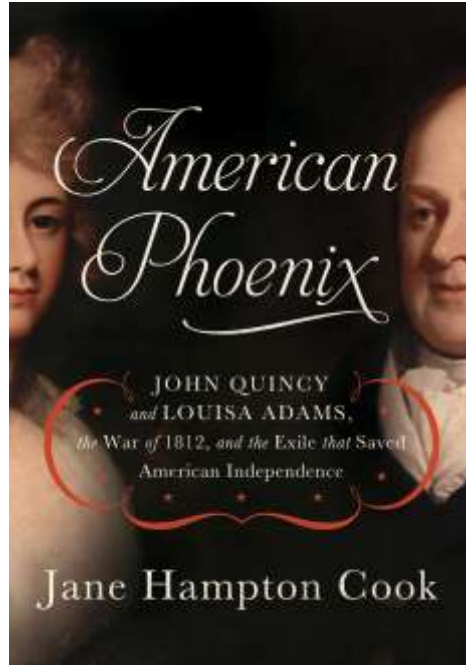


STUDY GUIDE/BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

Study Guide for *American Phoenix: John Quincy and Louisa Adams*, by Jane Hampton Cook, janecook.com.

American Phoenix is a literary nonfiction book that is unique because it shows authentic character changes in two real people, who are the main characters. Character arcs are usually the work of fiction, and it is rare to find authentic character change in two real-life individuals at the same time.

Both John Quincy and Louisa Adams underwent a transformational character arc from 1809 to 1815. John Quincy transformed from a down-on-his-luck politician into a statesman on track to become president. Louisa transformed from a marginalized mother into a female leader who made life and death decisions to be reunited with her family.



Part 1: Journey Interrupted

1. *American Phoenix* takes place in the era of the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars. Why was it unusual for Louisa Adams to travel from St. Petersburg, Russia, to Paris, France, in February 1815? pages 3-5.
2. What were some of the difficulties that Louisa faced as she traveled? pages 3-5.
3. Where was John Quincy Adams? pages 6-8.
4. What skill did John Quincy show as a young child to his father John Adams and Benjamin Franklin's friends? What might that foreshadow for him? page 7.
5. Why does Louisa refuse to socialize in Mitau? What does Louisa most want in the first chapter? pages 3-9, 14.
6. What was tempting about Paris in 1815? page 10.
7. What does John Quincy notice about the people and their allegiance in Paris in 1815? page 10.
8. What does Louisa learn about Baptiste? pages 11-12.
9. Louisa was born in the same year as what famous British novelist? page 15.
10. Louisa was half British and half American but spoke French fluently. How might her identity have been an advantage? How might it have been a disadvantage? page 15.
11. What did Louisa have in common with Napoleon? What could this foreshadow? page 16.
12. Who rescues Louisa from being stuck? page 19.
13. What was America's greatest struggle at this time? page 21.
14. What does John Quincy want more than anything, although he does not admit it to the Marquis de Lafayette. What does this show about his temperament? Is he reserved or outgoing? page 22.
15. Louisa faces a difficult life or death choice, whether to cross the icy river or take the long route around and not find shelter. What does she choose and what happens? page 23.

