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People of Purpose

80 PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE

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Book design by Foster Design.

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ISBN-13: 978-1-59647-306-5
ISBN-10: 0-673-36371-6

D E D I C A T I O N

TO THE STAFF OF THE WOOSTER PUBLIC LIBRARY

WOOSTER, OHIO

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

In my experience, gracious men and women are attracted to libraries. This is particularly true, in my emeritus state, as I daily step into the Wooster, Ohio, public library. Staff members share books by the bagful with me and go out of their way to be accommodating. I imagine similar scenes in heaven.

My gratitude, also, to Bobbie Dempsey and Jenny Bevington at Good Year Books, for persevering with me until the proposal for this manuscript finally became reality. I could not ask to work with two finer professionals. And to Jeanne, my wife, thanks for the hours of editing, suggesting, and encouraging for this and the many other publications we have been privileged to do.

Reading biographies is an experience in walking in others' shoes, feeling their rejections and their triumphs and making them ours. These real people of our recent past and living present proclaim to us how those with purpose make a difference. These people are life-and-breath models children need. There is much in these forty men and forty women to lift our spirits. Let your imagination and that of children touch the lives of the persons found in *People of Purpose*.

Be careful as you read, for these people challenge our complacency. People of purpose view themselves in the light of their potential and not of their circumstances. They expect no less of you. Consider the animosity that greeted their ideas:

Suffrage for all: "Nonsense!"

Abolish slavery: "There have always been slaves!"

Protect the environment: "We have to make a living!"

Mosquitoes carry sickness: "What stupidity!"

One can carry light in a bottle: "Are you serious?"

Unseen microorganisms cause disease: "Ridiculous!"

We were here first, eons before you: "Tough! I'm bigger."

Undaunted by criticism, these people of purpose set out to overcome the challenges they faced.

Pondering the biographical lives of purposeful people gives one understanding of the people portrayed. This studying of others can lead us to consider ourselves in the light of their lives. Perhaps their lives will enable all of us to stretch our minds in our quest for understanding. Let their exemplary behavior clash

with our failures so that our own value systems can gain strength.

This does not mean approval of all of their acts, for their humanity sticks out its jagged edges from time to time for all to see. Any darker areas they may have only accent their successes as our measure of hope. Their lives come into personal focus at the point we say to a friend, "Did you know that _____ had this problem, and in spite of it, she did this about it? . . ."

How to Use This Book

People of Purpose is intended as a bridge to further reading; the biographies, therefore, are short by design. After children read and reflect on the ones found here, encourage them to go to the library with its many biographies, reference works, and films. Use the index on page 165 for help in comparing and contrasting the ones here with other people of purpose with similar interests and careers.

Suggest to children that they keep a journal as they read the biographies. Their journals will help them when they react to the questions and activities found at the end of each biography. Or you, as parent or teacher, may read a biography aloud each day and then discuss it. The biographies are reproducible for individuals, small groups, and classrooms. Children can present them orally—as narrative or dramatic presentations—to younger and older children and to adults.

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People of Purpose

ABIGAIL SMITH ADAMS



1744–1818

Supporter of Women's Rights and Letter Writer

Abigail always wanted to know about everything. Her mother taught her to read, write, and do arithmetic in addition to teaching her about cooking, housekeeping, and gardening. Abigail's father, a Congregational minister in Weymouth, Massachusetts, encouraged her to read the books in his library.

John Adams, a young lawyer from neighboring Braintree, was impressed with seventeen-year-old Abigail. Originally, he had thought he would remain single—and then he talked to Abigail. She was smart and practical.

When Abigail was about twenty and John twenty-nine, Reverend Smith, her father, performed the marriage ceremony. The couple moved to John's farm in Braintree (now called Quincy), and soon children were on the way.

John was often away from home for long periods of time because of his duties with the Continental Congress, a convention of delegates from the American colonies. The Revolutionary War broke out in 1775. Schools were closed, so Abigail taught her children at home. The oldest children, Abigail (nicknamed Nabby) and John Quincy, learned French and Latin from their mother. The younger boys, Charles and Tommy, were taught to read and write. Meanwhile, Abigail wrote letters constantly to her husband and others.

Abigail wrote to her husband on March 31, 1776, when he was organizing a new government in the Continental Congress. That letter became famous as a plea for women's rights. She wrote: "I long to hear you have



declared an independancy—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, & be more generous & favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember, all Men would be tyrants if they could."

After the war Abigail sailed to England, where John was the new United States ambassador. The new United States government had little money to pay its ambassadors. When they entertained, Abigail served humble American dishes and did her own shopping. The English press made fun of John and Abigail.

In 1797 John Adams became the second president of the United States. The ever-practical Abigail hung her washing to dry in the vacant East Room of the White House because there was no other place provided.

Abigail continued to write letters; more than two thousand of them still exist. Abigail asked her husband to burn them, but fortunately he did not. Through her many letters we now have a better understanding of what life was like in our young republic.

