

Lincoln Overcoming Challenges: His Rise to Presidency and His Strong Legacy

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INTRODUCTION

I have been teaching third and fourth graders for almost four years in the district, and I have noticed that there are always students who are interested in the life of President Abraham Lincoln. The theme that interests me the most are the Lincoln stories that demonstrate his fortitude in becoming self-educated and overcoming failures in his rise to the presidency. Lincoln is still evaluated as our greatest President by presidential scholars (Schlesinger 179-189). Hence, teaching Lincoln's rise from poverty to historic achievement can be inspirational for students.

This unit aims to discuss the biography of President Lincoln with a focus on the challenges he encountered and how he managed to rise above his adversities and misfortunes. This unit will stress the major obstacles he faced in his political career and how he overcame them to become America's finest president. The unit will use books, articles, pictures, timelines, and movies. Other teachers can make use of this material for their third through fifth grade students in Reading or Social Science.

Why teach this topic? Biographies of great leaders are not only useful in teaching history, but they are also very useful in helping the student relate more meaningfully to our social science topics. When they learn the biographical details of a great person like Lincoln and how he managed to succeed despite the many challenges he had to face, they will be inspired by this role model:

Lincoln's long struggle against adversity —inner adversity as well as terrible problems of his day—is something anybody can identify with and learn from. We can learn from Lincoln's life that those who rise to supreme heights have personal dilemmas—identity crises, ambivalences, hurts, setbacks and even a loss of will—which they have to anguish over and work their way through I do believe that Lincoln's life can still provide motivation for today's students. (Oates, 146-47)

For most young children, the first public official they hear about is the President of the United States. It is common that children can name the President right away, but not their Senators or mayors. The American Presidency is one of the most important and enlightening topics and could greatly open the interest and minds of young elementary learners. This could be a tool to help pave the way for their understanding and cherishing the study of the social and historical sciences or future academic pursuits. Better yet, perhaps it will ignite patriotic concerns and help inculcate the spirit of responsible citizenry. The topic is appropriate for elementary students (third through fifth grade). And with modifications, this topic can be adapted as well for the much younger learners.

Without a doubt, the President is the highest position in the American government. This office is the symbol of leadership, a source of inspiration and unity, and lends great significance to the topic.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

This unit is designed around the biography of President Abraham Lincoln including major events in his political career and his very own personal challenges starting from his boyhood days to adulthood, along with his important achievements. These events include his election as US President in 1860; the Emancipation Proclamation against slavery in 1863; and preserving the Union by winning the Civil War in 1865. Students will learn valuable lessons from studying President Lincoln's life. They will have a basic understanding of why we need to elect a President, the importance of the Emancipation Proclamation in terms of freedom and equality, the historical circumstances surrounding the Civil War and how Lincoln was strongly instrumental in winning that war and uniting the nation.

There are many children's books that have been written about Lincoln, but often, the emphasis was given more on his successes or political victories and not on how he faced and overcame his many and unique personal obstacles and political challenges. This unit hopes to bring out Lincoln's biography in a new and different light, with the end goal of helping the students gain a deeper understanding and a greater appreciation of Lincoln's life and challenges in the context of his time, the 19th century. On all of these subtopics, we will have a better understanding how uniquely challenging and sometimes tumultuous Lincoln's life and presidential term were. And yet, these challenges forged a personality that was capable of achieving for his greatness.

CHECKING STUDENTS PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Before I begin the unit on Lincoln, I will try to check the level of knowledge they have on the subject in order to know what they already know, what they will know and what they would like to learn further about the topic. I will use the KWL chart that is familiar to most students at the target grade levels. Some of the fourth graders are expected to show some basic knowledge on the topic, while some may not be able to show any.

Engaging discussions and questioning will be used to facilitate discussion and explorations on the topic. Some of the possible questions may include: Why do you think we need a President? What qualities and qualifications do you think our presidents should have? What do you think are the reasons why President Lincoln is still great?

IMPORTANT WORDS, CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

The topic will be a great opportunity to introduce or likewise deepen the students' concepts in history and social science. Some of the important words or concepts that they will learn are (not necessarily in order):

Biography	Lawyer
Presidency	Politician
Whig Party	Republican Party
Emancipation	Abolitionists
Slavery	Civil War
Confederates	Freedom
Equality	Challenges
Union	Debate

Vocabulary will be taught directly and indirectly depending on the students' level and responses. I will use word cards or write words on the board as we discuss and read key or new concepts. I will ask students if they can define the word or if they have any thought on it. Certain tools will be used to help understand or decode vocabulary such as dictionaries, context clues or even encyclopedias. Some assessment tools and fun activities such as matching word meanings,

multiple choice or factual and cloze type activities where they fill in the blanks the key words that are appropriate in sentence or phrases.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The students will try to understand the major challenges faced by Lincoln before and during his presidency. The first part of the lesson will aim to expose the students to the facts, circumstances and challenges before he became a lawyer, then a politician, and then it will proceed to his taste of defeats and victories during his presidency. A key part of the unit study will be the creation of a timeline on the class bulletin board about Lincoln's life: challenges, defeats and victories. The timeline will start in 1809 and end in 1865.

