

A Founding Mother: A Novel of Abigail Adams

by Stephanie Dray and Laura Kamoie



About the Book

In time for the 250th anniversary of the birth of the United States comes a sweeping, intimate portrayal of Abigail Adams --- wife of one president and mother to another --- whose wit, willpower and wisdom helped shape the fledgling republic. A stunning historical novel with modern-day implications from the *New York Times* bestselling authors of *AMERICA'S FIRST DAUGHTER* and *MY DEAR HAMILTON*.

In the heart of revolutionary Boston, Abigail Adams raises her children amid riots, blockades and the outbreak of war. While her husband, John Adams, rises from country lawyer to nation-builder, often away for years at a time, Abigail builds her own independence --- managing their farm, making lucrative investments, amassing savings, battling plague and loss, and defending their home. Unafraid to speak her mind, she famously offers fearless political counsel, urging John to "remember the ladies" in the new government. Through it all, she becomes his most trusted confidante and indispensable ally.

When peace is secured, Abigail steps onto the world stage --- exchanging ideas with Thomas Jefferson in the French countryside, navigating court life as the wife of the Minister to Great Britain, and presiding over the parlor politics of the early American republic in New York, Philadelphia and Washington, DC. Even after her husband's presidential administration, she continues battling political foes and working behind the scenes to advance her family, secure independence for the women in her life, and ensure a better life for the next generation of Americans.

From war-torn streets to the chandeliered halls of power, *A FOUNDING MOTHER* is the unforgettable story of a woman ahead of her time --- one whose voice, vision and valor still resonate powerfully today.

Discussion Guide

MOTHERHOOD

1. Motherhood is a major motif in the novel. When was Abigail at her best as a mother --- caregiving, nurturing moral values, setting up her children for success, educating them, helping them in adulthood?
2. Conversely, what were Abigail's weaknesses as a mother to her children? Did she make choices that disappointed you?
3. How would we judge her parenting by modern standards, and is it fair?
4. Did her relationships with her children differ? Do you think she had a favorite?
5. What about Abigail as a founding mother? When was she at her best in serving the people and all the children of the new United States? When was she at her worst --- perhaps encouraging decisions that did not honor the values of the nation?
6. Did her obligations as a founding mother to the nation ever conflict with her duties as a mother to her own children by blood and birth?
7. How did the times limit or repress Abigail's desires to define herself by more than motherhood? Are any of those forces still at work?

ABIGAIL HERSELF

1. How did you feel about Abigail Adams as you read the book? Did you relate to her? Did your feelings about her change by the end of the novel?
2. Which of Abigail's struggles touched your heart, made you emotional, or lingered after you finished the book?
3. What interested you about Abigail's friendships with Mercy Otis Warren, Thomas Jefferson, Adrienne Lafayette and others?
4. What did you think about her relationship with Phoebe Abdee?
5. Were there times you were frustrated or angry with Abigail?
6. What questions would you ask her if you could?
7. Does she deserve to be remembered as our most influential founding mother?

MARRIAGE

1. Why do you think Abigail and John fell in love and decided to marry? Which qualities attracted each other? And how did these qualities sometimes cause trouble in their marriage?
2. Abigail and John's marriage was relatively egalitarian for the time period, but what were the limits of equality in their partnership?
3. Did John ever fully appreciate Abigail's sacrifices? Was he a good husband? If so, in what ways? And were there ever times in which he fell short?
4. John and Abigail spent more than a decade apart over the course of their marriage. How did that shape their relationship, their children and Abigail herself?
5. What are we to make of Abigail's scandalous correspondence with James Lovell?
6. Did Abigail fully appreciate John's sacrifices or the pressures under which he was operating? Was she a good wife? If so, in what ways. And were there ever times in which she fell short?
7. How did their relationship turn into a political partnership?

THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

1. The letters between John and Abigail are a gift to historians in being the most complete and informative correspondence of early America. Did the inclusion of snippets from these letters in the novel advance your understanding or appreciation of this fragile time in our history?
2. What influence did Abigail have over John and in the early development of the country?
3. How did Abigail and the other women in the novel participate in the Revolution? Was their patriotism different from that of the men?
4. How did the novel redefine what it means to participate in the founding of a nation? Which work or sacrifices are often overlooked or minimized?
5. Abigail implored John to make sure Congress "remember[ed] the ladies." Why did she ask that? What did you think of his response? And did the new nation do as she asked?
6. Did the novel change your thoughts, feelings or understanding of the Revolution itself? If so, how?

MODERN RESONANCE

1. Because the novel is written from Abigail's point of view, many perspectives from the revolutionary era are presented with her internalized biases. As a modern reader, what aspects of our history do you wish she had cared more about?
2. How does Abigail speak to us today? How was this book relevant to our modern moment?
3. In what ways do the themes of building a nation and the rights and responsibilities of the people within that nation resonate today?
4. What might Abigail Adams think about how the role of women in America has evolved? What might delight and surprise her? What might frustrate her?

NOVEL CHOICES

1. What surprised you most to learn in this book?
2. How did the ending make you feel? Would you have preferred it showed Abigail's death?
3. What benefits were there for you in reading a novel about Abigail's life instead of a biography?
4. Did you read the note from the authors at the end of the novel? If so, how did it contribute to your enjoyment of the story?

Author Bio

Stephanie Dray is a *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* bestselling author of historical women's fiction. Her award-winning work has been translated into eight languages and tops lists for the most anticipated reads of the year. She lives near Maryland with her husband, cats and history books.

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