

Characters

Write your initials next to the character you're going to read. **Starred characters are major roles.*

- ☐ *NARRATOR 1 (N1)
- ☐ *NARRATOR 2 (N2)
- ☐ *NARRATOR 3 (N3)
- ☐ *NARRATOR 4 (N4)
- ☐ *JOHN ADAMS, second President of the United States
- ☐ *THOMAS JEFFERSON, Adams's Vice President (later, third President of the United States)
- ☐ ABIGAIL ADAMS, wife of John Adams
- ☐ TIMOTHY PICKERING, Secretary of State
- ☐ JAMES MCHENRY, Secretary of War
- ☐ OLIVER WOLCOTT JR., Secretary of the Treasury
- ☐ JOHN MARSHALL, Adams's diplomat to France
- ☐ GILBERT FOX, an actor
- ☐ THOMAS ADAMS, Adams's son

ADAPTED FROM "JOHN ADAMS," THE HBO FILMS AND PLAYTONE MINISERIES, WRITTEN BY KIRK ELLIS, BASED ON THE BOOK WRITTEN BY DAVID MCCULLOUGH. SCHOLASTIC ADAPTATION BY KATHY WILMORE AND KRISTIN LEWIS.



Above, left to right: President John Adams (Paul Giamatti) with former President George Washington (David Morse). Below: Vice President Thomas Jefferson (Stephen Dillane) walks with President Adams.



Unnecessary War

HOW FAR WILL PRESIDENT JOHN ADAMS GO TO KEEP THE UNITED STATES FROM FIGHTING A WAR HE DOESN'T BELIEVE IN?

PROLOGUE

N1: John Adams is remembered as one of the heroes of the American Revolution (1775–1783). He was one of the first Americans to call for independence from Britain. He nominated George Washington to command the Continental Army, and he encouraged Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence.

N2: Adams was widely known as a passionate supporter of liberty—for slaves, as well as for the Colonies.

N3: But Adams's accomplishments as the second President of the United States are largely forgotten. If not for his determination and strength, the nation might have been ruined by war before it ever got a chance to grow strong.

SCENE 1

N4: John Adams is sworn in as the new President on March 4, 1797, in the nation's capital, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His first big challenge is already brewing. International relations with France are tense, even though the U.S. and France have a treaty to protect one another against Britain.

N1: The next day, Adams takes a walk with Thomas Jefferson—his friend, political rival, and Vice President.

JOHN ADAMS: We must find a solution to this misunderstanding with France. But I will not allow our national honor to be **defiled**.

THOMAS JEFFERSON: France helped us win the Revolution, Mr. President. We owe them much for that.

ADAMS: But now the French have captured more than 300 of our trading ships. They tortured the captain of the *Cincinnatus* with thumbscrews! Barbaric!

N2: Jefferson shows no reaction to Adams's emotion.

ADAMS: I want to send an envoy to France to help work things out. You served us well in France during the Revolution. Will you go?

JEFFERSON (surprised): Me?

ADAMS: I can think of no one better.

JEFFERSON: We belong to different political parties, John. We're rivals! I'm your Vice President only because I came in second in the election. Would you send me overseas to keep me from challenging your authority?

ADAMS: Of course not. I ask because this country needs help with France, and the French consider you a true friend.

JEFFERSON: I cannot accept your proposal.

ADAMS: Are you saying this as my Vice President or as the head of your party?

JEFFERSON: We've always had different ideas about the best form of government, John.

ADAMS: But we've always differed as friends, respecting each other's beliefs. Must we play politics? You told me once that I would always have your friendship.

JEFFERSON: You have it.

ADAMS: But not your support! Good day, Thomas.

JEFFERSON: Good day, John.

N3: They walk off—in opposite directions.

SCENE 2

N4: Soon afterward, in May 1797, Adams meets with his Cabinet. Against his friends' advice, Adams kept Washington's advisers instead of choosing his own.