Strategy

First, I will introduce our topic by showing some pictures of Lincoln and his family. Second, I will ask them questions about what they remember about him from stories that they had read in the lower grades. Questioning techniques will be used to understand the unit. This will explore his biography using narrative and informative texts from an elementary textbook, or biographical books from the school library, or even social science books that are suited to their grade level. Cut out pictures or posters can be used as well as coins that show Lincoln. General references like encyclopedias and other electronic database for students will also be tapped and this will allow a lot of room for learning with greater intensity, depth, and creativity. (Please see lesson plans at the end.)

KEY EVENTS IN LINCOLN'S BIOGRAPHY

Before and After Marriage

Before Marriage, Lowly Origin and Childhood

Abraham Lincoln's biography is a story of a great man still respected by many. His story began in a log cabin in Kentucky when he was born on February 12, 1809. His ancestors had been traced back with tolerable certainty through five generations, to Norfolk County, England (Browne 35).

There were rough circumstances in his life before he became a president. Browne talks about Lincoln's lowly origin, "The early life of Lincoln was doomed to unvarying hardship. He was born and nurtured in penury, and the coarse food and scanty clothing which barely served the necessities of existence were earned, after the age of infancy was past, by the labor of his own brave and willing hands. The story of his privations is full of pathos" (34).

Lincoln was never ashamed of his lowly birth. In allusion to the incidents of his boyhood and youth, he once remarked to a friend, "My early history is perfectly characterized by a single line of Gray's elegy: The short and simple annals of the poor." At another time, he drew up a statement of the leading events in his career at the request of Hon. J. W. Fell of Illinois; he referred to his parents as "born of undistinguishable families" (Browne 35, 36).

His parents were unschooled, and Lincoln had no more than a year of formal education together. His life had numerous heartaches starting from childhood. His mother died when he was nine and an older sister when he was eighteen. These series of events exposed him early in life to tragedy and pain at such a tender age. Fortunately, his stepmother Sarah Johnson later on gave him maternal comfort. She was said to have "exhibited special fondness for little Abraham, whose precocious talents and enduring qualities she was quick to apprehend" (Browne, 62-63).

Passion for Learning Despite Limited Resources

Lincoln's learning was not fully satisfied with the limited knowledge furnished in the schools he attended at long intervals. His stepmother had said that, "he read everything he could lay his

hands on, and when he came across a passage that struck him, he would write it down on boards, if he had no paper, and kept it until he had paper.” Then he copied and committed to memory passages that he liked and kept a scrapbook. Among the few volumes which he found in the cabins of families by which he was surrounded were the Bible, Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Weems’ *Life of Washington*, poems of Robert Burns. He was fortunate also to get the reading of *Æsop’s Fables* and biographies of Benjamin Franklin and Henry Clay (Browne 66-67).

History fascinated Lincoln. Parson Mason’s Weems’s *Life of George Washington* had stirred his imagination. Many years later, on his way to Washington and his first inaugural, he told the New Jersey Senate that Weems’ account of Washington’s heroic struggles at Trenton had made a strong imprint in his mind. Donald also theorizes that Lincoln probably read William Grimshaw’s *History of the United States*. With a sharp denunciation of slavery, Grimshaw exhorted the students, “Let’s not only declare by words, but demonstrate by our actions, that ‘all men are created equal.’” The pioneer schools of Indiana also gave Lincoln a good grounding in elementary mathematics. “He sewed together sheets of paper to form a little notebook wherein he wrote his math problems and answers.” In it, he recorded complicated multiplication and division calculations (e.g. 344,567,384 x 23,423 and 4,375,702 divided by 2,432). He “liked logic and the precision of Math,” and years later, “after serving a term in Congress, he tried to work his way through most of a geometry textbook” (Donald 31).

The reminiscences of his playmate reflect Lincoln’s passion for learning. “He read everything he could find in the region about...He was given much to learning.” He was a “frequent attendant” in court sessions when he is spared from the labors in the farm. He especially liked attending John A. Breckenridge’s court sessions. The latter was the “foremost lawyer” in the region. “Lincoln had to walk 17 miles each way to hear Breckenridge plead law in Booneville.” Lincoln’s listening of Breckenridge’s speeches and court hearings had greatly influenced him to be a lawyer (Browne 56-57).

Strained Relationship with his Distant Father

“His father was said to be a distant man” (Ewers 1). The happy years of Abraham Lincoln’s boyhood were short as his relationship with his father began to deteriorate. His father, Thomas Lincoln, was aging and after his second marriage to Sarah Bush Johnston, he was under “considerable financial pressure” because he had to provide for a household of eight people. For a time he could rely on Dennis Hanks help, his illegitimate nephew, but when Dennis got married, he moved to his own homestead. Hence, as Lincoln became an adolescent, his father came to depend more on him for farming work. “Thomas also sent him to work for other farmers in the area and by law he was entitled to everything that Lincoln earned until he became of age” (Donald 32).

Sarah Bush Lincoln remembered that, “Thomas never made Abraham quit reading to do anything if he could avoid it.” But Dennis Hanks said that “Thomas thought Abraham spent too much time on his books” and sometimes punished him for neglecting his work by reading.” When Abraham was a little boy and attempted to thrust himself into adult conversations, his father struck him. As Abraham became a teenager, he began to distance himself from Thomas. “His sense of alienation may have started from his mother’s death, where he needed more support and compassion, but his stolid father was unable to give it” (Donald, 32, 33).

