

THE NEW REPUBLIC

Biography

John Adams was an important leader in the early years of the United States. After serving two terms as George Washington's Vice President, Adams became the second President of the United States. As President, Adams faced many challenges, both within the new nation and around the world. ♦ *As you read, think about how Adams addressed the foreign policy challenges of his presidency. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

John Adams (1735–1826)

John Adams was born in Massachusetts in 1735. He graduated from Harvard and became a lawyer during the colonial period. Adams served as a delegate to both the First and Second Continental Congresses in 1774 and 1775 and strongly supported the movement toward independence. In fact, it was Adams who selected Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence.

During the Revolutionary War, Adams served as a diplomat in France. He was also responsible for overseeing the creation and outfitting of an army to battle the British. At the war's conclusion, Adams participated in the negotiations that resulted in the Treaty of Paris.

Following the conflict, Adams once again worked as a diplomat before eventually becoming the nation's first Vice President. During his two terms as Vice President, Adams found his lack of responsibilities frustrating, once calling the Vice Presidency "the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived." When George Washington decided against seeking a third term, Adams ran as the Federalist

Party candidate. He narrowly defeated his Democratic Republican opponent, Thomas Jefferson, to become the second President of the United States.

A war between Britain and France presented a significant challenge to the Adams administration. After the French began seizing American merchant ships, many Federalists wanted to wage war against France. Yet Adams was convinced that the United States should remain neutral, and he called a session of Congress for the specific purpose of determining how to keep the United States out of war. Even after the XYZ Affair, and after French and American ships had engaged in several battles, Adams sent a secret envoy to France to negotiate a treaty without first consult-



John Adams, The Art Archive / Chateau de Blerancourt / Dagli Orti

ing Congress. Although this move cost Adams the support of his fellow Federalists—and this loss, combined with dissatisfaction over the Alien and Sedition Acts, eventually led to his defeat in the election of 1800—Adams believed that preventing war was his greatest priority as President.

After serving one term as President, Adams retired to Massachusetts, where he died in 1826.

Questions to Think About

1. How did Adams contribute to the movement for American independence from Great Britain?
2. What major foreign policy challenge did Adams face during his presidency? What was the effect of that challenge?
3. **Draw Conclusions** Why was Adams dissatisfied with his role as Vice President?