JAMES MCHENRY: It seems quite plain, Mr. President. War with France is unavoidable.

ADAMS: War is never unavoidable, Mr. McHenry. Beware the guilt of an unnecessary war.

TIMOTHY PICKERING: But Mr. President! We must—

ADAMS: I hope, sirs, that you will respect my wishes as you did our previous President's.

OLIVER WOLCOTT JR.: But France must respect this country!

MCHENRY: Nothing will command respect better than a strong national army. We need

more than our scattered militias.

ADAMS: It is too early to speak of armies and war, gentlemen. I kept you all in your posts for the sake of national unity. Do not make me regret that decision!

SCENE 3

N1: That night, at home . . .

ABIGAIL ADAMS: You seem troubled, John.

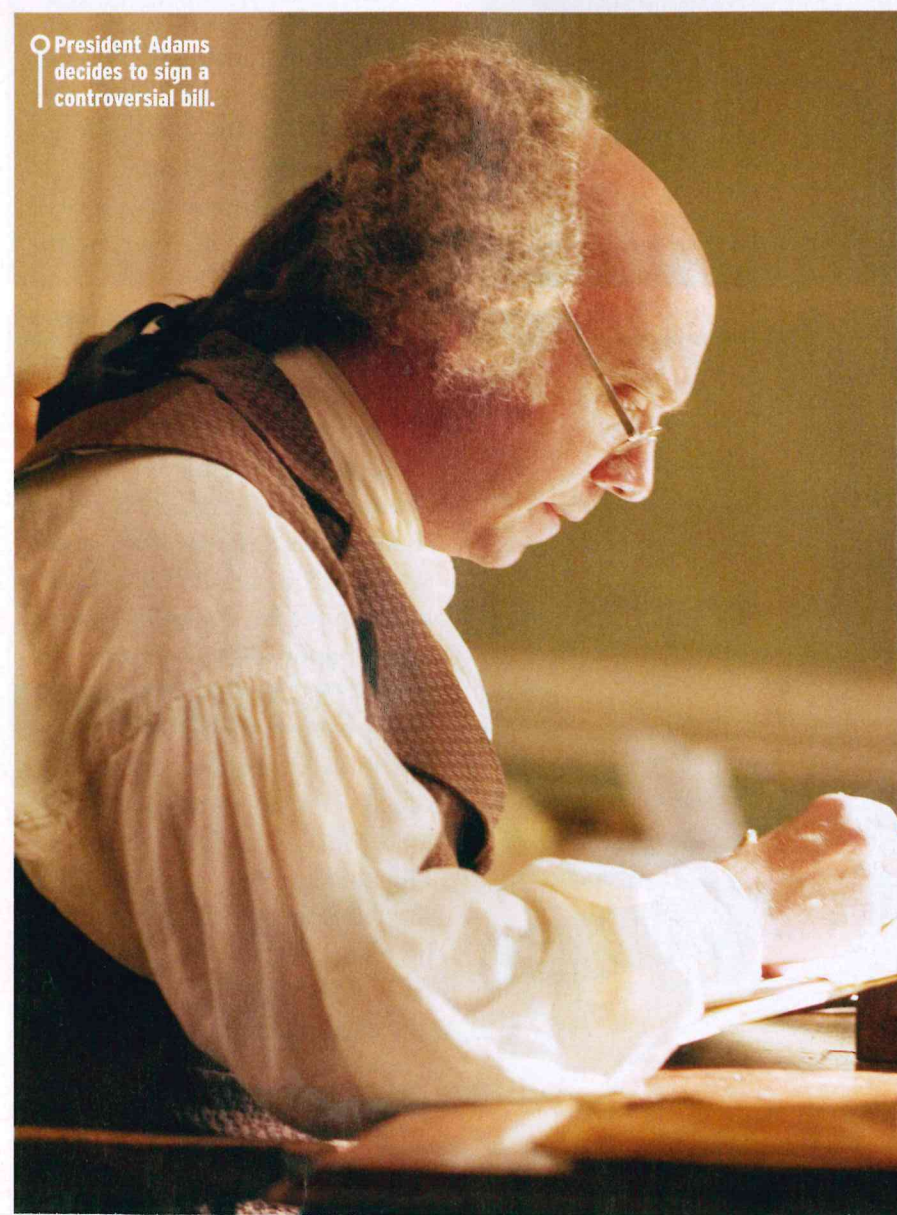
ADAMS: It was so frustrating, Abigail! My thoughts seem so **transparent**. But when I speak, my ideas seem to lose their power.