Donald says that Lincoln’s distancing from his father was something more than a teenage religion. Lincoln kept his quiet judgment of his father to himself, but years later it crept into his scornful statements of his father, “that he grew up without education and settled in a place where there was nothing to excite for ambition or education” (33). In all of Lincoln’s published writings and stories, he had not one favorable word to say about his father. There is something profoundly sad in that fact, both for the son and the father.

Adulthood: Personal Challenges and Depression

Lincoln left no words describing his sense of loss about his mother's death. Many years later he wrote a condolence note to a bereaved child: "in this sad world of ours, sorrow come to all; and to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares ... I have had experienced enough to know what I say" (Donald 27).

According to Donald, deeper consequences of the loss of his mother before he reached age ten can only be a matter of speculation. "It is tempting to trace his subsequent moodiness, his melancholy, and his occasional bouts of depression to this case but the connections are not clear and these patterns of behavior appear in persons who have never experienced such loss" (27). Certainly the death of his mother, along with the deaths of other friends and neighbors, gave a gloomy cast of his childhood memories in his Indiana home. His mother's death is nevertheless the first major traumatic experience of Lincoln that can affect greatly grieve any child at such a tender age.

"Douglas Wilson, co-director of the Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College, convincingly argued in a book called *Honor's voice* that Lincoln fell in love with a woman named Ann Rutledge and they were supposed to be married in 1835" (Ewers 2). However, tragedy struck when Rutledge contracted brain fever and died. After Rutledge's death, Lincoln seems to have "come apart at the seams." He made a remark one day when it was raining that "he could not bare (sic) the idea of its raining on her grave, on witness remembered" (Ewers 3). That was the time the community said that he was crazy. So "wracked with grief" was Lincoln that many worried he would commit suicide. Herndon, his legal partner, inferred from this that Rutledge was Lincoln's "true love"—that he mourned her death for the rest of his life. Most historians today think Lincoln's reaction to her sudden departure had more to do with his own past: "It reminded him, says Connecticut Colleges Burlingame, of the death of his mother" (Ewers 3).

As Lincoln battled his personal demons, he would continue to have "strained relationships" with women. He ultimately courted and may have proposed to as many as four Illinois ladies during his 20s and 30s. "Then, in 1840, his life had a new turn. He met and won the hand of Mary Todd, the sharp, vivacious daughter of a prosperous Kentucky banker." They seemed a good match - both had great ambition and loved poetry and politics. But, only a few weeks later, Lincoln called off his engagement. To one, Lincoln apparently confided that he thought he did not love Mary as he should and that he would do her a great wrong if he married her. "Lincoln's tortured personal life took a turn for the worse when one of his few close friends, Joshua Speed, with whom he'd been living for four years, announced he was moving to Kentucky." As he had after Rutledge died, Lincoln fell into what seems to be a near-suicidal depression. For a week, he allowed only the doctor and Speed to see him. So worried was he about his friend's safety, Speed made sure "to remove razors from his room and took away all knives and other such dangerous things" (Ewers 3).

Most scholars attribute Lincoln's depression in large part to guilt. He could not recover, he wrote over a year later to Speed –when he and Mary still not married –with the never-absent idea that there is one still unhappy whom I have contributed to make so. It took him over a year to "snap out of his gloom." He finally returned to Mary, asked her forgiveness, and then married her in a hastily arranged ceremony. (Ewers 4)

It is clear from the above-mentioned quotes and discussion that Lincoln's life was not smooth. He did not come from a privileged family, had to work hard for everything, and at a tender age had already experienced some great losses and pain through the deaths of his sister and his mother, whom he dearly called his "angel." And, he and his father lacked the bonding that he enjoyed from his mother. It is further apparent that Lincoln's poor origin, very limited schooling and scanty reading sources had never hindered his zeal and dedication to learn, and later become

a lawyer, politician and statesman. Many authors allude to this lack of education and reading sources as the possible factors that drove Lincoln constantly try to improve himself.

Fortunately, despite these difficult challenges, he resolved to overcome his lowly beginnings and scanty learning resources, worked hard to educate himself, teach himself the law, and became one of the respected lawyers in his time. This is no simple feat. The determination to overcome obstacles and not allow poverty to hinder his ambitions was indeed key in helping him to achieve success and get elected in the political arena. He seemed to have mastered the ability to bounce back and learn from his failures. Like all successful people, he was resilient. Though not always victorious in every election, he managed to always rise a little higher in the latter elections. And, the rest is history: he was indeed able to achieve on the highest position in the nation.

After Marriage and into Politics

Lincoln's married life has its own challenges and was considered as tempestuous at times. He married Mary Todd. She shared his interest in politics, but she was known for being sharp-tongued and bad tempered. She had problems from allergies to bad headaches. Her bad temper became notorious to people around them. She lacked a religious faith that might have helped her cope with her problems (Frost 76).

Lincoln had several tragedies in his family regarding the deaths of his sons. One was in 1850 when their three-year-old Eddie died of tuberculosis after 52 days of suffering and this grieved his wife very much. Then in 1862, they lost her 11-year-old son Willie to typhoid fever. This caused Mary to stop functioning and she stayed in bed for weeks (Frost 76).

“Though Mary Lincoln was by no means such a shrew as has been asserted, she was difficult to live with. Lincoln responded to her impulsive and imprudent behavior with tireless patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. Borne down by grief and illness after her husband's death, she became so unbalanced at one time that her son Robert had her committed to an institution” (“Abraham Lincoln,” *American Presidency* 2). It is not an easy experience for any husband with a wife that had difficult behaviors and numerous health symptoms, hence, it can be deduced that for Lincoln, his experience with his wife was not a smooth one. He did not only have challenges with her erratic behaviors, but he had grieved much for the death of his sons.