Abigail died of typhoid fever just two weeks before her seventy-fourth birthday. She was the only woman to have been the wife of one president of the United States and the mother of another president. Her son John Quincy Adams became the sixth president in 1825.

1. Make a list of five words that describe Abigail Adams. Compare your list with a classmate's.
2. With a partner, reread the part from Abigail's letter that begins, "I long to hear. . . ." Discuss why Abigail would say, "all Men would be tyrants if they could." Why do you think she wrote that?
3. If you could ask Abigail one question, what would it be?

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Find a letter written by Abigail Adams. Read it several times and then explain it in your own words for the class.
2. Abigail and John were known as people of integrity. Name some people in today's government who are known as people of integrity.
3. Why are the ideas of the president's wife (or husband) important?
4. Pretend your husband or wife is the president of the United States and you are away on a diplomatic tour around the world. Write a letter to him or her, stating several things you think it is important for him or her to do as president.

FURTHER READING

Bober, Natalie S. *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1995.

Osborne, Angela. *Abigail Adams: Women's Rights Advocate*. American Women of Achievement Series. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989.

Peterson, Helen Stone. *Abigail Adams: "Dear Partner."* New York: Chelsea Juniors, 1991.

Wagoner, Jean Brown. *Abigail Adams: Girl of Colonial Days*. New York: Aladdin Books, 1992.

JANE ADDAMS

★ 1860–1935

Social Reformer, Pacifist, Women's Rights Advocate

Jane Addams tossed and turned in bed. She could not sleep, for she had told a lie during the day. Quietly, she made her way downstairs to her father's room and gently shook him awake. Fearful of what he might do or say, she told him what she had done. He looked at her and told her he was glad he had a little girl who felt so bad about telling a lie that she would come to her father about it. Then he sent her back to bed. As an adult, Jane's honesty and integrity would benefit thousands of needy people.



While traveling, she was moved by the situation of the homeless in London, England. She was impressed by the efforts of some people to help them. She went back to Europe two years later with the purpose of learning more so she might help the homeless in the United States.

After she returned Jane bought a run-down mansion on Chicago's Halsted Street. With the help of Ellen Gates Starr and volunteers, the large house was made ready for those who lived in the Italian neighborhood, where several families often lived together in one room. In May 1889 she named it Hull House and opened it for clubs, classes, and lectures.

At that time there were no laws about children working. Children as young as five years of age worked twelve to sixteen hours a day, six days a week in factories. Small children were hired to work around the dangerous machines because they could squeeze around them. Many children were hurt, and some lost their lives. Jane encouraged politicians to make laws against such abuse.

In her neighborhood the streets were a mess because the garbage was not collected regularly. Jane applied for the job of ward garbage inspector. It was the only job she ever took for pay—one thousand dollars per year. She reported that the collection crews were not doing their job. Even though the local politicians passed a rule that eliminated her position, she

had made her point: the garbage was picked up. Shortly thereafter, the death rate in Jane's district dropped from third to seventh because of the improved sanitary conditions.

People all over the world heard about the things Jane was doing to improve the lives of the poor. She wrote books and articles, spoke, and became an ardent worker for peace. Many people learned about her in Germany, France, and Japan because her autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, was published in their languages.

When Jane Addams was seventy-one, she was only the second woman ever to be honored with the Nobel Peace Prize. She encouraged President Franklin Roosevelt to appoint a woman as secretary of labor—Frances Perkins. Frances was the first woman in the cabinet of a president of the United States. Frances had volunteered at Hull House some years before.

Because of Jane Addams, neighborhood centers or settlement houses are now located across the country. Among the issues they deal with are immigration, child and family welfare, civil rights, and housing.

READING

ADDAMS

1. Imagine yourself as a newspaper editor. Write three headlines describing the work of Jane Addams as a social worker.
2. What does it mean to be a “social reformer”? With a partner or group, choose one aspect of your neighborhood or town that needs reform. Brainstorm up to ten ways to improve the problem.
3. What would happen if garbage were not collected for several months in your neighborhood? Draw a picture to describe the scene.
4. If you could encourage the president of the United States to do something, what would it be? Write him a letter.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. On which of the Great Lakes is Chicago located? Read about Chicago in a reference book and share three interesting facts with your class.
2. Who was the first woman to be honored with the Nobel Peace Prize? What country was she from?
3. Jane Addams was concerned that children had to work long hours around dangerous machines. Write a paragraph of fifty words on what Jane would say if she could come back and see how children in the United States are treated now.
4. With a group, make a list of several agencies in your town that care for people who are poor or in need of help. Visit one of the agencies or have a representative come to your class.

FURTHER READING

- Kittredge, Mary. *Jane Addams*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988.
- Schraff, Anne. *Women of Peace: Nobel Peace Prize Winners*. Hillside, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- Wheeler, Leslie A. *Jane Addams*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Silver Burdett Press, 1990.