ABIGAIL: There's nothing wrong

with your words. The problem is the prejudices of the people you're talking to. They cling to their old ideas and don't want to hear new ones.

ADAMS: This country cannot survive a war! We are too young, not yet established. To build an army and attack another country—what can they be thinking? They seem more concerned with their own ambitions than with what's best for the nation.

ABIGAIL: Be true to your ideals, John. But if war comes, we must be ready. You must be ready.



SCENE 4

N2: March 1798, in Philadelphia. Adams is reading a letter, outraged by what it says. With him is John Marshall, a trusted friend and adviser.

ADAMS: I send you to France to seek peace, and this is how they treat you? This is how they treat the United States? Don't they understand what such disrespect can lead to?

JOHN MARSHALL: France's Foreign Minister refused to meet with me. He knows that you don't want war. He thinks you will avoid it at all costs. So instead of talking, he asks for money!

ADAMS: If word of this gets out, the people will demand war. But if I don't release the facts, Mr. Jefferson and his party will claim that I'm playing politics with them.

MARSHALL: Perhaps you should tell him the truth, Mr. President. If you seek his support, he might be willing to help.



N3: Marshall leaves, and Jefferson arrives. He reads the letter from France in shocked surprise.

JEFFERSON: Mr. Talleyrand refuses to meet with U.S. envoys until we pay him \$250,000?

ADAMS: Plus he demands another \$10 million to the French government and its officials! Talks are important, but I will do nothing to harm the safety, honor, or interests of this nation.

JEFFERSON: We shouldn't blame the entire French government for what Mr. Talleyrand has asked.

ADAMS: Mr. Talleyrand is the French government.

JEFFERSON: Perhaps there is some misunderstanding.

ADAMS: Mr. Marshall is a man of his word. We must shield ourselves behind a wall of strength. Congress will grant my request to arm our merchant ships and fortify our harbors.

JEFFERSON: There is also talk of an army.

ADAMS: Should the need arise, we must be prepared to protect our borders.

JEFFERSON: You've always insisted that you wanted peace.

ADAMS: I still do. I want to protect our borders. But if there is to be war, Mr. Jefferson, it will be France's doing, not mine!

SCENE 5

N4: As word gets out about France's demands, Americans start to rally around their President. One evening in April 1798, Adams and his wife attend a play.

ADAMS: I don't much feel like going out in public, Abigail. The people have always seen me as a poor replacement for George Washington.

ABIGAIL: They understand little about politics. If you had declared war immediately, they would have loved you all along. They don't realize how disastrous it would have been.

ADAMS: Better to be unpopular than go to war for the wrong reasons.

N1: An actor onstage named Gilbert Fox sees John and Abigail take their seats in the balcony. He stops the show and points upward. People throughout the theater turn their heads.

GILBERT FOX: Three cheers for our President! May he slay thousands of Frenchmen like a mighty Samson!

N2: The crowd cheers and shouts out a popular new slogan: "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute!"

ABIGAIL (smiling): It seems they have come to love you, John.

ADAMS: They aren't cheering for me. They are just expressing

repugnance for France. They will turn again at a moment's notice. A mob is no less a mob because you have its support.

SCENE 6

N3: Adams meets with his Cabinet to review a set of Congressional bills awaiting his signature.