Professional/Political Challenges and Achievements

Jobs and Professions

The years that followed after Lincoln left his father's house were significant in shaping the course of his future. His strong body enabled him to perform manual labor jobs, but this equipped him only as a farmer, “his father's occupation” which he despised. “In the next ten years, he tried nearly every other kind of work the frontier offered: carpenter, riverboat man, store clerk, soldier, merchant, postmaster, blacksmith, surveyor, lawyer, politician.” Experience eliminated all but the last two of these possibilities, and by the time he was thirty, “the direction of his career was firmly established” (Donald 38).

Lincoln's journey to his political career was a long one and he had always struggled with financial stability moving from one job to another before he became firmly established. He could have chosen to just settle for menial jobs, but through the years, he strove to improve, learn new skills, and teach himself law.

His Pursuit of the Law Profession

“His friend Stuart had encouraged him to study law, and he obtained a license on Sept. 9, 1836.” New Salem was in decline at this time and would soon be a ghost town. On April 15, 1837, Lincoln moved to Springfield and became a law partner of Stuart. He had been nicknamed “Honest Abe” for honest and conscientious efforts to pay off his debts. He was said to be so poor

that he arrived in Springfield on a “borrowed horse with all his personal property in his saddlebags (“Abraham Lincoln,” *American Presidency* 2).

With the courts in Springfield in session only a few weeks during the year, lawyers were obliged to travel the circuit in order to make a living. Every year, in spring and autumn, Lincoln followed the judge from county to county over the 12,000 square miles (31,000 sq km) of the Eighth Circuit. In 1841 he and Stuart dissolved their firm, and Lincoln formed a new partnership with Stephen T. Logan, who taught him the value of careful preparation and clear, succinct reasoning as opposed to mere cleverness and oratory. This partnership was in turn dissolved in 1844, when Lincoln took young William H. Herndon, later to be his biographer, as a partner. (“Abraham Lincoln,” *American Presidency* 2)

McCormick Reaper Case and Negative Perception of Him by Colleagues

After his Senate defeat in 1854, Lincoln went back to his law practice. “Much of the summer and fall of 1855 he spent in preparing to participate in the patent infringement suit that Cyrus Hall McCormick, the inventor of the reaper, had brought against John H. Manny, who was building closely similar machines.” The suit was a very significant one; there was already a huge market of these machines being used in wheat cultivation. “In the hope of breaking McCormick’s patent, a number of other Eastern and Western manufacturers helped finance Manny’s defense, and he employed a team of leading patent lawyers in the country, headed by George Harding of Philadelphia” (Donald 185).

At that time, it seemed likely that Judge Thomas Drummond of the Northern District of Illinois would hear the case, “Harding thought that the team should include a local Illinois lawyer who knew the judge and would have been an asset to the case.” When Harding could not secure the services of the Chicago lawyer Isaac Arnold, he sent Peter Watson, a patent lawyer to Springfield to see if Lincoln might do. When Watson met Lincoln, “a very tall man having neither a coat nor vest ... in a small plainly furnished house,” he was not impressed and thought that this was not the associate that Harding wanted. Watson, not wanting to appear imprudent after consulting with Lincoln, eventually “paid Lincoln a \$400 retainer, arranged for a fee -- reputedly \$1,000 -- and left him with the impression that he was to make an argument at the hearing” (Donald 186).

Lincoln, interested in this important case, went out, physically, to check the factory’s location. Puzzled that Watson and company never sent him copies of the deposition and other legal papers, he tried to get his own copies made from the US District Court in Chicago. Still, after a while, nobody from Harding’s term had made an effort to invite him or inform him when and where the hearing was to be held.

Upon reading through the newspapers that the case would be heard in Cincinnati, Lincoln took the train and tried to reach Harding and attended the hearings. “Harding and his team made it clear to Lincoln that he could not participate in the trial.” Lincoln remained in Cincinnati for the week of the hearing, but the “other lawyers ignored him and neither conferred with him even when they were in the same hotel” (Donald 186).

This particular case was one of the most insulting experiences ever endured. He decided to send back the check sent to him for “saying that he made no argument and, therefore, was not entitled to anything beyond the original retainer.” When Watson returned the check explaining that he earned it, Lincoln cashed it later on.

One of the roots of the “shabby” or demeaning treatment of Lincoln by some people was the seemingly negative perception that they had regarding his looks, slow speech, lowly beginnings, coming from a not so distinguished family. An example of this was how Harding judged and meanly described Lincoln’s capabilities through his appearance. He described Lincoln as a “tall

rawly boned, ungainly back woodsman, with coarse, ill-fitting clothing his trousers hardly reaching his ankles holding in his hands a blue cotton umbrella with a ball on the end of the of the handle.” Edwin McMaster Stanton, the brilliant Pittsburg lawyer had joined the defense and had made also unkind remarks to Harding: “Why did you bring the dead long armed Ape here? He does not know anything and do you good” (Donald 186).

Share of Political Challenges and his Unique Political Journey

The paper’s purpose is not to give a complete detail of Lincoln’s political career, but to discuss highlights of his political career that are pertinent to the objectives of this paper.

