

## Letters

Reading and writing were considered separate skills in the 1700s, and taught as such. Many people could read but not write.

Literacy in the American colonies varied based on gender, race, and socio-economic status. Literacy was generally higher in New England than the mid-Atlantic and the South; higher in cities than in rural areas; and higher among European-Americans than African-Americans.

Letters were an important method of communication. For those who could read and write, it allowed them to communicate long-distance. Instructional books often included sample letters for people to copy or use as a template. The topics ranged from personal to business matters.

### *LETTER of Counsel from an Aunt to her Niece.*

*Dear Cousin,*

I Cannot but express the Joy I conceive to hear that you take your Learning to well, and are so diligent therein ; the which that you would persevere in, would yet add more to my Comfort ; especially when I consider that thereby you will not only be freed from evil Company and evil Imaginations, too frequently the Attendants of Idleness, but that, Dear Child, you will be enabled to obtain, when you come to Years of more Maturity, both Credit and Advantage ; when those that have squander'd away their Youth in Idleness, must be contented to come short of either : Wherefore, that you may accomplish what you have begun, be circumspect and diligent therein ; as you expect to continue in the Favour of her who is, *Your loving Aunt, A. W.*

*The Young Secretary's Guide, 1764*

---

DAR MUSEUM

(202) 879-3241 ★ [museum@dar.org](mailto:museum@dar.org) ★ [www.dar.org/museum](http://www.dar.org/museum)

*This program is made possible by the generous contributions of NSDAR donors.*

---

*LETTER from a Wife to her absent Husband.*

*My Dear,*

**Y**OU cannot imagine how tedious your Absence has been. and at present is to Her, who is your tender and loving Wife. Alas! I little thought when you left me, that I should have been so long separated from the Man whose Company I so much value and esteem, which might, were I not confident of your true Affections, oblige me to tax you with Coldness and Disrespect. Indeed, I received your Letter, wherein you tell me of some unexpected Business that does detain you: It may be you have; but could not that have been deferred till a further Opportunity, or done in less Time than you have been absent? I am almost of an Opinion that the one or the other might have been: But, however, *My Dear*, Hoping that you will not for the future, dispense with any thing that may create a Delay, I shall construe what is past to the best Advantage on your Part, and in earnest Expectation of your good Company, subscribe myself,

*Your loving and affectionate Wife, E. B.*

---

The Young Secretary's Guide, 1764

\*\*\*\*\*

*Select Familiar LETTERS on several Occasions, peculiarly calculated for the Service of our Female Pupils.*

LETTER III.

*From a Tradesman's Wife in the City to her Neighbour, that wanted a good Cook.*

*Madam,*

**T**HE last Time we drank Tea together, you intimated to me, that you was at a great Loss for a thorough Cook. The Bearer hereof has lived five Years in a Merchant's Service, and would not have removed, but that she was unfortunately seized with the Small Pox, and has since been in the Country for the Recovery of her Health. She is now perfectly well, and no ways disfigured by that malignant Distemper. She has made, it is true, her Application to her late Mistress, to be received into her Family again; but the Lady happened, it seems, to be provided to her entire Satisfaction. She is very ready, however, and willing, to give her the best of Characters. You may depend on it, from me that she is strictly honest, perfectly sober, of a very obliging Disposition, and, in short, every Way well qualified for the Performance of what she promises to undertake. If you please to give yourself the Trouble of paying a Visit to her former Mistress, I doubt not in the least but she'll confirm what I have here ventured to say in her Behalf. It is my humble Opinion, you may wait a long Time before you find out one more fit for your Purpose. If upon Inquiry you should approve of her, I shall be glad of being the Means of bringing you together.

*I am, Madam,*

*Your most obedient humble Servant, E. F.*

Every Young Woman's Companion, 1770

---

DARMUSEUM

(202) 879-3241 ★ [museum@dar.org](mailto:museum@dar.org) ★ [www.dar.org/museum](http://www.dar.org/museum)

This program is made possible by the generous contributions of NSDAR donors.







