John Adams

Handout A—John Adams
(1735–1826)

1. Adams played a leading role in the First Continental Congress, serving on ninety committees and chairing twenty-five of these. An early advocate of independence from Great Britain, in 1776 he penned his Thoughts on Government, describing how government should be arranged. He headed the committee charged with writing the Declaration of Independence. He served on the commission that negotiated the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War.

2. Adams was not present at the Constitutional Convention. However, while serving as an American diplomat in London, he followed the proceedings. Adams and Jefferson urged Congress to yield to the Anti-Federalist demand for the Bill of Rights as a condition for ratifying the proposed Constitution.

3. The Alien and Sedition Acts gave the government the authority to deport aliens, to lengthen the period of naturalization for immigrants, and to jail citizens who expressed opinions critical of the government. The Alien and Sedition Acts were meant to quell support for France and to silence Republican criticism of the government.

4. Some students may not deem Adams’s accomplishments to be on par with those of George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. Others may argue that Adams’s approval of the Alien and Sedition Acts constitutes a black mark on his record that makes him undeserving of the honor of a monument. Still other students will argue that Adams deserves a monument because his contributions to American independence and to the formation of the American government were on par with his more famous contemporaries. These students may point out that Adams penned defenses of American rights in the 1770s and was one of the earliest advocates of colonial independence from Great Britain. They may also mention that his authorship of the Massachusetts Constitution and Declaration of Rights of 1780 makes him a champion of individual liberty.

5. Some students may suggest that government may limit speech when the public safety requires it. Others may suggest that offensive or obscene speech may be restricted. Still other students will argue against any limitations on freedom of speech.

Handout B—Vocabulary and Context Questions

1. Vocabulary
   a. disagreed
   b. caused
   c. until now
   d. beginning
   e. struggles
   f. remember
   g. foolishness
   h. separated
   i. crises
   j. suffering
   k. corruption
   l. doubts
   m. God’s care
   n. era

2. Context
   a. John Adams wrote these documents.
   b. These documents were written on July 3, 1776.
   c. These are private letters to Adams’s wife, Abigail.
   d. John Adams wrote these documents to share his thoughts and feelings with his wife, and perhaps for posterity’s sake.
**Handout D—Discussion Guide**

1. Adams is referring to the Congress’s resolution to declare independence from Britain.
2. He mentions Otis’s argument against writs of assistance as the beginning point of the American Revolution, the resolution for independence being the culmination.
3. Adams predicts that July 2 will be celebrated as the anniversary festival (or Independence Day).
4. Suggested responses: humbled, cautious, content, proud, or satisfied
5. Suggested responses: jubilant, happy, enthusiastic, pleased, or realistic
6. Adams believes there will be challenges ahead. He expects that it will require sacrifice and hard work to maintain what they have just created. But he welcomes the struggle and believes the new nation will be stronger for it.
7. Adams means that suffering builds character in people as well as in nations. The struggles each individual will face, either as a soldier, elected office-holder, or citizen will mirror the struggles the new nation will face. Both will be stronger—as a furnace or kiln refines and strengthens a piece of pottery.
8. Students should provide evidence for their reasoning. Letter A was written in the morning of July 3, 1776 and Letter B in the evening of July 3, 1776.
9. Private letters, particularly those written to intimates, may be likely to reveal an individual’s true feelings more than something produced for public display. Other students will say that elected officials, as John Adams was when he wrote these letters, are more likely to reveal vulnerabilities and doubts about public policy when they are writing private letters. Some students may suggest that personal writings may also be written for posterity.

**Handout A—Samuel Adams (1722–1803)**

1. Adams began to study law but soon turned to a career in business instead. He worked for a time as a clerk for a well-known Boston merchant. When Adams’s father died in 1748, he took over the family brewery. But Adams was a poor manager, and the brewery went bankrupt. Adams next took a job as a colonial tax collector, but he failed in this position too.
2. Adams appealed to both natural and English rights. In “Resolutions of the Boston Town Meeting,” he argued that the law of nature dictated that “no law of the society can be binding on any individual without his consent.” The colonists of Massachusetts, Adams held, were not represented in Parliament. Therefore, the British government could not tax them. In “The Rights of the Colonists,” Adams claimed that the American colonists were “entitled, to all the natural, essential, inherent, and inseparable rights, liberties, and privileges of subjects born in Great Britain.”
3. Adams signed the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation and helped to write the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780.
4. Adams hoped that the country would forever be an “asylum on earth for civil and religious liberty” and “never cease to be free and independent.” He hoped that “Temperance,” “Frugality,” and the old republican spirit of virtuous self-sacrifice for the common good would characterize American society.
5. During the 1760s, Adams became a leader of the Patriot resistance to the British government’s attempt to tax the American colonies. With John Hancock and James Otis, he organized the Sons of Liberty, who took the lead in opposing the Stamp Act of 1765 and the