“During a thirty-two year career in electoral politics that spanned from 1832 until 1864, Lincoln appeared as a candidate on nine general election ballots. He ran for Illinois state representative six times (1832, 1834, 1836, 1838, 1840 and 1854), for US representative once (1846), the Senate twice in 1854 and 1858 and for president twice (1860, 1864)” (Pinsker 1).

In 1843 and 1844, Lincoln lost the nomination for Congress to other candidates. Although disappointed, he kept striving for his goal. Finally, in 1846, his hard work had paid off. Abraham Lincoln won the Whig nomination for the U. S. House of Representatives. Lincoln started his Congressional career on December 6, 1847. He failed to make the recognition or reputation he had hoped for in Congress. Already in his political career, Lincoln had a strong stand on slavery. His brief term, however, ended on March 4, 1849. Lincoln’s stay in Congress was short and not as fulfilling as he wanted it. He opposed the Mexican War so strongly that he lost much of his popularity with his constituency. At the expiration of his term in 1849 he returned home and sank into the political background for some time.

While he liked being a lawyer, law was not his final dream. He later decided to re-enter politics and was again elected to the Illinois legislature, but resigned for the Senate. He always wanted a higher position. He later on decided to join the Republican Party, when the Whig party was falling apart. In 1854, he ran for Senate, but was defeated and in 1856. He was defeated again for nomination for Vice President (“Lincoln ‘Failure List.’”) It is to be noted that Lincoln had been facing financial challenges even as he had made some gains in the political arena. “The financial pressure gave special urgency to Lincoln’s second race to the legislature in 1834. Apart from all the reasons, he wanted to elected because of the salary” (Donald 52).

In 1858, he was nominated to run against Stephen A. Douglas for the US Senate. He lost against Douglas, but it became advantageous for Lincoln in making him and his political position against slavery --- famous all over the country. More people came to know him better. (A section below talks more in greater details about the Lincoln-Douglas debates.) The culmination of his political race was his being elected to the Presidency in 1860, and moreover, he got reelected as President again in 1864, amidst some political turmoil brought about by the Civil War.

For purposes of making it clearer, I chose to include a useful timeline (see below) showing Lincoln’s failures and successes to help the readers visualize and understand better total picture of the numerous challenges and setbacks he had faced (“Lincoln ‘Failure List.’”) The successes that he achieved are also included in order to have a complete picture of his political failures and defeats.

Lincoln's Failures, Setbacks and Successes (S)

- 1832 Lost job
Defeated for state legislature
(S) Elected company captain of Illinois militia in Black Hawk War
- 1833 Failed in business
(S) Appointed postmaster of New Salem, Illinois
(S) Appointed deputy surveyor of Sangamon County
- 1834 (S) Elected to Illinois state legislature
- 1835 Sweetheart died
- 1836 Had nervous breakdown
(S) Re-elected to Illinois state legislature (running first in his district)
(S) Received license to practice law in Illinois state courts
- 1837 (S) Led Whig delegation in moving Illinois state capital from Vandalia to Springfield;
Became law partner of John T. Stuart
- 1838 Defeated for Speaker Nominated for Illinois House Speaker by Whig caucus
(S) Re-elected to Illinois House (running first in his district)
(S) Served as Whig floor leader
- 1839 Chosen presidential elector by first Whig convention
(S) Admitted to practice law in U.S. Circuit Court
- 1840 Argues first case before Illinois Supreme Court
(S) Re-elected to Illinois state legislature
- 1841 (S) Established new law practice with Stephen T. Logan
- 1842 (S) Admitted to practice law in U.S. District Court
- 1843 Defeated for nomination for Congress
- 1844 (S) Established own law practice with William H. Herndon as junior partner
- 1846 (S) Elected to Congress
- 1848 Lost denomination
(Chose not to run for Congress, abiding by rule of rotation among Whigs.)
- 1849 Rejected for land officer Admitted to practice law in U.S. Supreme Court
Declined appointment as secretary and then as governor of Oregon Territory
- 1854 Defeated for U.S. Senate Elected to Illinois state legislature (but declined seat to run for U.S. Senate)
- 1856 Defeated for nomination for Vice President
- 1858 Again defeated for U.S. Senate
- 1860 (S) Elected President of the United States
- 1864 (S) Re-elected as President of the United States

Highlight on the Lincoln-Douglas Debates

In the 1858 senatorial election, Stephen Douglas, the Democratic Senator from Illinois, was challenged to a series of debates by Lincoln. Douglas accused Lincoln stampeding into Illinois and the rest of the North, where they would take away white jobs and copulate with white women. “Again and again, he accused Lincoln of desiring intermarriage and racial mongrelization” (Oates 71).

In the debates, Lincoln reiterated a lot of fine points. One issue is whether slavery would remain or be abolished in the United States. While Douglas emphatically denied that the Declaration of Independence applied to Negroes, Lincoln’s position held that it did. The Negro was a man; Lincoln’s “ancient faith” taught him that all men are created equal; therefore there could be no “moral right” in one man’s enslaving another. Further, historian Richard N. Current has said that Lincoln left the unstated conclusion of his logic that there was no moral right in one man’s making a political and social inferior of another on grounds of race (Oates 73). “Lincoln

lost his bid for the Senate, but because of the debates, he became the country's leading antislavery politician, gained national recognition, and in 1860, he was elected president" (Newman 46; "Biographies of US Presidents").

