

# presidents of the *United States of America*

"I led the effort  
for American  
independence  
and served as the  
2nd President of  
the United  
States."



**John Adams**



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# Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about John Adams's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

He and his wife Abigail owned a horse, and we need to find out what its name was. You can help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.

— — — — —

Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

## Meet John Adams

Have you ever felt overlooked or unappreciated? If you have, you might be surprised to know that some of America's presidents have felt the same way. Being president is a tough job—you get criticized a lot and people often don't always appreciate the good things that you do. Few people understood this more than our second president, John Adams – a man who was often attacked and mocked by his opponents.



Part of it might have been his appearance. Short and bald, Adams was an easy target for attacks. Part of it might have been his personality. He was often cranky and got into heated arguments with his colleagues.

These traits led people to focus on Adams's negative qualities. They had great respect for the other Founding Fathers—men like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton. Americans even put their faces on currency, but not John Adams's.

In Adams's case, however, looks can be deceiving, because he was, indeed, one of the greatest Founding Fathers. Few people did more during the American Revolution to make the United States an independent nation. Despite his flaws, the American people chose him as their first vice president. Then, when the great George Washington retired, they chose him as their second president.

John Adams may be one of America's least appreciated presidents, but it's hard to imagine the country winning independence and surviving in its early years without his leadership.

