

## 1776 Audition sides

Please choose two sides to read at your audition. If two characters are listed, you may choose either character for which to read. You do not need to memorize the sides and may be asked to do a third side as a cold reading at the audition.

- I John Adams
- II John / Abigail
- III Rutledge
- IV Jefferson / Rutledge
- V Martha / Franklin
- VI Franklin
- VII Dickinson
- VIII Hancock / McKean
- IX Thompson
- X Lee
- XI Wilson
- XII Courier / McNair

John Adams

## S C E N E 1

*In front of the curtain.*

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Start     **JOHN ADAMS:**

I have come to the conclusion that one useless man is called a disgrace, that two are called a law firm, and that three or more become a congress. And by God, I have had *this* Congress! For ten years King George and his Parliament have gulled, cullied, and diddled these Colonies with their illegal taxes—Stamp Acts, Townshend Acts, Sugar Acts, *Tea* Acts—and when we *dared* stand up like men they stopped our trade, seized our ships, blockaded our ports, burned our towns, *and* spilled our blood—and still this Congress won't grant any of my proposals on Independence even so much as the courtesy of open debate! Good God, what in hell are they waiting for?

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End     *The curtain flies up to reveal the Chamber of the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. At rise, Congress is in session, sweltering in the heat of a premature summer's evening. A large day-by-day wall calendar reads: "MAY 8."*

JOHN:

Oh, Abigail, what am I going to do?

ABIGAIL:

Do, John?

You don't usually ask my advice.

JOHN:

Yes—well, there doesn't appear to be anyone else right now.

ABIGAIL, *sighing*:

Very well, John, what is it?

JOHN:

The entire South has walked out of this Congress, George Washington is on the verge of total annihilation, the precious cause for which I've labored these several years has come to nothing, and it seems—[*a pause*—it seems I am obnoxious and disliked.

ABIGAIL:

Nonsense, John.

JOHN:

That I am unwilling to face reality.

ABIGAIL:

Foolishness, John.

JOHN:

That I am pig-headed.

ABIGAIL, *smiling*:

Ah, well, there you have me, John. I'm afraid you *are* pig-headed.

*He smiles; a pause.*

JOHN:

You must tell me what it is! I've always been dissatisfied, I know that; but lately I find that I *reek* of discontentment! It fills my throat and floods my brain, and sometimes—sometimes I fear that there is no longer a dream, but only the discontentment.

ABIGAIL:

Oh, John, can you really know so little about yourself? And can you think so little of me that you'd believe I married the man you've described? Have you forgotten what you used to say to me? I haven't. "Commitment, Abby—commitment! There are only two creatures of value on the face of this earth: those with a commitment, and those who require the commitment of others." [*A pause.*] Do you remember, John?

JOHN, *nodding*:

I remember.

End

*McNair enters, carrying two gaily beribboned kegs, and thumps them down in front of John.*

Rutledge

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Start

**RUTLEDGE:**

Mr. Adams, perhaps you could clear something up for *me*: after we have achieved independence, who do you propose would govern in South Carolina?

**JOHN:**

The people, of course.

**RUTLEDGE:**

Which people, sir? The people of South Carolina? Or the people of Massachusetts? You refuse to understand us, gentlemen! We desire independence, yes—for South Carolina. That is our country. And as such we don't wish it to belong to anyone—not to England, and not to you.

**JOHN:**

We intend to be one nation, Rutledge.

**RUTLEDGE:**

A nation of sovereign states, Mr. Adams, united for our mutual protection, but separate for our individual pursuits. That is what we have understood it to be, and that is what we will support—as soon as *everyone* supports it.

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End

**RUTLEDGE:**

Ah! Black slaves. Why didn't you say so, sir? Were you tryin' to hide your meanin'?

**JEFFERSON:**

No, sir.

**RUTLEDGE:**

Just another literary license, then.

**JEFFERSON:**

If you like.

**RUTLEDGE:**

I don't like at all, Mr. Jefferson. To us in South Carolina, black slavery is our peculiar institution and a cherished way of life.

**JEFFERSON:**

Nevertheless, we must abolish it. Nothing is more certainly written in the Book of Fate than that this people shall be free.

**RUTLEDGE:**

I am not concerned with the Book of Fate right now, sir. I am more concerned with what's written in your little paper there.

**JEFFERSON:**

They are people who are being treated as property. I tell you the rights of human nature are deeply wounded by this infamous practice!

**RUTLEDGE, shouting:**

Then see to your own wounds, Mr. Jefferson, for you are a—*practitioner*, are you not?

*A pause. Rutledge has found the mark.*

**JEFFERSON:**

I have already resolved to release my slaves.

**RUTLEDGE:**

Then I'm sorry, for you have also resolved the ruination of your personal economy.