Lincoln's political changes were tested during the Civil War and his Emancipation Proclamation. In discussing his biography, I will discuss with my students that these topics are closely intertwined and, hence, are inseparable in not only understanding Lincoln's biography, but the historical context of his presidential term. These milestones helped established that greatness that he still enjoys today. The major point I want to stress to my students is the question why Lincoln is still evaluated by scholars as the best president.

Basic Facts on Civil War

The War's Inception and Background

The Civil War (1861-1865) took more American lives than any other war in our history. It so divided the people of the United States that in some families, brother fought against brother. The Civil War was between the Southern States and their agricultural way of life, who withdrew from the Union in order to defend slavery, and the Northern States, dedicated to the union and a more modern life ending the expansion--and, later, the existence--of slavery. The terrible bloodshed left a heritage of grief and bitterness that declined only slowly and, even today has not fully disappeared. ("A Divided Nation")

When President Lincoln was elected president in November 6, 1860, it upset many Southerners. During his campaign, Lincoln expressed his opposition to slavery. He believed in a gradual emancipation in the South and hoped slavery would die out over time. However, many Southerners did not trust him. South Carolina decided to secede from the Union and six other states followed this secession before Lincoln was sworn in as president; four others joined and the 11 states formed the Confederate States of America. They claimed that states rights allowed them to do so (Martin 16).

The war began when the Confederate soldiers fired on Union troops at Fort Sumter in South Carolina on April 12, 1861. This started a lot of challenges to Lincoln, having just been inaugurated President. (Please see lesson and options on Lincoln's biography at the end of the paper.)

The Origin: Slavery and the Slave Trade

The issue at the heart of the Civil War is closely tied up to the slavery that then existed in the United States. While the problem with slavery was not the sole cause of the Civil War, it was the major source of conflict between the Northern and Southern states.

Slavery in the United States began with a few boatloads of Africans who arrived in the thirteen colonies during the 1600s. However, the slave trade did not become a thriving business until the mid-1700s. By then, large plantations in the South had been developed, and their owners wanted slaves to work in their fields and homes. Slaves entered the colonies through several ports, but Charleston, South Carolina, was the busiest slave port of all (Newman 7-8).

Abolitionists who fought for the abolishment of slavery played a key role in eventually changing the course of history and educating the people of the many evils of slavery. Well-known abolitionists included Frederick Douglas, and William L. Garrison. The women abolitionists included Sojourner Truth, Abby Kelly, Lucy Stone, the Grimke sisters and Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Newman 33-38).

The major legal breakthrough came about in 1865; the 13th Amendment was added to the Constitution reflecting President Lincoln's leadership and it abolished slavery in the United States.

Methodology

Various methods will be used to explore this significant and rich topic. Narration, creative questioning techniques or a movie can be used for this segment. The unit will emphasize how this event had greatly challenged Lincoln with many problems. He needed to win the war and preserve the Union; the country was divided, but few wanted to go to war. We will discuss also what states composed the Northern states and the Southern states and what the Confederacy meant or stood for. Further discussion can be extended to: Lincoln's war measures: from choosing his key military generals or officers and others such as sending food to the troops.

Emancipation Proclamation

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation; ordering that all slaves in rebel territory be freed. This document marked a radical change in American policy. About 4 million African-Americans gained freedom by the terms of the Proclamation, which is regarded as one of the most important documents in the history of the United States. After the Civil War started, the slavery issue was heightened by the escape to Union lines of large numbers of slaves who volunteered to fight for their freedom and that of their fellow slaves. ("Lincoln Frees the Slaves.") In these circumstances, a strict application of established policy would have required return of fugitive slaves to their Confederate masters and would have alienated the staunchest supporters of the Union cause in the North and abroad. Abolitionists had long been urging Lincoln to free all slaves, and public opinion seemed to support this view. He moved slowly and cautiously nonetheless; on March 13, 1862, the federal government forbade all Union army officers to return fugitive slaves, thus annulling in effect the fugitive slave laws. On April 10, on Lincoln's initiative, Congress declared the federal government would compensate slave owners who freed their slaves ("Lincoln Frees the Slaves.")

The initial Northern response to the Emancipation Proclamation was jubilation, especially on the part of antislavery men. Some huge rallies and bonfires were done to celebrate the proclamation. Scores of letters of commendation also pored into Lincoln's office. Predictably, the reaction in the South was negative (Donald 377-378).

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, however, did not free the slaves in the Border States, an omission that was condemned by the abolitionists – people favoring the abolition of slavery"

Abolitionists noted that Lincoln had only made a promise of freedom and that, apart from being conditional, his promise could be withdrawn...Horace Greeley of *New York Tribune* lamented that Lincoln exempted from his decree most of Louisiana and Tennessee, two states which had 'more than one hundred thousand of their citizens in arms to destroy the Union.' Similarly, William Lloyd Garrison regretted that the proclamation left 'slavery as a system...still to exist in all the so-called loyal Slave States.' (Donald 379).

The Proclamation was also considered a "military necessity." "Emancipation stuck at the heart of the South's war effort in two ways, by disrupting its labor force and converting part of that labor force into military asset." More than 100,000 former slaves became Union soldiers (Milkis and Nelson 159).