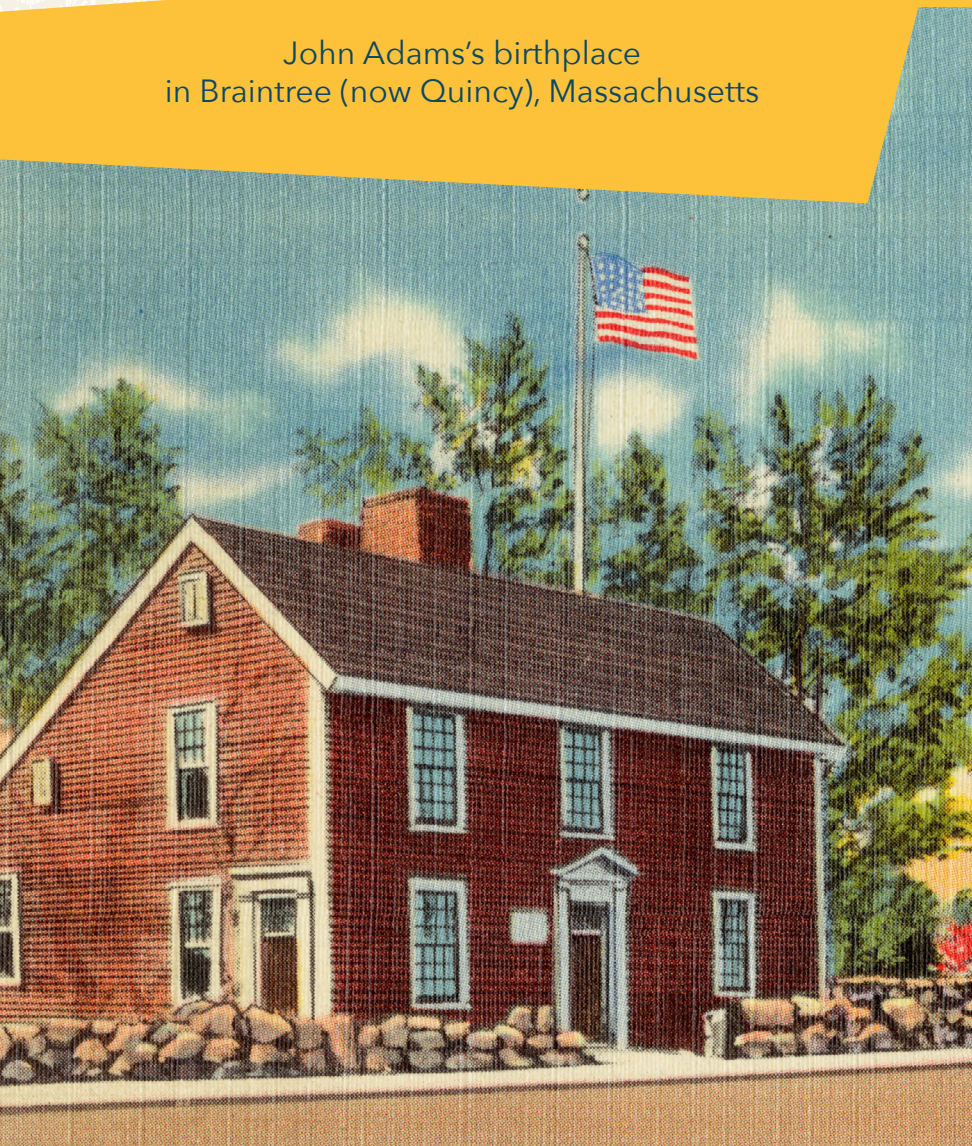


# Young John

John Adams, son of John Sr. and Susanna Adams, grew up on a farm in Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. His father, John Sr., was a very busy man. When he wasn't serving as a **deacon** in the Congregational Church, he was supporting his family through farming and shoemaking. Young John and his two younger brothers, Peter and Elihu, helped the family by doing chores on the farm, but they also found time to have outdoor adventures. They especially loved going hunting and fishing.

Young John dreamed one day of following his father's footsteps and becoming a farmer. John Sr., on the other hand, saw that his son was highly intelligent and might be suited for something else—perhaps being a **clergyman**. Encouraged by his father, young John studied hard at a local school, becoming one of its best students. He was so smart that he was admitted into Harvard College at the young age of 15.

John Adams's birthplace  
in Braintree (now Quincy), Massachusetts



## Interesting Facts

- He was a member of the Federalist Party.
- He was the first Vice President of the United States and the second President of the United States.
- He and George H.W. Bush are the only two presidents whose sons also became president.
- He and his son John Quincy Adams are the only presidents of the first twelve presidents that never had enslaved servants.
- He was the first president to live in the White House.
- He died on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.





## Early Career

After graduating from Harvard in 1755, Adams studied law and became a successful attorney. Later, in 1764, he married a highly intelligent woman named Abigail Smith, the daughter of a prominent local minister. They eventually had five children, although one, Susanna, died in infancy.

John Adams was just one of many lawyers in **New England**, but in 1770, he got his big break. By then, the British government had been imposing unfair and oppressive taxes on the American colonists for several years. Many Americans protested against the British government. On March 5, 1770, violence broke out in Boston when a group of more than 300 colonists yelled at and threatened a group of nine British soldiers. Fearing for their lives, the British soldiers fired upon the crowd, killing five. Many Americans were outraged and wanted the soldiers hanged. The incident would forever be remembered as the Boston Massacre.

Although Adams was a colonist and strongly believed in defending the Americans' rights, he also believed that the mob was to blame for **provoking** the soldiers. He courageously defended the British soldiers in court and successfully prevented the accused soldiers from going to jail. This **verdict** showed the world that the American cause would be built upon the rule of law. It also gave John Adams a reputation for being both brilliant and fair.

## John and Abigail

John and Abigail Adams lived in a time when most women stayed at home to raise the children while their husbands had professional careers. Although Abigail Adams did indeed stay at home and raise their kids, she was very smart and well-informed about political issues. Unlike many husbands of the time, John respected his wife's political opinions and sought her advice throughout his career. They wrote over 1,000 letters to each other during the course of their marriage. In fact, when John served in the Continental Congress in 1776, Abigail famously wrote to him, reminding him to "Remember the ladies" when he drafted laws for the colonies.



## Quote

"I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy... in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Music... and Porcelain."

- May 1780





# The American Revolution

By 1774, many American colonists worried that they would have to fight a war against Great Britain. That year, the colonies sent delegates to the Continental Congress to decide on what to do. John Adams and his cousin Samuel Adams (an outspoken opponent of British policies) attended Congress as representatives of Massachusetts.

