelphia, British officers came to Lydia's house and told her that they wished to use one of her rooms for their meetings.

One night in December 1777, British General William Howe and his officers were meeting in the home while the Darragh family slept. The men never realized that Lydia was not sleeping, but instead was on the other side of the door, listening to their meeting. She overheard all the details of their plan to overtake General Washington and his troops who were stationed north of Philadelphia. Lydia crept back to bed where she lay awake, worrying over a

way to get this information to General Washington so that he could be prepared.

The next day, Lydia went to General Howe's headquarters and obtained a pass to leave the city, saying that her family needed more flour from the mill 6 miles away. Lydia did go to the mill, where she left her flour bag and continued on, in search of American soldiers. When she reached the American lines, Lydia relayed her information to a friend named Colonel Thomas Craig, and then she went back to the mill to get her bag of flour. She walked back across the British lines with her sack of flour and headed home.

The day of the planned attack on American troops, Lydia anxiously watched as the British troops marched away. After four long days of waiting, Lydia learned that she had been successful. Washington and his army had been expecting the British attack and were ready for it. Unfortunately, the British suspected that a member of the Darragh family was responsible for leaking the information. They brought Lydia into a room and questioned her, but she remained calm. The officer believed her story.

Lydia continued to support the war effort by nursing sick and wounded soldiers in the Philadelphia area. Her involvement in the war resulted in criticism from some community members, but Lydia rose above this. She continued to live in Philadelphia until her death in 1789, and today is remembered as a Revolutionary War heroine.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Why was Lydia Darragh reluctant to actively be involved in the Patriot cause?
2. How did Lydia know the secret British plans?
3. How was Lydia able to leave the city and relay her message? Why do you think the British officers let her go? Why didn't they suspect her plan?
4. Was Lydia's plan successful? Explain.
5. In what other ways did Lydia support the American war effort?

Activities:

1. Go to: http://interactives.mped.org/view_interactive.aspx?id=28&title= .

Complete a 3 circle Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the 3 women (Abigail Adams, Caty Greene, and Lydia Darragh).

2. Write a biography poem about Lydia Darragh.

Line One: First Name

Line Two: 3 Adjectives to describe her

Line Three: Important relationship (mother to, wife of...)

Line Four: 3 feelings she experienced

Line Five: 3 things the person feared

Line Six: Accomplishments (who discovered... , who accomplished... , etc.)

Line Seven: Her residence

Line Eight: Last name

3. Imagine that Lydia had been caught spying outside the door of the meeting room. Write a paragraph describing what you think would have happened when she was caught.
4. Write a thank you letter to Lydia as though you are George Washington. Use the friendly letter format, and be sure to include an accurate date.
5. Complete an Event Map outlining Lydia's spying event.

What Happened?

Where?

When?

EVENT MAP

Why did it happen?

Who was involved?

How did it happen?