ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND SLAVERY

PREVIEW COPY
INCLUDING THE COMPLETE FIRST LESSON

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Ankeney and Vigilante collaborated in the development of teaching materials to support two Huntington Library exhibits, “The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America,” and “The Great Experiment: George Washington and the American Republic.” In addition they developed a series of lessons for the Library of Congress National Digital Library using broadsides from the Continental Congress and the Washington Letterbooks. Gary B. Nash, Professor of History at UCLA, served as editor of the unit. Marian McKenna Olivas was the layout editor.

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TEACHER’S GUIDE

APPROACH AND RATIONALE

Lincoln and Slavery is one of over 60 National Center for History in the Schools teaching units that are the fruit of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. The units represent specific dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative.

By studying a crucial episode in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history in an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow’s history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers and literature from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of “being there,” a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian’s craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.
**Teacher's Guide**

**CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION**

Within this unit, you will find: Teaching Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History Unit Objectives, and Introduction to Abraham Lincoln and Slavery; A Dramatic Moment; and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by high school students, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific Dramatic Moment to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.
TEACHING BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

Abraham Lincoln, “The Great Emancipator” in historical folklore, was a complex individual with political savvy. Historical interpretations of Lincoln and his stand on the issue of slavery vary. Some have argued that Lincoln considered slavery as a moral issue and was committed to its extinction, while others argue that Lincoln was the embodiment of American racism. A student of history can find a wide spectrum of opinions between these two poles.

Through the use of primary sources students will discover Abraham Lincoln’s attitudes and actions regarding slavery, its abolition, and the use of African American troops during the Civil War. Students encounter Lincoln’s words and deeds amid the political realities of the day and in the context of the time in which he lived. Contemporary voices of both support and opposition draw attention to public reaction to Lincoln’s policies. Students are asked to grapple with questions such as: How, when, and why did the war to preserve the Union come to include the abolition of slavery? Was the Emancipation Proclamation the climax of a series of measures designed to end slavery or was it a break from previous policy? What were the factors behind Lincoln’s decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation and to confirm “the promise” with a call for ratification of the 13th amendment? What impact did public opinion have on Lincoln’s decision regarding the abolition of slavery and the use of African American troops in combat?

II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit may be used as a “spotlight” to focus on the evolution of Lincoln’s stance on slavery and his commitment to abolition. Specific lessons may also be used at different times during the chronological study of the events leading to the Civil War and the Lincoln presidency. Lessons I and II may be incorporated in the study of the sectional crisis leading to the war while the remaining lessons are appropriate during a study of the Lincoln presidency. The lessons are intended as an inquiry into the development and implementation of Lincoln’s policy of emancipation.

III. CORRELATION TO NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

Abraham Lincoln and Slavery provides teaching materials that address Eras 4 and 5 in National Standards for History, Basic Edition (Los Angeles, National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). Lesson One, “A House divided, Lincoln’s Early Views on Slavery” and Lesson Two, “The Lincoln Douglas De-
“bates” provide teaching materials to assist in accomplishing Standard 3B of Era 4: “How the debates over slavery influenced politics and sectionalism” and Standard 1 of Era 5, “How politics and ideologies led to the Civil War.” Lessons contained in this teaching unit on the Emancipation Proclamation specifically address Standard 2A of Era 5, which expects students to explain reasons for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, evaluate its provisions, and explain its significance.

Lessons within this unit likewise address a number of specific Historical Thinking standards including: explain historical continuity and change (Standard 1, Chronological Thinking); identify the author or source of a historical document or narrative and assess its credibility (Standard 2, Historical Comprehension); analyze cause-and-effect relationships and distinguish between unsupported expressions of opinion and informed hypotheses ground in historical evidence (Standard 3, Historical Analysis and Interpretation); obtain historical data from a variety of sources (Standard 4, Historical Research); and marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances (Standard 5, Historical Issues Analysis and Decision Making).

IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

1. To interpret documents in their historical context.
2. To understand the significance of the debate over the abolition of slavery and the use of African American troops.
3. To examine the historical context of emancipation.
4. To explore the political motivation surrounding public policy.

V. LESSON PLANS

Lesson One: The House Divided: Lincoln’s Early Views on Slavery
Lesson Two: The Lincoln-Douglas Debates
Lesson Three: The Lincoln Administration and the Evolution of an Antislavery Policy
Lesson Four: Emancipation and African American Troops
Lesson Five: Contemporary Views of Lincoln and His Position on Slavery
Lesson Six: Artists’ Views of the Emancipation Proclamation
INTRODUCTION TO ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND SLAVERY

Abraham Lincoln was a complex, self-made man. Born in poverty near Hodgenville, Kentucky in 1809, he moved to Indiana with his family in 1810 and settled in Illinois fourteen years later. He was elected a captain in the Illinois militia during the Black Hawk War of 1832 and served in the state legislature from 1834 to 1841. Temporarily retiring from politics, he became a successful Illinois lawyer. Lincoln was a staunch supporter of Henry Clay and an active member of the Whig Party of Illinois. In 1846 he was elected to the House of Representatives where he voiced his opposition to the war with Mexico. After one term in the House, he abandoned politics and returned to his law practice in Springfield. Lincoln’s opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act rekindled his interest in politics and he made an unsuccessful bid for the United States Senate in 1855. He joined the newly formed Republican Party and was recognized as one of its leaders in Illinois.