War broke out in April 1775. Soon, the Congress looked for someone to lead the military effort against the British. In June of that year, Adams rose up in Congress to **nominate** Virginian delegate George Washington as the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. Congress approved Washington's selection unanimously. It was a brilliant decision—Washington led the army with great determination and integrity.

Even though the war had begun, the members of Congress couldn't agree on what to do. Some hoped that negotiations with Great Britain could end the war. Others, like Adams, believed that negotiations would only allow the British to continue imposing their oppressive laws. He believed that, to be truly free, America had to leave the British Empire permanently. He worked

hard to convince other delegates of his views. His efforts paid off when Congress declared independence on July 4, 1776.

When Congress looked for someone to write the first draft of the Declaration, Adams nominated Virginia delegate Thomas Jefferson. Once again, it was a brilliant choice, since Jefferson was one of the most eloquent writers in the colonies.

During the war, Adams traveled to Europe to convince its leaders to provide military and financial assistance to the United States. All of these travels meant he had to make long, dangerous voyages across the sea and live far away from his family for many years. The Adams family made great sacrifices on behalf of the nation.

After Washington won a major victory at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781, the British realized they couldn't win the war. Adams, along with Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and Henry Laurens, negotiated with the British to end the conflict. In 1783, the Americans and the British signed the Treaty of Paris. The war was over and the United States was free.





## After the War

In 1787, many of the Founders gathered to draft a new constitution for the country. The states ratified it in 1788, making it the law in the country. The new Constitution created two new offices, the President and the Vice President of the United States. They would be the two highest-ranking offices in the country. From December 1788 to January 1789, the country held its first presidential election. Everyone knew that George Washington would be chosen as the nation's first president and he ended up being elected unanimously by the Electoral College. Since John Adams had the second highest number of votes, he became the first vice president. Both Washington and Adams would be re-elected in 1792.

Vice President Adams loyally supported Washington for two terms, although things did not always go smoothly. Americans began disagreeing on many issues, splitting into two parties: the **Federalists** and the **Democratic-Republicans**. While Washington, Adams, and Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton led the Federalist Party, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and Congressman James Madison led the Democratic-Republicans. When Washington announced he was retiring in 1796, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson emerged as candidates to replace him. The election was heated and divisive, but Adams won a close victory, 71 electoral votes to 68.



### Quote

"Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence."

- December 1770





# President

President Adams immediately faced a major crisis. At the time, Britain and France were at war, and Americans disagreed on how to respond. Most Federalists wanted to support Britain, because it was the United States' biggest trading partner, while most Democratic-Republicans wanted to support France, because it had helped America during its Revolution.

The French enraged many Americans when they began attacking U.S. **merchant** ships in 1796. This led to an undeclared naval conflict between America and France known as the "Quasi-War." People across the United States demanded that Adams officially declare war on France. President Adams, however, knew that America could not survive a war because it was so much younger and weaker than the European countries. He did everything he could to stay out of the conflict, sending **diplomats** to negotiate with the French government and building up the U.S. Navy to **deter** further attacks.

In 1798, Adams signed into law the Alien and Sedition Acts, which allowed the government to deport foreigners and made it illegal to criticize the government. It remains a controversial decision to this day—one that many believed violated Americans' rights.