"In time, Lincoln thought the Emancipation Proclamation as the crowning achievement of his presidency. He told his friend Joshua S. Speed that the measure would ensure his fame by linking his name to something that would resound the interest of his fellowmen" (Donald 377). The proclamation, however, brought with it many challenges that he had to face and deal with properly. In the hundred days after he issued the preliminary proclamation, Lincoln's leadership was severely threatened and tested and there was no clarity that his administration could weather the repeated crises that it faced. Many things were at stake. "The proclamation posed a threat to

break up the coalitions of republicans, War democrats, and other border state leaders that he had carefully built since the outbreak of the Civil War. It might have provoked a mutiny in the army” (Donald 377).

Lincoln’s decision to sign the Proclamation was one of the most difficult and controversial decisions he had to make at that point in time, but this proved to be beneficial in the end in abolishing slavery and in preserving the Union.

Methodology

Various methods will be used to explore this significant and rich topic. Please see the lessons at the end of the paper. A major product here that can be expected of the students is the making of a timeline for the origin and abolishment of slavery. Further, the class will make an e-book (electronic book) using their drawings and a user-friendly computer program to maximize the use of technology. Also, the students can make a comic book or picture book to depict the lives of the slaves back then. Students who are good in writing can be asked further to make a narrative about their acquired learning and reactions or reflections to slavery. (Please see lesson plans.)

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan A: Getting to Know Lincoln

Objective: To know the roots of Lincoln from birth until he became a politician and key facts and challenges of his life

Strategy: Questioning techniques and guided discussions will be used to understand the unit.

Materials

As previously mentioned in the earlier part of this paper, this unit will explore his biography using narrative and informative texts from an elementary textbook, or biographical books from the school library, or even social science books that are suited to their grade level. KWL charts, cut out pictures, or posters can be used and also coins that show Lincoln will be shown. General references like encyclopedias and other electronic databases for students will also be tapped, and this will allow a lot of room for learning with greater intensity, depth and creativity.

Process

I will start the lesson by asking questions as follows: Do you think that Lincoln had only a few problems during his presidency, hence it was easy for him to achieve a lot? For his time, the 19th century, in what ways was Lincoln like the common man? In what ways was he extraordinary? Do you think he had a smooth or rough presidency? What kind of family life do you think did he have? What kind of a student was Lincoln? Do you think he liked school? Other related questions can further be asked that will help awaken their curiosity and thinking skills.

Then, I will proceed to reading a biography book with descriptive colored and black and white pictures. After the major reading activity on Lincoln’s biography, I will go back again to the KWL chart and list down the new acquired learning of the students. Then I will plan for a 3-day lesson to elaborate on his biography. On the first day, I will make the students make their own story of Lincoln with their drawings and cut out pictures on a construction paper or through an improvised small picture book. Then, on the second day, I will show a sample “time line” of President Lincoln and students will create their own version in small groups or pairs (depending on academic readiness of the learners). The students will use cut out drawings or pictures to represent the key events in Lincoln’s Life. On the 3rd day, will make the kids do their matching type or fill in the blanks exercises exercises, or bingo game on Lincoln (which I personally will design).

Expected Product

Time line and a picture storybook

Options for modifications/additions

The lesson can be extended by showing a short film on Lincoln and search in the computer for sites showing about Lincoln's life, family, war photos, etc. Another good enrichment of this topic is a short essay on the student's comparison of their expectations (prior to the lessons) on Lincoln's biography in comparison to the facts they will learn about him in the biography materials discussed in class. For some gifted learners, they can even create an e-book (storybook electronically stored in the computer) with the help of a technologist.

Lesson Plan B: The Journey to Freedom

On Slavery and the Emancipation Proclamation, I would like to let the students see the historical development of how slavery developed and eventually abolished from the 1700's to 1865.

Objective

To get to know the roots of slavery, its effect on the people and the nation as a whole, and why the Proclamation that dealt with equality and freedom is a great milestone for the Black African Americas, as well as in the whole history of the United States

Materials - Books, related websites, picture books

For books, I specifically intend to use these books: Stuart Kallen and *Days of Slavery* and Judy Monroe's *The Underground Railroad*, among other supporting resources (See Teaching Resources Bibliography.)

Option

This unit can use a movie that is related to slavery like a movie about the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman's life, etc.

Strategy or Process

Open discussion, questioning, brainstorming, drawing conclusions and inferences with students. A key point is presenting the students that Lincoln had faced with a great dilemma that no other American president had faced. His options were difficult ones: to proceed with the Proclamation or not and to concede to the secession of the South or not. He could either succeed or fail.

Lincoln was able to prevail, preserve the Union, and help abolish slavery in the United States. But his journey was not an easy one as he was perplexed with adversities—internally and externally. His family had their own shares of sorrows with the early deaths of his sons and the problems that his wife was having as discussed in the biography above. All of these had help shape the person that he was.

Expected Product

Summarizing and sequencing of history of slavery and how President Lincoln's Proclamation helped changed its course. Other products that can be: picture books, poster summaries, comic style, summary, comic style summary, and short essays. Children can choose two types of products depending in their interest and motivation.

Lesson Plan C

The teacher can employ games, an "acting out game," where they'll pick a character that we have read in Lincoln's biography (i.e. his family member, political rival, enemies, supporters, his wife, Frederick Douglas, his generals, etc.). After a student picks a character, he/she will act out in

front of the class and the class will predict who character is; this can be modified using groupings. Please see explanation below.

Objective

To reinforce knowledge and understanding of important facts in Lincoln's life as gleaned from their lesson.