Our northern brethren are feelin' a bit tender toward our slaves. They don't keep slaves, no-o, but they're willin' to be considerable carriers of slaves—to others! They are willin', for the shillin'—*[rubbing his thumb and forefinger together]*—or haven't y'heard, Mr. Adams? Clink! Clink!

MARTHA:

I spoke to no one last evening.

FRANKLIN:

Indeed you did not, madame, but nevertheless we presented ourselves. This is Mr. John Adams and I am Dr. Franklin. [*As she stares at them, dumfounded:*] Inventor of the stove?

MARTHA:

Oh, please, I know your names very well. But you say you presented yourselves?

FRANKLIN:

Shall we start over? Please join us, madame.

MARTHA:

Yes, of course. [*She disappears from the window.*]

FRANKLIN:

No wonder the man couldn't write. Who could think of independence, married to her?

*She appears, smiling.*

MARTHA:

I beg you to forgive me. It is indeed an honor meeting the two greatest men in America.

FRANKLIN, *smiling back*:

Certainly the greatest within earshot, anyway.

MARTHA:

I am not an idle flatterer, Dr. Franklin. My husband admires you both greatly.

FRANKLIN:

Then we are doubly flattered, for we admire very much that which your husband admires.

Tell us about yourself, madame; we've had precious little information. What's your first name?

MARTHA:

Martha.

FRANKLIN:

Ah. Martha. He might at least have told us that. How did he win you, Martha, and how does he hold onto a bounty such as you?

MARTHA:

Surely you've noticed that Tom is a man of many accomplishments: author, lawyer, farmer, architect, statesman—[*she hesitates*]—and still one more that I hesitate to mention.

FRANKLIN:

Yes, what *else* can that redheaded tombstone do?

Franklin

Start

**FRANKLIN**—*he's been asleep, his chin on his chest; now an eye opens:*

Please, Mr. Dickinson—but must you start banging? How is a man to sleep?

*Laughter.*

**DICKINSON:**

Forgive me, Dr. Franklin, but must you start speaking? How is a man to stay awake?

*Laughter.*

We'll promise to be quiet, sir. I'm sure everyone prefers that you remain asleep.

**FRANKLIN:**

If I'm to hear myself called an Englishman, sir, then I assure you I'd prefer I'd remained asleep.

**DICKINSON:**

What's so terrible about being called an Englishman? The English don't seem to mind.

**FRANKLIN:**

Nor would I, were I given the full rights of an Englishman. But to call me one *without* those rights is like calling an ox a bull—he's thankful for the honor but he'd much rather have restored what's rightfully his.

*Laughter, Franklin laughing the longest.*

**DICKINSON, finally:**

When did you first notice they were missing, sir?

*Laughter.*

Fortunately, Dr. Franklin, the people of these colonies maintain a higher regard for their mother country.

**FRANKLIN:**

Higher, certainly, than she feels for them. Never was such a valuable possession so stupidly and recklessly managed than this entire continent by the British Crown. Our industry discouraged, our resources pillaged—and, worst of all, our very character stifled. We've spawned a new race here—rougher, simpler, more violent, more enterprising, and less refined. We're a new nationality, Mr. Dickinson—we require a new nation.

End

Dickinson

Start

**DICKINSON:**

Mr. Adams, you have an annoying talent for making such delightful words as "property" sound quite distasteful. In Heaven's name, what's wrong with property? Perhaps you've forgotten that many of us first came to these shores in order to secure rights to property—and that we hold *those* rights no less dear than the rights you speak of.

And what is this independence of yours except the private grievance of Massachusetts? Why, even your own cousin, so busy now with his seditious activities in Boston that he has no time to attend this Congress, is a fugitive with a price on his head! Then tell me this: what good can come from this radicalism and civil disorder? Where can it lead except to chaos, mob rule, and anarchy? And why in God's name is it always *Boston* that breaks the King's peace? [*To the Congress:*] My dear Congress you must not adopt this evil measure. It is the work of the devil. Leave it where it belongs—in New England.

**SHERMAN:**

Brother Dickinson, New England has been fighting the devil for more than a hundred years.

**DICKINSON:**

And as of now, "Brother" Sherman, the devil has been winning hands down! [*Indicating John:*] Why, at this very moment he is sitting here in this Congress! Don't let him deceive you—this proposal is entirely his doing! It may bear Virginia's name, but it reeks of Adams, Adams, and more Adams! Look at him—ready to lead this continent down the fiery path of total destruction!

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End



Hancock / McKean

Start

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**HANCOCK:**

Gentlemen, the usual morning festivities concluded, I will now call the Congress to order. [*Gavel:*] Mr. McNair, the stores of rum and other drinking spirits are hereby closed to the colony of Rhode Island for a period of three days.

Sit down, Mr. Hopkins. You've abused the privilege. The Chair takes this opportunity to welcome Dr. Lyman Hall of Georgia to this Congress and hopes he will make the best of it. My God, it's hot!

**McKEAN:**

Mr. President!