Part 2: Journey Begins

16. What was Independence Day, July 4 like in 1809? How is Independence Day the same and how is it different from today? pages 27-38.
17. What does John Quincy discover in the newspaper that changed his life? page 29.
18. Prior to the War of 1812, the United States was largely a country in name only. What could America gain through an alliance with Russia? page 30.
19. How does John Quincy's friend Ezekiel Bacon describe John Quincy's appointment as America's top diplomat to Russia? What does this likely mean? page 32.
20. The *Adams and Liberty* song was sung to what now famous tune? page 33.
21. How many children do Louisa and John Quincy Adams have? page 33.
22. How does Louisa respond to the news of John Quincy's appointment to Russia? pages 34-38.
23. What decision is Louisa left out of? Who tells Louisa about the decision? Why do you think John Quincy did not tell her? pages 39-41.
24. Why did Louisa not say goodbye to her father-in-law? page 41.
25. What other family members accompanied Louisa and John Quincy on their voyage? page 43.
26. Besides a storm, what other dangers threaten the *Horace*? pages 46-56.
27. What major event and Jefferson's response to it led to John Quincy's resignation from the US Senate? pages 48-51.
28. What country did the Danish lieutenant think the *Horace*'s sailors belonged to? What does this reveal about America's identity as an independent nation in 1809? page 56.
29. How many Americans were detained at Kristiansand? What did John Quincy decide to do to help them? pages 67-62.
30. Who was one of John Quincy's political enemies back home? What did he think was the best thing that could be done to John Quincy Adams? pages 63-65.
31. What convinced the admiral to let John Quincy pass through the blockade? How was this ironic? page 67.
32. What was the topic of the sermon Louisa and Kitty heard before they left on their journey? What could this foreshadow? page 70
33. What advice did John Quincy give his sons? pages 72-74.
35. What did John Quincy prioritize in Elsinore? How does this show character growth? page 77.
36. Who was really in charge of their voyage, the captain of the ship or John Quincy? pages 77-86.
37. How did heaven smile on their voyage? page 83.
38. Why did John Quincy and Louisa arrive without their clothing? Who does John Quincy need to meet first before he can meet the emperor or czar in Russia? pages 88-94.
39. Why did John Quincy experience *deja vu*? pages 95-103.
40. Who gave Romanzoff a book of French poems? What could this signify politically for Russia? page 96.
41. What does Emperor Alexander say about the United States? Is this surprising? page 100.
42. What challenge does Louisa face when preparing to meet the emperor's wife and mother? What heartbreak from her past does this resurrect? pages 104-105.



43. Why was it important to dress lavishly in the emperor's court? How did clothing portray someone's social status in this era? pages 104-113.

44. What surprise does Louisa experience when meeting the emperor's wife? What special gift does Louisa use in this moment? page 112.

45. What did the presentations to the emperor and his wife allow John Quincy and Louisa to do? page 114.

46. Describe the splendor of the palace party. pages 114-8.

47. What natural phenomenon signaled that they were stuck in St Petersburg until spring? How did this affect their spirits? pages 120-121.

48. What talent or capability does John Quincy display after his meeting with Romanzoff? How does this help him do his job well? page 122.

49. What political goal does John Quincy need to achieve in Russia? page 123.

50. How do some of the other diplomats feel about Napoleon? pages 124, 131.

51. Which diplomat poses the biggest threat for John Quincy's mission? Which well-known historical political figure is his biggest obstacle? pages 126-7, 132, 137.

52. Why does Adams write to his mother that "extravagance and dissipation have become a public duty?" page 128.

53. What clothing embarrassment does Louisa face because of their lack of money? How does she try to solve this problem? page 129.

54. What problem does John Quincy bring to Count Romanzoff? What does this say about John Quincy's commitment to keep a promise? How does Romanzoff respond? pages 134-5.

55. Who offered to intervene in the problem with the 300 stranded Americans in Denmark? Was this a surprise? pages 138-139.

56. What social faux pas did Louisa violate? What was really going on? pages 142-143.

57. Who was getting a divorce? What opportunity did this present for Russia? page 145.

58. Why does Louisa say "custom is the law?" page 146.

59. How did the empress mother show Louisa that she had forgiven her? page 148.

60. What custom did John Quincy witness? pages 150-151.

61. What custom did John Quincy decline and why? page 152.

62. What problem did John Quincy bring to the French ambassador's attention? How did he respond? page 152.

63. What loss does Louisa experience? page 157.

64. Why does Louisa refuse to receive visits from Count Romanzoff and the princess? How significant a role does money play in this society? How does the palace solve the problem for Louisa? pages 158-159, 160-162

65. Who had replaced the democratic spirit in Europe? page 160.

66. How had Count Romanzoff solved John Quincy's problem of needing to send correspondence to America? Is this a wise choice for John Quincy? page 164.