Materials

Students and their creative acting ability

End Product

Scene act or pantomime

For purposes of productivity and collective participation, I intend to require my class to be divided into 4-6 groups. A group will present a scene or dominant character in Lincoln's life, and the rest of the class will guess or explain that particular event or character. The best groups will receive prizes to make it fun. This setup can be modified, though, depending on the teacher's class decision, either to group the students or to take volunteers of perhaps five students. This lesson can also be a good opportunity to document using a digital camera. The scene acts can be documented by the class, and they can post them on their bulletin or make a slideshow of these in the computer.

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This is a brief biography from Lincoln's early life to his Presidency. The article is short, but full of informative facts on Lincoln, along with the other US Presidents.

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"A Divided Nation: Causes of the Civil War." *World Book Online*. 2004.

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This is a general reference that has basic information on the Civil War and can be accessed through the website.

Donald, David Herbert. *Lincoln*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

This is written by two-time Pulitzer Prize winner. This 700+ page book is a very comprehensive book on the subject and is highly recommended Lincoln literature for a detailed and in depth look at Lincoln's biography. The author has a lot of information and reflections that are not usually discussed in much detail other Lincoln literature. (This curriculum unit had used many important quotations from this book.)

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This presents Lincoln's biography as well as the myths about him.

Frost, Bob. "The Sad Journey of Mary Todd Lincoln." *Biography*. 2001. *Academic Search Premiere*.

This tells of Lincoln's wife, Mary and her personality, her struggles in her health, and with the deaths of her sons and eventually President Lincoln's death.

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<<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/education/educate.htm>>.

This is a great educational link that shows resources like students resource and books about Lincoln.

“Lincoln Frees the Slaves.” Minneapolis: *African American Registry*, 2005. *NetTrekker*.

An informative site in the web for teachers or schools that subscribe to the Net Trekker services.

Martin, Michael J. *Emancipation Proclamation: Hope of Freedom for the Slaves*. Minnesota Capstone Press, 2003.

A great reference for teachers and students in understanding the development and rationale of prior to Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. This has an informative discussion also of the Slavery Issue and the Civil War. Good features are the rich photos and the timeline that shows how the Proclamation developed and when slavery was totally abolished.

Milkis, Sidney and Michael Nelson. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development*, Washington: Copress, 2003.

An excellent and comprehensive book that discusses the origins and development of the US presidency and the American Presidents biographies, achievement and failures from the period of 1787 to 2002.

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A good reference about the slave trade, famous runaway rebels, simple timeline on slavery and its abolishment, and a little backgrounder on the Lincoln-Douglas debates. This has great colored photos that will help young readers understand the history of slavery.

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A resource for teachers on Lincoln’s biography that discusses in detail the author’s his political and family life, the myths surrounding Lincoln, and how he was a many-mooded person with flaws and internal and external adversities and yet had managed to prevail the burdens of his embattled presidency.

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An article that discusses Lincoln’s experiences and how these had prepared him for the presidency.

Schlesinger, Arthur Jr. “Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton.” *Political Science Quarterly* 112.2(1997): 179-190.

A great article that shows clearly how President Lincoln was ranked by political scientists as the greatest American president and how Presidents from the past had been ranked and why they are ranked as such. The presidential rankings given are: Great, Near Great, High Average, Average, Below Average and Failure.

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This is for a teacher’s reference or older students who can read a novel. It is a story of two thirteen-year-old girls, one white and one black, run away from a southern farm and make the difficult journey north to freedom, living to recount their story forty-one years later to two similar young girls. (Setting, 1855)

Freedman, Russe. *Abraham Lincoln: A Photobiography*. New York: Clarion Books (a Houghton Mifflin Company), 1987.

This is a good resource for narrative information as well as black and white historical pictures or drawings: from Lincoln’s birthplace, his family, his great debate with Douglas, war time and funeral photos.

Greene Carol. *Abraham Lincoln: President of a Divided Country*. Chicago: Children’s Press, 1989.

Great biography for lower grades (i.e., 3rd graders.) Book is narrative yet simple, short complete in major details. It has a lot of pictures to help young learners grasp the biography better. This will be useful for both regular & in special students.

Kallen, Stuart. *Days of Slavery*. Minnesota: Abdo and Daughters, 1990.

This book talks about the origins of slavery and also about the African American contributions to early America.

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A good resource for discussing the origins and development of the Civil War and the so-called black African American 'rebuffers of hope' (Booker Washington and Frederick Douglas) who tried to build the lives of freed slaves in terms of providing them education and jobs.

Let's Read Biography. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

A simple biography and picture book that is easy to understand by our young students.

Monroe, Judy. *The Underground Railroad*. Minnesota: Bridgestone Books, 2003.

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This is a Lincoln's biography that refers to Lincoln as a dedicated man who survived a difficult childhood and became a country lawyer, and as sixteenth president of the United States, guided the country during the Civil War.

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This is a highly recommended biography book with lots of colorful pictures. It is very informative on the origins of the Civil War and the country's darkest days. Great features of this book includes a map of the divided states: North and South (the Confederates), a timeline of Abraham Lincoln's personal and political life, and a vocabulary list under the glossary that learners need to remember and understand.

Ussel, T. M. *Abraham Lincoln*. Minnesota: Bridgestone Books, 2003.

Presents the life story of the sixteenth president of the United States who is known for ending slavery in the U.S. It has illustrations and pictures. (This book has a Spanish version; ideal for bilingual students.)

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This is a picture book for young learners about Lincoln's biography.