105924

Autueil Jan<sup>y</sup> 18 1785

Letter from  
Abigail Adams  
to Reverend  
John Shaw, 1785  
(page 1 of 3)  
DAR Americana  
Collection

I find Sir, what I never doubted; that you are a gentleman of your word; I thank you for the agreeable proof which you have given me of it, and that I may not be wanting in punctuality I have taken my pen to discharge the debt which I acknowledge is due to you. amongst the publick edifices which are worthy of notice in this country are several churches. I went a few days since to see three of the most celebrated on Paris. they are prodigious masses of stone buildings, and so surrounded by towers which are seven story high that the sun seldom enlightens them. I found them so cold and damp that I could only give them a very hasty and transient survey. The architecture, the sculpture, the paintings are beautiful indeed, and each of them would employ my pen for several pages, when the weather will permit me to take a more accurate and entire inspection of them. These churches are open every day, and at all times of the day, so that you need enter them without finding priests upon their benches. half a dozen at a time, and more at the horns of confession - all kinds of people and all ages, go in without ceremony, & regardless of each other, gaze upon the images, exhort themselves by their pater noster, and are - usually, silently and go out again without being noticed. or even seen by the priests whom I found always kneeling with their faces towards the altar around these churches (for they have altars and galleries as with us; chairs alone being made use of) there are little boxes, or closets, about as large as a sitting room in which is a small grated window, which communicates with

DAR MUSEUM

(202) 879-3241 ★ [museum@dar.org](mailto:museum@dar.org) ★ [www.dar.org/museum](http://www.dar.org/museum)

This program is made possible by the generous contributions of NSDAR donors.



Letter from  
Abigail Adams  
to Reverend  
John Shaw, 1785  
(page 2 of 3)  
DAR Americana  
Collection

"an other cluett of the same kind, one of them holds the person who is confessing, and the other the confessor: who places his ear at this window hears the crime, a disclosure the transgressor, and very often makes an assignation for a repetition of the same crime, or yet heys a new one, I do not think this a breach of Chaisty, for can we suppose that of the many thousands whom the Religion of the Confessy obliges to Confessy, one quarter part of the numbers can find its influence sufficiently powerfull to conquer those passions, which another has im-plantet in Man, when the gratification of them will cost them only a few times in confessyons. the priest who is known to betray his Oust, or divulge any thing committed to him in confessyons, is punished with Death.

I was at the Church St Rochs about ten o'clock in the morning, and whilst I was there, about three hundred little boys came in from some Chaisty Seminary which belongs to that Church; they had books in their hands. they followed in each other in organ and choir. I fell upon their knees in ones like soldiers in ranks and file their might be so other persons in the Church at their Devotion. every thing was stillt & solemn throughout this vast edifice. I was reaching with a slow pace round it, when all at once the deep silence which might was suddenly broken by all these boys at one instant chanting; with loud voices which made the dome ring; & me spring. for I had no apprehension of any sound, I have never been to any of these Churches upon a Sunday, when the weather is warmer & lighter it. but their Churches seem rather calculated to damp Devotion than excite it, I took such a cold there, as I have not had since I have been in France before. I have been several times



Letter from  
Abigail Adams  
to Reverend  
John Shaw, 1785  
(page 3 of 3)  
DAR Americana  
Collection

to the charge of the Dutch Ambulance; and should go offener, if  
I could comprehend the Discontents which are act in French. I  
believe the American Embassy is the only one to which Flushing  
are not allowed, do perhaps think that their Ministers there are  
men of force? or that Religion is not a necessary article for them  
Sunday will not feel so to me, whilst I continue in this country.  
it is High Monday for all Sinne.

we had a visit the other Day from  
one less a personage than Abbe Shayer. on his visit, who has become  
a convert. his visit I suppose was to me, for he was a perfect stranger  
to my Friends, he told us that he had spent a year at Rome, that  
he belonged to a Seminary of St Sulpice in Paris; that he never  
knew what Religion was until his conversion, & that he designed  
to go from to America in a year or two. to see if he could not convert  
his Friends and acquaintance, after talking some time on this title  
we began to question Mr A. if he believed the Bible, & to omit it Luther  
and Calvin, upon which Mr A took him up pretty short, and told  
him that he was not going to make a Father confessor of him,  
that his Religion was a matter that he did not look upon him  
self accountable for, to any one but his Maker, and that he did not  
choose to hear either Luther, or Calvin treated in such a manner;  
Mr A. he took his leave after some time, without  
any invitation to accept his visit,

with respect to our interest at Medford  
what ever is necessary to be done for our mutual benefit, you  
will be so good as to direct yourself. I am glad that the old servants  
did not go off, and the Death removed him. We account you give of  
your nephews is vastly pleasing to their & your affectionate friend,  
A Adams