67. Why does John Quincy visit the factory? What does the visit show him? pages 166-168.

68. Why was John Quincy afraid to participate in the Russian custom of exchanging Easter eggs? What role did faith enable him to participate? pages 170-171.



69. What did the breaking of the ice on the river signal? page 172.
70. What type of exercise did John Quincy and Louisa have in common with the emperor? Did they also share a similar faith? page 173.
71. Why did Louisa and Kitty stop walking? Who noticed? page 173.
72. What dark rumor plagued Emperor Alexander? pages 175-176.
73. What country was Napoleon's new bride from? Why was that important? How did this affect Russia? pages 176-177.
74. Why did Emperor Alexander dance with Louisa at the French ambassador's ball honoring Napoleon? pages 176-82.
75. What hobby did John Quincy take up? pages 184-6.
76. Who paid more attention to John Quincy and Louisa after Emperor Alexander danced with Louisa at the ball? pages 184-187.
77. What had John Quincy yet to receive in the summer of 1810? What does his response say about his integrity? pages 188-190.
78. What did Louisa receive that brought her great joy? pages 190-192.
79. How did Louisa describe the Danes? page 195.
80. What fact does John Quincy learn about the French ambassador that makes his mission to convince the Russians to trade with America more difficult? page 198.
81. Why does the French ambassador want John Quincy to represent America in France and not Russia? pages 200-201.
82. What proposition did Mr. Six and the French ambassador give to John Quincy? How did John Quincy respond and what does it reveal about his character? pages 202-03.
83. Why was it important for the American vessels to unload their cargo at Archangel and Kronstadt? pages 205-209.
84. How did the French ambassador obtain his current position to Russia? page 210.
85. Though he was embarrassed to be one of the only diplomats to attend St. Alexander Nevsky's ceremony, how might it have been an advantage for him take a genuine interest in Russia's customs? pages 211-214, 216.
86. How did John Quincy stand up to the French ambassador? pages 214-216, 220-224.
87. Why did John Quincy decide to read a French translation of the Bible? pages 216-217.
88. What did Romanzoff mean when he said that Russia's attachment to America was obstinate? 224-226.
89. How did Emperor Alexander show political favoritism to America through social gestures? pages 227-230.
90. Why did John Quincy believe that his mission had been a success? page 230.
91. Why was Louisa still unhappy? pages 227-237.
92. Why did Louisa snub Emperor Alexander? How did he respond? pages 238-239.
93. Who offered to rescind the Berlin and Milan decrees but, in reality, encouraged his officers to confiscate American ships? page 241.



94. Who had been reading their letters to their family members? How did Louisa respond to this Russian spying? pages 242-243.

95. What did raising French flags in territory along the Baltic Sea for the first time signify? Was war on the horizon between France and Russia? page 250.

96. What rumor did Emperor Alexander confront John Quincy about during the New Year in 1811? page 252.

97. How did Emperor Alexander honor John Quincy and Louisa at the New Year's ball in 1811? How did French Ambassador Caulaincourt respond? pages 253-256.

98. What had Emperor Alexander figured out about Louisa? page 256.

99. What was General Hitroff's punishment for selling Russian military secrets to the French? page 260.

100. John Adams showed the French ambassador that he could debate with honor and logic. What country was the greatest obstacle to American ships trading goods with Russia? pages 263-266.

101. What happened to the French ambassador? pages 270-271.

102. As Emperor Alexander recognized that war with France was imminent, he John Quincy discuss news between America and what other nation? page 273.

103. What family news did Louisa and John Quincy receive from America? How did this affect Louisa? pages 276-280.

104. What news about America did John Quincy read in a newspaper? How did he respond? pages 280-281.

105. What appointment did President Madison offer to John Quincy Adams? Did he want the job? Why or why not? What was his answer? pages 283-285

106. One of the reasons that John Quincy turned down the appointment was because of Louisa's pregnancy. He prioritized his family over position, which was a contrast to the decision at the beginning of the story when he succumbed to his parents' decision for his older sons to stay behind in Boston. How does this show character growth? pages 286-292.