ADAMS (reading): "The president is hereby empowered to detain and remove any citizens of enemy nations living in the United States . . ."

N4: He sets the bill on his desk and pauses, **circumspect**.

ADAMS: The Congress really wants me to make this a law?

WOLCOTT: The Congress believes it's necessary for this country's safety.

MCHENRY: There are more than 25,000 French people in Philadelphia alone! We must assume they are loyal to France, not America.

ADAMS (continuing to read): "It will be a crime to say or publish anything against the government of the United States . . ." Congress really agrees on this?

WOLCOTT: Yes, sir.

ADAMS: Don't you think these laws will only make the problem worse?

WOLCOTT: The people want war, Mr. President. We should listen to them. No self-respecting nation should have to take this abuse from France.

ADAMS: I'm well aware of that, and we must be prepared for war. But I'm duty-bound to stay on a course of peace.

N1: Meanwhile, newspapers across the country express outrage with Adams. They call him a hypocrite and a **pedantic** fool. Adams starts

to consider signing the bills.

N2: Jefferson meets with Adams. **JEFFERSON:** Will you really expel anyone who dares to voice an opinion different from yours? Suspending free speech tramples the Constitution!

ADAMS: These measures will protect us.

JEFFERSON: Don't destroy your reputation by attacking the freedoms that we both fought for. That will lead to a revolution.

N3: Jefferson sees that Adams's mind is made up. He walks out, and Adams signs the bills.



President Adams (center) is frustrated by the members of his Cabinet.

SCENE 7

N4: The President's son Thomas arrives with news from France.

ADAMS: France is willing to talk peace?

THOMAS: Talleyrand says they would receive another envoy respectfully. Things in France have changed.

ADAMS: This is the news I've waited for!

THOMAS: Let's see Mr. Jefferson try to call you a warmonger now.

ADAMS: I'm the warmonger who

dares to make peace. Jefferson tells people what they wish to hear. I tell them what they need to know!

N1: Later, Adams discusses the opportunity with his Cabinet.

PICKERING: It's a mistake to pursue this peace.

ADAMS: I don't agree.

PICKERING: If this crisis goes on a few more months, you're more likely to get re-elected.

ADAMS: Don't talk about politics!

MCHENRY: The people are scared of France. Without that fear, we won't have their votes

in the next election.

ADAMS: Government by fear is no government at all.

PICKERING: Your stubbornness will ruin our party. Jefferson will prevail over us!

ADAMS: Mr. Jefferson, against whom you take such **umbrage**, is a great man. I demand your resignations.

PICKERING: I don't feel it's my duty to resign.

ADAMS: Then you leave me no choice but to fire you both for insisting on war.

SCENE 8

N2: Marshall, the new Secretary of State, pursues peace for the President.

N3: That November, the President and Mrs. Adams move into the unfinished President's House (later called the White House) in Washington, D.C. The new capital barely exists—it is being built on swampland.

N4: Marshall returns from France.



After his term in office, Adams returned to his home in Massachusetts to be an ordinary citizen again.

ADAMS: Mr. Marshall! I pray you bring good news.

MARSHALL: On October 3, Mr. President, we signed a treaty with France. A copy for the Senate to ratify is on its way.

ADAMS: Well done. We have peace, Mr. Marshall—an honorable peace!

MARSHALL: Has it come too late to help your re-election campaign?

ADAMS: Yes, but so be it.

Returning to office with blood on my hands would not be a victory.

SCENE 9

N1: In the election of November 1800, Adams comes in second place. Tied for first are Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr.

N2: The House of Representatives isn't able to agree on a winner until February 1801. Soon afterward, Marshall visits Adams, who is packing his belongings.

MARSHALL: Well, Mr. President,

it has been settled at last. Mr. Jefferson soon will be sworn in as our third President.