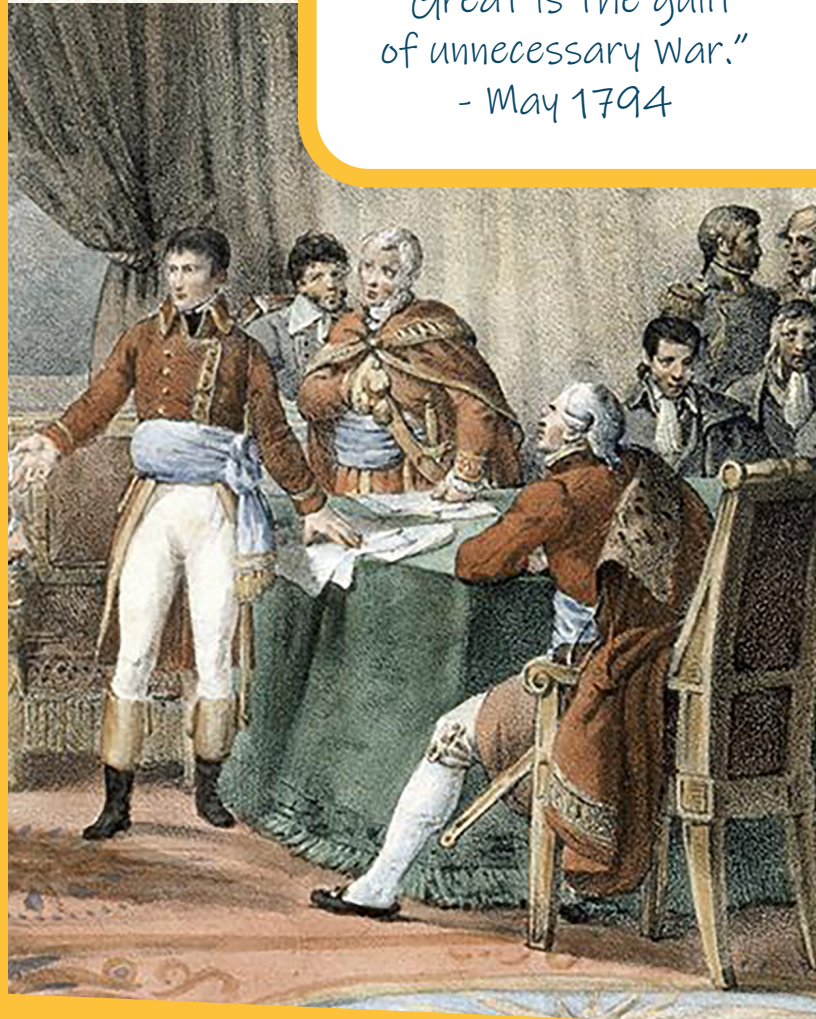
Adams's hard work for peace paid off when his diplomats signed the Treaty of Mortefontaine in 1800. The treaty solved many of the disagreements between the two countries and ended the Quasi-War. It was a great triumph for Adams who, like Washington, saved the country from an unnecessary war. Unfortunately, news of the treaty didn't arrive until after electors began voting in the 1800 presidential election. They voted without knowing of Adams's success. This time, Jefferson defeated him.

# Quote

"I pray heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this house and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof."  
- November 1800, in reference to the Executive Mansion, AKA the White House

# Quote

"Great is the guilt of unnecessary War."  
- May 1794



Signing of the Treaty of Mortefontaine



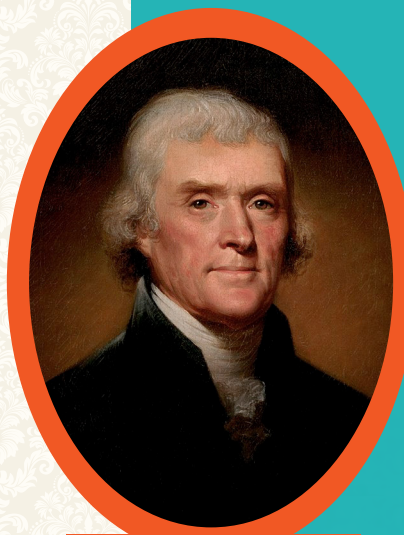
# Retirement

After the presidency, John and Abigail Adams moved back to their farm, Peacefield, in Quincy, Massachusetts.

Adams and the new president, **T**homas Jefferson, had been longtime friends and colleagues. However, their political disagreements strained their friendship and for more than a decade after Adams's presidency, both men ceased having any contact. In 1812, they began writing to each other again. They renewed their friendship and frequently sent letters, debating the great issues of the day and expressing admiration for each other.

Adams suffered tragedies in his life when his daughter Nabby died in 1813 and his wife Abigail died in 1818. He did, however, enjoy one of the rarest of experiences in American history: in 1824, when Adams was 88 years old, he saw his son John Quincy Adams elected as the sixth President of the United States. John Adams was the first p**r**esident whose son also served as president.