107. Though Louisa felt insecure in her role as the wife of the American diplomat to Russia, other diplomatic wives looked to her for advice, even when she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. What does this say about her skills and capabilities as a diplomat's wife? pages 296-297, 299-301.

108. The relationship between the French ambassador and John Quincy ended in respect. What does this say about John Quincy's skills and character? pages 297-298.

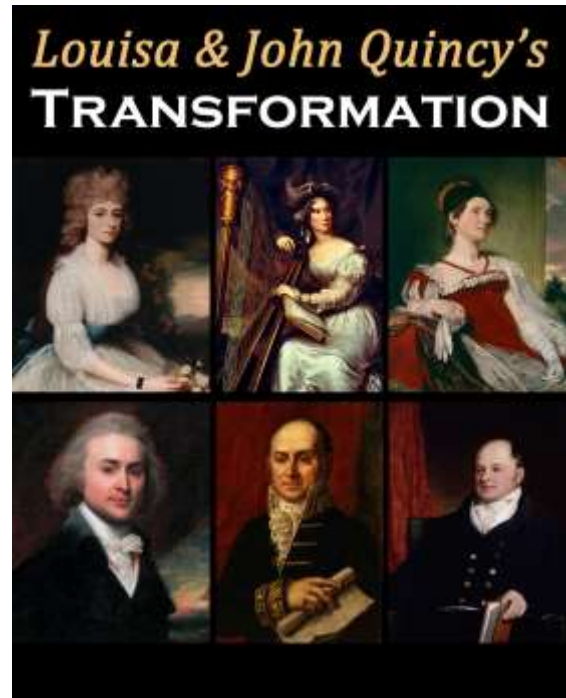
109. What were some other reasons John Quincy declined the appointment on the Supreme Court? What does this say about his ability to be true to himself? pages 305-309.

110. What was the name of John Quincy and Louisa's new baby? What was ironic about her birth and their inability to go home? page 313.

111. Comets during the 1800s were viewed with a lot of superstition. What did Emperor Alexander and John Quincy think two comets signified? page 315.

112. Why was John Quincy considered the father of diplomacy in St. Petersburg? page 319.

113. What custom was John Quincy allowed to part with? page 322.



114. What tragic news did the Adams family receive? page 323.

115. As France prepared to invade Russia and as England and America prepared for war, what conclusion does John Quincy make about going home? What prevents him from doing so? pages 334-341.

116. What rival does John Quincy face in September 1812? How does the war between America and England affect his ability to communicate with the new ambassador? pages 345, 349-51.

117. What personal tragedy do John Quincy and Louisa experience? page 348.

118. John Quincy's effective working relationship with the Emperor of Russia led the emperor to make what offer? pages 350-351.

119. How did Louisa express her grief? page 353.

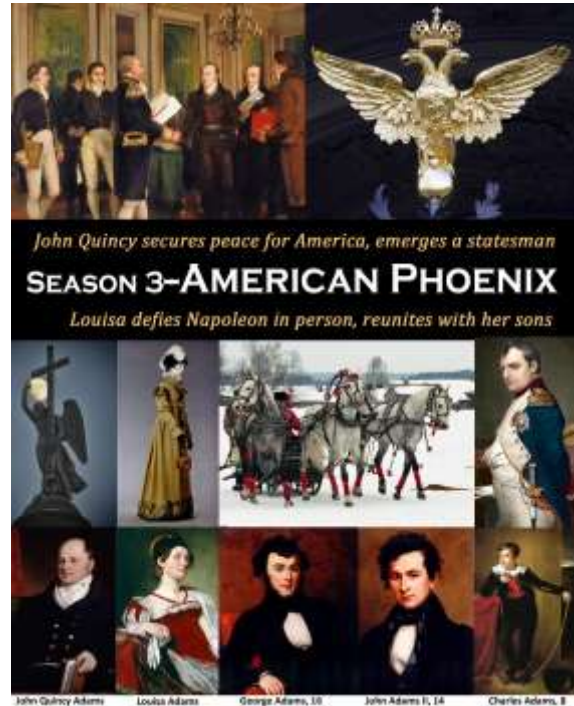
120. How did the Russians celebrate their victories? pages 362, 375.