ADAMS: He is fortunate that I'm leaving him with a country to preside over. My presidency has faced many complaints, but leading this country into a ruinous war will not be among them. I thank you for your part in that achievement.

MARSHALL: You're all right with what has happened?

ADAMS: A great weight has been

lifted from my shoulders. I shall be quite content as Farmer John instead of President Adams. It is a good exchange.

SCENE 10

N3: When Jefferson is inaugurated on March 4, 1801, Adams isn't there. He is already on his way home to Massachusetts.

N4: Instead of a fine carriage, he travels in a crowded public coach. Passengers who recognize him stare in amazement.

ADAMS: Stop gawking! I am plain John Adams. Just an ordinary citizen—the same as yourselves!

EPILOGUE

N1: Adams retired to his farm, but he had a long and busy life after his presidency. He lived to see his son John Quincy Adams sworn in as the sixth President.

N2: After years of bitterness, Adams wrote to Jefferson in 1812. "You and I ought not to die before we have explained ourselves to each other."

N3: For the last 14 years of their lives, the old friends exchanged many letters and ideas.

N4: They died on the same day—July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Write Now!

Write a monologue for one character from the play. A monologue is an uninterrupted speech given by one character that reveals his or her inner thoughts and often addresses the audience directly. Act out your monologue with your friends!

No-Sweat Test Prep



Test prep is easy compared with running a country!

NOW THAT YOU'VE READ THE PLAY, IT'S TIME TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS!

- 1 Who says "suspending free speech tramples the Constitution"? (detail)
 - (A) John Marshall
 - (B) John Adams
 - (C) Abigail Adams
 - (D) Thomas Jefferson
- 2 If the U.S. goes to war with France, what does John Adams think will happen? (inference)
 - (A) Jefferson will get elected.
 - (B) Laws will be upheld.
 - (C) The U.S. won't survive.
 - (D) France will attack Britain.
- 3 Why does Jefferson refuse to go to France? (motive)
 - (A) to protect his political party's interests
 - (B) to irritate Adams
 - (C) to see Fox's play
 - (D) to lobby for free speech

- 4 What does Adams mean when he says his words "lose their power"? (inference)
 - (A) He can't convince others of what seems so clear in his own mind.
 - (B) No one respects him.
 - (C) He always says the wrong thing.
 - (D) His political rivals speak louder than he does.
- 5 Which of the following happens first? (sequencing)
 - (A) France demands money.
 - (B) Marshall goes to France.
 - (C) Adams fires his Cabinet.
 - (D) Adams moves to D.C.

- 6 Why does Adams fire his Cabinet? (motive)
 - (A) for lying
 - (B) for cheating
 - (C) for supporting war
 - (D) for belittling him

- 7 Why is the public unhappy with Adams? (inference)
 - (A) In public, he says he supports war with France, but in private, he's against it.
 - (B) He suspends citizen rights and refuses to go to war with France.
 - (C) He sends angry letters to Talleyrand.
 - (D) He puts the interests of his political party over the nation's.

- 8 Which of the following would be the BEST alternate title for the play? (main idea)
 - (A) Waging a Wrong War
 - (B) Jefferson's Justice
 - (C) Sore Losers
 - (D) President for Peace

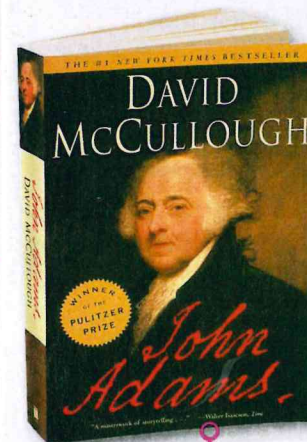
Short-Answer Questions

WRITE YOUR ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ON ANOTHER PIECE OF PAPER.