Adams lived to the age of 90, dying at Peacefield on July 4, 1826.



Thomas  
Jefferson



John  
Adams

## Friends Until the End

During their retirements, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson rekindled a close friendship and regularly wrote letters to each other. Both men passed away on July 4, 1826—the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Americans marveled that the two men who had the most influence over the Declaration had died during such a milestone anniversary. Just moments before he died, Adams spoke his last words in tribute to his longtime friend: “Thomas Jefferson survives.” He didn’t know that Jefferson had died a few hours earlier.

## Quote

“Independence  
forever!”  
- June 1826



# Legacy



Unlike Washington and Jefferson, John Adams does not have a famous memorial in DC, nor is he on any coins or dollar bills. He was, however, one of the most important of the Founding Fathers. He played the leading role in pushing the United States to break away from the British Empire—so much so that Thomas Jefferson later called him the

“Colossus of Independence.” He made wise choices when he nominated Washington to lead the war effort and Jefferson to write the **Declaration of Independence**. Lastly, he helped guide the new nation in its early years as the second U.S. president.

Adams was a man of principle who never feared doing what was right, even when it was unpopular. He opposed slavery his entire career and, as president, resisted taking America into an unwise war. Adams was not a perfect man—he often angered or alienated his friends with his blunt personality, and many historians criticize him for signing the Alien and Sedition Acts. Overall, however, he did so much to make the United States a strong, independent nation.

## Quote

*“The doctrine of human equality is founded entirely in the Christian doctrine that we are all children of the same Father, all accountable to Him for our conduct to one another.”*  
- date unknown (Adams wrote this as a note in a book he owned)

## Match the Man

Washington, Adams, and Jefferson were very important in the founding of the nation. Match the Founding Father to his accomplishments.

**George Washington**

1st President

2nd President

3rd President

Wrote the Declaration of Independence

**John Adams**

Led the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War

Nominated the man who served as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army

**Thomas Jefferson**

Nominated the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence

ANSWERS ON PG 10

## True or False?

**T**  
**F**

John Adams was the first president to live in the White House.

**T**  
**F**

Adams wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Independence.

**T**  
**F**

Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were friends until the end of their lives.

**T**  
**F**

John Adams is the only president whose son also served as president as well.

**T**  
**F**

Adams graduated from Harvard and became a lawyer.

**T**  
**F**

During George Washington's presidency, John Adams served as vice president.

ANSWERS ON PG 10



# Glossary

**Deacon:** A member of a church who ranks below the priest or minister and performs certain duties and services.

**Clergyman:** A formal leader in a church who often performs religious services.

**New England:** The northeastern region of the United States, consisting of the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

**Provoke:** To purposefully cause someone else to become angry or excited.

**Verdict:** A decision, often by a jury or a judge, deciding a case in court.

**Nominate:** To propose that a specific person be appointed for a specific office.

**Federalist Party:** The party that formed in the 1790s in the United States that believed the federal government needed to be strengthened at the time for the country to prosper. It was led by George Washington, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton.

**Democratic-Republican Party:** The party formed in the 1790s in the United States that believed the federal government should remain relatively weak and that states should have more power. It was led by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

**Merchant:** A person or company involved in trading goods.

**Diplomat:** A person who represents his or her country in other countries or in international organizations.

**Deter:** To prevent something, such as a military attack, often by the threat of force.

**Declaration of Independence:** The document, published by America's Founding Fathers on July 4, 1776, announcing the creation of the United States as a new nation, no longer part of the British Empire. John Adams helped convince many of the Founders to support it.

# Sources

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Images: Getty Images, WikiCommons

## Answers:

THE NAME OF ADAM'S HORSE:  
CLEOPATRA

TRUE OR FALSE?  
TRUE  
FALSE  
TRUE  
FALSE  
TRUE  
TRUE

George Washington

John Adams

Thomas Jefferson

1st President

2nd President

3rd President

Wrote the Declaration of Independence

Led the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War

Nominated the man who served as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army

Nominated the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence





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