121. Louisa develops her writing skills as she uses her notebook to pour out her grief. How does she describe Napoleon? page 364.

122. Louisa's grief leads her to suicidal ideation. What helps her to overcome this? pages 370, 373.

123. How did the War of 1812 defy logic? page 374.

124. When learning that President Madison had accepted Emperor Alexander's offer to mediate peace, where did John Quincy think they would go? pages 376-378.



Part 3: Journey Resurrected

125. The story returns to Louisa's carriage breaking through the ice on the Vistula River in February 1815. How has she changed since her suicidal ideations after the death of her daughter? page 381, 388.

126. How does knowing what Louisa experienced in Russia affect your opinion of her now compared to the beginning of the book? pages 381, 413-417.

127. Is traveling in a carriage with a Russian insignia an advantage or a disadvantage? page 382.

128. Although John Quincy thought he would be returning to America, he learned that President Madison wanted him to negotiate a peace treaty between America and England. What character growth and skills does he bring to this new opportunity? page 383.

129. What did Louisa most hope for now that John Quincy was negotiating a peace treaty? How does that motivate her on her journey? page 384.

130. How did Louisa's carriage nearly breaking through the ice affect Charles? page 385.

131. How did jealousy affect Louisa and John Quincy's long-distance relationship? pages 386-387.

132. What happened to Kitty? page 389.

132. What are some of the meanings and usages of the phoenix? page 391.

133. How had John Quincy Adams risen like a phoenix? How had Louisa? page 391.

134. What bad news arrived from America? How did this impact the peace talks? pages 393-397, 400-01.

135. What were some of the challenges Louisa faced on the road to Paris? pages 398-399, 402-404, 410-411.

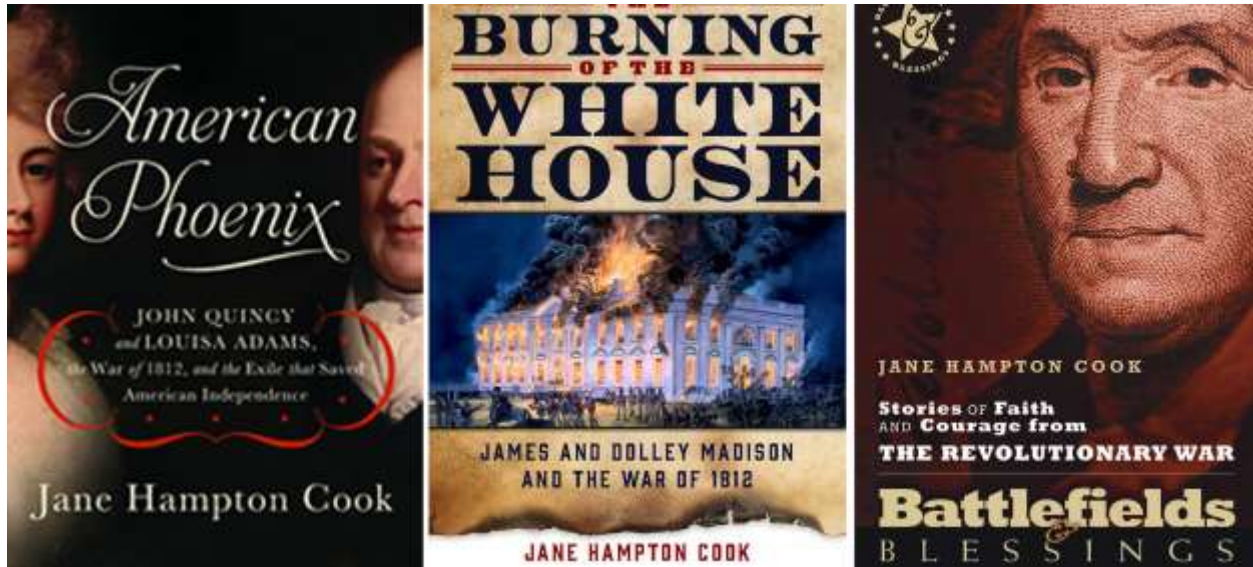
136. What superstition did Louisa give in to before she left Russia? pages 405-407.
137. When John Quincy met France's King Louis XVIII, who did the king think Adams was related to? What does this say about the reputation of the Adams family? pages 408-409.
138. Why did John Quincy risk telling Louisa details about the negotiations? What does this say about his trust in her? How is this different from the beginning of the story when he does not trust her to weigh in on the decision about their sons staying behind in Boston? How does this show their character growth and the strength of their relationship? page 411.
139. While not a main character in the story, Napoleon has played a crucial background role in the book. How could his return to Paris affect Louisa as she journeys there at the same time? pages 417-420.
140. What happened after the burning of the White House in Baltimore? What song was created as a result? What song about Adams has the same tune? pages 421-423.