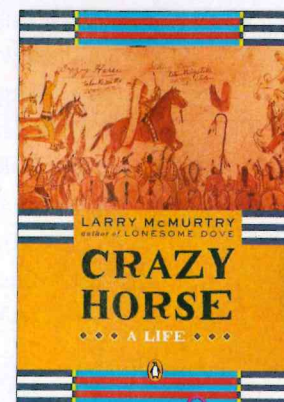
- 9 How are Adams and Jefferson similar? How are they different? (compare and contrast)
- 10 How would you describe Adams? (character analysis)
- 11 What do you think Adams means when he says "returning to office with blood on my hands would not be a victory"? (interpreting text)

Biography Buffet

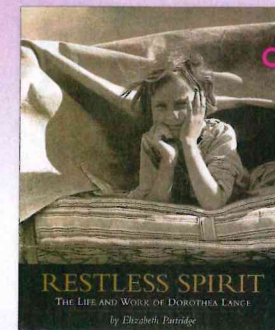
The play you just read is based on a TV adaptation of David McCullough's biography *John Adams*. In Greek, the word *bios* means "life" and *graphos* means "write." Yes, you guessed it: a biography is quite literally a written account of a person's life. Go to the library and check out one of the biographies described on this page. Don't see a subject that grabs you? Then find a biography about someone who does!



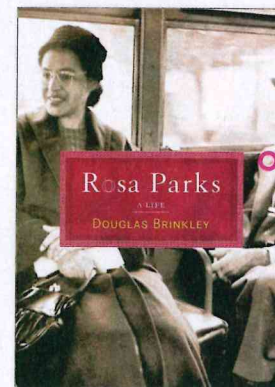
John Adams
David McCullough
In *John Adams*, David McCullough paints a detailed portrait of a man who stayed true to his convictions in the face of opposition. McCullough won a Pulitzer Prize for *John Adams* in 2002, nine years after winning one for *Truman*, his biography of the 33rd President of the United States.



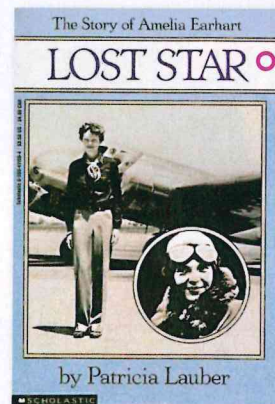
Crazy Horse
Larry McMurtry
Although best known for his novels, Larry McMurtry wrote a highly praised biography of Crazy Horse. Born in the mid-1800s, the Oglala Sioux warrior spent his life trying to defend the lives and land of Lakota Indians in what is now South Dakota. Crazy Horse led a resistance movement that culminated in the Battle of Little Bighorn.



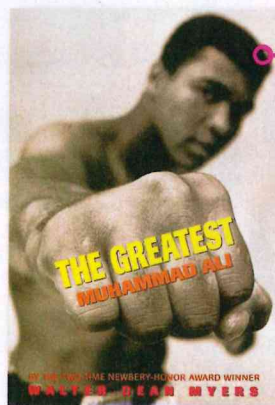
Restless Spirit: The Life and Work of Dorothea Lange
Elizabeth Partridge
Included in this biography of photographer Dorothea Lange are more than 60 of her most powerful photos. With her camera, Lange captured the fleeting moments of people who lived during the Great Depression and World War II, including Japanese-American families in internment camps.



Rosa Parks: A Life
Douglas Brinkley
Historian Douglas Brinkley tells the remarkable story of Rosa Parks, who sparked the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott when she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger.



Lost Star: The Story of Amelia Earhart
Patricia Lauber
Newbery Honor winner Patricia Lauber explores the details of pioneering aviator Amelia Earhart's attempt to fly solo around the world in 1937. Lauber also probes the mystery surrounding Earhart's disappearance.



The Greatest: Muhammad Ali
Walter Dean Myers
Award-winning author Walter Dean Myers traces Muhammad Ali's inspiring life from his childhood in segregated Louisville, Kentucky, to his breathtaking career as a boxer and political activist.