In 1858 he challenged Democrat Stephen Douglas for the Senate. His lifelong ambition was to serve in the United States Senate, where great men debated the paramount issues of the day. In seven three-hour debates across the state, Lincoln relentlessly confronted Douglas only to have the State assembly appoint his opponent to the Senate. Two years later, in a four-way race for the presidency, Lincoln was elected with slightly under 40% of the popular vote. As president, he faced the greatest constitutional challenge in the nation’s history as eleven states seceded from the union. The fortunes of the war weighed on his shoulders as Union forces failed to achieve rapid victory. Lincoln’s search for a competent military leader became legendary as he dismissed general after general, finally placing confidence in U. S. Grant. In 1864, as he prepared to run for reelection, he faced dissension within his own party and even the rumored nomination of his Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase. On August 23, 1864, less than three months before the presidential election, Lincoln wrote, “This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected.” Yet, decisive turns in the Union military objectives helped ensure his victory in the presidential election of November 1864. By inauguration day, March 4, 1865, the war was virtually over. On April 9, Confederate Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse. On Friday evening, April 14, the Lincolns attended a performance of “Our American Cousin” at Ford’s Theater. There, John Wilkes Booth fired the fatal shot, and with the assassin’s bullet, the Lincoln legend began.
On December 1, 1862, with the nation embroiled in its greatest challenge ever—the Civil War—President Abraham Lincoln delivered his annual message to Congress. That speech, to the Senators and the Representatives of the states which remained in the Union, concluded with the following words:

... The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and than we shall save our country.

Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We—even we here—hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth.


The “fiery trial” to which Lincoln referred—and through which he passed with considerable honor—was, of course, the Civil War. Students of history know the result. Not only was the Union saved but a new beginning for what Lincoln termed the “Last best hope of earth” emerged from the cataclysm, one which had shed the institution of slavery. How, why, and when did Lincoln’s war aims—which began with the preservation of the Union—come to include the freeing of enslaved Americans? What are the historical connections between Abraham Lincoln’s views about slavery and the evolution of policies which represented our nation’s initial steps toward a more honorable, if not wholly egalitarian, vision for the people of the United States of America?
Lesson One: The House Divided—Lincoln’s Early Views on Slavery

A. Objectives

♦ To analyze the personal and political positions regarding slavery held by Abraham Lincoln prior to 1860.

♦ To assess the depths of Lincoln’s aversion to slavery.

B. Lesson Plan (1 day)

Reading 1: Document A—Letter to Speed, 24 August 1855
Document B—House Divided Speech, 16 June 1858

Reading 2: Document A—On Slavery and Democracy, ca. 1858
Document B—Letter to Brown, 18 October 1858

In groups of two or three, have students read and discuss the collection of primary sources labeled Readings 1 and 2. Next, ask each group to select either Reading 1 or 2 for primary focus, and to sketch and label the metaphor of a “house divided” in Reading 1 or create a chart comparing the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence (1776) with Lincoln’s assertions in Reading 2. Have each group present their work either in small groups or in the large group debriefing. As part of that class discussion, consider such questions as:

1. Where did Lincoln’s disdain for slavery originate?

2. What specifically about the institution of slavery did he oppose?

3. What, in his view, were the constitutional aspects of the issue?
Document A
From a letter to Joshua F. Speed, 24 August 1855

Excerpts from Lincoln’s response to a letter from a long-time friend (and slaveholder) revealed his views about the enslavement of African Americans.

. . . You know I dislike slavery; . . . I confess I hate to see the poor creatures hunted down, and caught, and carried back to their stripes, and unrewarded toils; but I bite my lip and keep quiet. In 1841 you and I had together a tedious low-water trip, on a Team Boat from Louisville to St. Louis. You may remember, as I well do, that from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio there were, on board, ten or a dozen slaves shackled together with irons. That sight was a continual torment with me; and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio, or any other slave-border. It is hardly fair for you to assume, that I have no interest in a thing which has, and continually exercises, the power of making me miserable. You ought rather to appreciate how much the great body of the Northern people do to crucify their feelings, in order to maintain their loyalty to the constitution and the Union . . .

I do oppose the extension of slavery, because my judgment and feelings so prompt me; and I am under no obligation to the contrary. If for this you and I must differ, differ we must. . . .

—Library of America, Vol. 1, 360–63
Document B

“House Divided” Speech at Springfield, Illinois, 16 June 1858

The excerpts which follow are from a speech given by Abraham Lincoln at Springfield, Illinois on the occasion of his selection as the Illinois State Republican Party’s candidate for United States Senate.

A house divided against itself cannot stand.

I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.

I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided.

It will become all one thing, or all the other.

Either the opponents of slavery, will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.

**Document A**

**“On Slavery and Democracy,” ca. 1858**

The undated statement below was found in Lincoln’s papers in the approximate period of his preparation for the Lincoln-Douglas debates; it was not uncommon for him to jot down notes of the sort as a way of clarifying his views.

As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy.

—Library of America, Vol. 1, 484.

**Document B**

**Letter to James N. Brown, 18 October 1858**

Lincoln’s views excerpted below are from a letter he wrote in response to queries from a man who had either witnessed or read reports about the Lincoln-Douglas debate series. The final debate had been concluded a few days previous to the date Lincoln penned his response.

I do not perceive how I can express myself, more plainly, than I have done in the foregoing extracts. In four of them I have expressly disclaimed all intention to bring about social and political equality between the white and black races, and, in all the rest, I have done the same thing by clear implication. . . .

I have made it equally plain that I think the negro is included in the word “men” used in the Declaration of Independence.

I believe the declaration that “all men are created equal” is the great fundamental principle upon which our free institutions rest; that negro slavery is violative of that principle; . . . that by our frame of government, the States which have slavery are to retain it, or surrender it at their own pleasure; and that all others—individuals, free-states and national government—are constitutionally bound to leave them alone about it.

To purchase the complete unit, see the National Center for History in the Schools catalog:

http://nchs.ucla.edu/catalog.html

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