141. Who wrote the actual treaty, the Americans or the British? What bold move did John Quincy make in the treating negotiations? pages 424-425.
142. How did Louisa's servants respond to Napoleon's return? page 417.
143. What was the happiest day in John Quincy's life? page 430.
144. What did Louisa have in common with Napoleon? page 431.
145. How quickly did the people of France switch from loyalty to the king to loyalty to Napoleon? page 437.
146. What special skills did Louisa tap when she faced Napoleon's imperial guards? Was she calm or terrified? How does this incident complete her character arc? pages 438-441.
147. When John Quincy and Louisa are reunited with their older son's George and John, where are they living? pages 444-446.
148. John Quincy transformed from a lackluster politician into a statesman on track to become president. Louisa transformed from marginalized mother into a woman entrusted to make life and death decisions to be reunited with her family. What did Louisa do that enabled her story to be remembered? pages 447-450.

Jane Hampton Cook

Jane Hampton Cook makes history and biography relevant to news, current events, politics, faith, and modern life. She is an award-winning author of nine books. Receiving a recommend, her feature screenplay *SAVING WASHINGTON* placed third out of 1,000 entries in ScreenCraft's 2018 drama contest. She has since received producer's notes from WME, Lionsgate, New Republic Pictures, Entertainment One, the Gersh Agency and others. Inspired by her 9-11 evacuation experience from the White House, *SAVING WASHINGTON* is adapted from her book, *The Burning of the White House: James and Dolley Madison and the War of 1812*.



A national media commentator and former White House webmaster, Jane has been a frequent guest on the Fox News Channel, BBC, SKY News, and other national, local, and independent TV and radio outlets. She was a cast member and on-camera storyteller for *THE FIRST AMERICAN*, a documentary about George Washington, *FOX NATION* documentaries, and the History Channel's *UNITED STUFF OF AMERICA*. She received a bachelor's degree from Baylor University and a master's degree from Texas A&M University. Jane lives with her husband and their children near Washington D.C. www.janecook.com.



Books

- Resilience on Parade: Short Stories of Suffragists & Women's Battle for the Vote*
 (Wheelhouse Lit, 2020)
- The Burning of the White House* (Regnery History, 2016)
- American Phoenix* (Thomas Nelson, HarperCollins imprint, 2013)
- America's Star-Spangled Story* (Lighthouse of the Carolinas, 2014)
- Stories of Faith and Courage from the War in Iraq and Afghanistan* (AMG, 2010) 2010 Gold Medal
 from Military Writers Society of America *Stories of Faith and Courage from the Revolutionary War*
 (AMG, 2007)
- The Faith of America's First Ladies* (AMG, 2006)

For Children

- What Does the President Look Like?* (Kane Miller, 2011)
- B is for Baylor* (Baylor Press, 2010), *Maggie Houston* (Hendrick Long, 2002)