**HANCOCK, *wearily; he knows what's coming:***

Colonel McKean.

**McKEAN:**

Surely we've managed to promote the *gloomiest* man on this continent to the head of our troops. Those dispatches are the most depressing accumulation of disaster, doom, and despair in the entire annals of military history! And furthermore—

**HANCOCK, *pounding his gavel:***

Please, Colonel McKean—it's too hot.

**McKEAN:**

Oh. Yes. I suppose so.

**HANCOCK:**

General Washington will continue wording his dispatches as he sees fit, and I'm sure we all pray that he finds happier thoughts to convey in the near—*[swats a fly]*—future. Mr. Thomson, are there any resolutions?

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End

Thompson      Start

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*THOMSON, ringing his bell:*

From the Commander, Army of the United Colonies; in New York, dispatch number one thousand, one hundred and thirty-seven—

“To the Honorable Congress, John Hancock, President. Dear Sir: It is with grave apprehension that I have learned this day of the sailing, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, of a considerable force of British troops in the company of foreign mercenaries and under the command of General Sir William Howe. There can be no doubt that their destination is New York, for to take and hold this city and the Hudson Valley beyond would serve to separate New England from the other colonies permitting both sections to be crushed in turn. Sadly, I see no way of stopping them at the present time as my army is absolutely falling apart, my military chest is totally exhausted, my Commissary General has strained his credit to the last, my Quartermaster has no food, no arms, no ammunition, and my troops are in a state of near mutiny! I pray God some relief arrives before the armada but fear it will not. Y’r ob’d’t—”

*Drum roll.*

“G. Washington.”

*During the brief silence that follows, Thomson shrugs and files the dispatch.*

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End

Lee

*He is shouted down by the entire Congress. Then the door bursts open and Lee sweeps in.*

Start

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**LEE:**

Benjy, I'm back—I'm back, Johnny! [*He lets out a Southern war whoop.*]

First things first. [*Looking around:*] Tom—where's Tom? [*Turning and seeing Jefferson:*] Tom! Your little bride wants to know: "When's he coming home?"

**JOHN, grabbing Lee's shoulders:**

Never mind that—*is it done?*

**LEE:**

Done? [*A pause.*] Why, certain—*Lee!*  
*Cheers from those for independence.*

Mr. President, I have returned from Virginia with the followin' resolution. [*He produces a paper and reads.*] "Resolved: that these united colonies are (and of a right ought to be) free and independent states, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is (and ought to be) totally dissolved!"

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End

Wilson

Start

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*WILSON, to Dickinson:*

Please don't push me, John, I know what you want me to do. But Mr. Adams is correct about one thing. *I'm* the one who'll be remembered for it.

I'm different from you, John. I'm different from most of the men here. I don't want to be remembered. I just don't want the responsibility!

Not necessarily. If I go with them, I'll only be one among dozens; no one will ever remember the name of James Wilson. But if I vote with you, I'll be the man who prevented American independence. I'm sorry, John—I just didn't bargain for that.

*FRANKLIN:*

Revolutions come into this world like bastard children, Mr. Dickinson—half improvised and half compromised. Our side has provided the compromise; now Judge Wilson is supplying the rest.

*WILSON, to Dickinson:*

I'm sorry, John. My vote is "Yea."

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End

Courier / McNair

Start \_\_\_\_\_

McNAIR:

How'd you like to try 'n' borrow a dollar from one o' them? [*To the Courier:*] Want another rum, Gen'ral?

COURIER:

Gen'ral? [*He grins.*] Lord, I ain't even a *corp'l*.

McNAIR:

Yeah, well, what's the Army know? [*He pours the the Courier another drink, pours himself and the Leather Apron a pair, selects one of Hancock's good clay pipes, lights it, then bangs with the gavel.*] Sit down, gentlemen. The Chair rules it's too damn hot to work! [*He occupies one chair, the Courier another, and the Leather Apron still a third.*] What's it like out there, Gen'ral?

COURIER:

You prob'ly know more'n me.

McNAIR:

Sittin' in here? Sweet Jesus! This is the *last* place to find out what's goin' on!

COURIER, *indicating his chair:*

Who sets here?

McNAIR:

Caesar Rodney of Delaware. Where *you* from, Gen'ral?

COURIER:

Watertown. Massachusetts.

McNAIR:

Well, then, you belong down there. You seed any fightin'?

COURIER, *proudly:*

Sure did. I seed my two best friends git shot dead on the very same day! Right on the village green it was, too! [*The recollection takes hold.*] An' when they didn't come home f'r supper, their mommas went down the hill lookin' for 'em. [*Music in, softly.*] Miz Lowell, she foun' Tim'thy right off, but Miz Pickett, she looked near half the night f'r Will'm cuz he'd gone 'n' crawled off the green 'fore he died.

End \_\_\_\_\_

*He is silent for a moment; then he sings.*