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Grade level: 8

Primary Source: *Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams*, June 18, 1775. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://masshist.org/bh/adamp1text.html>.

Allow students, in groups or individually, to examine the letter accessible at the above link while answering the questions below in order. The questions are designed to guide students into a deeper analysis of the source and sharpen associated cognitive skills.

Level I: Description

1. When was this letter written? Was it before or after the Battle of Bunker Hill?
2. Who wrote this letter and who was it written to?
3. According to the letter, when did the battle begin and how long did it last?

Level II: Interpretation

1. According to the letter, what tragic event has occurred?
2. How did Dr. Warren feel about his possible death on the battlefield?

Level III: Analysis

1. How does Abigail feel about John's actions during these events? Is she supportive?
2. How do you think John felt about being so far away from his family during the war?
3. How would you handle living that close to the battle and having your father so far away and unable to help you?

Dearest Friend

Sunday June 18 1775

The Day; perhaps the decisive Day is come on which the fate of America depends. my bursting Heart must find vent at my pen. I have just heard that our dear Friend Dr. Warren is no more but fell gloriously fighting for his Country-saying better to die honourably in the field than ignominiously hang upon the Gallows. great is our Loss. He has distinguished himself in every engagement, by his courage and fortitude, by animating the Soldiers & leading them on by his own example -- a particular account of these dreadful, but I hope Glorious Days will be transmitted you, no doubt in the exactest manner.

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong -- but the God of Israel is he that giveth strength & power unto his people. Trust in him at all times ye people pour out your hearts before him. God is a refuge for us. --Charlstown is laid in ashes. The Battle began upon our intrenchments upon Bunkers Hill, a Saturday morning about 3 o'clock & has not ceased yet & tis now 3 o'clock Sabbath afternoon.

Tis expected they will come out over the Neck to night, & a dreadful Battle must ensue Almighty God cover the heads of our Country men, & be a shield to our Dear Friends. how [many ha]ve fallen we know not-the constant roar of the cannon is so [distre]ssing that we can not Eat Drink or Sleep -- may we be supported and sustaind in the dreadful conflict. I shall tarry here till tis thou[ght] unsafe by my Friends, & then I have secured myself a retreat at your Brothers who has kindly offerd me part of his house. I cannot compose myself to write any further at present -- I will add more as I hear further--

Tuesday afternoon --

I have been so much agitated that I have not been able to write since Sabbath day. When I say that ten thousand reports are passing vague & uncertain as the wind I believe I speak the Truth. I am not able to give you any authentick account of last Saturday, but you will not be destitute of intelligence -- Coll: Palmer has just sent me word that he has an opportunity of conveyance. incorrect as this scrawl will be, it shall go -- I wrote you last Saturday morning. in the afternoon I received your kind favar of the 2 june and that you sent me by Captn. Beals at the same time, --I ardently pray that you may be supported thro the arduous task you have before you. I wish I could contradict the report of the Doctors Death, but it is a lamentable Truth, -- and the tears of multitudes pay tribute to his memory -- Those favorite lines [of] Collin continually sound [in my Ears.]

How sleep the Brave who sink to rest,
By all their Countrys wishes blest?
When Spring with dew'ey fingers cold
Returns to deck their Hallowed mould
She their shall Dress a sweeter Sod
Than fancys feet has ever trod
By fairy hands their knell is rung
By forms unseen their Dirge is sung
Their Honour comes a pilgrim grey
To bless the turf that wraps their Clay
And freedom shall a while repair
To dwell a weeping Hermit there --

I rejoice in the prospect of the plenty you inform me of, but cannot say we have the same agreeable view here. The Drought is very severe, and things look but poorly.

Mr Rice & Thaxter unkle Quincy Col Quincy Mr Wibert all desire to be rememberd, so do all our family. Nabby will write by the next conveyance --

I must close, as the Deacon w[aits.] I have not pretended to be perticular with regard to what I have heard, because I know you will collect better intelligence -- The Spirits of the people are very good. The loss of Charlstown affects them no more than a Drop in the Bucket, --I am

Most sincerely yours
Portia

[On covering sheet] To John Adams Esqr. In Philadelphia