

All Men Are Created Equal

NIE Lesson Plan

Lesson Grade Level: Middle and High School

Lesson Subject Area: U.S. History

Essential Question: How committed was Lincoln that all men are created equal?

Background Information: Abraham Lincoln, the nation's first Republican president, won election in November 1860, and assumed office March 4, 1861. During the "secession winter" of 1860-61, seven states from the deep South seceded from the Union. These states, dependent on cotton cultivation and slave labor, seceded because the Republican platform called for the restriction of slavery from the western territories. Lincoln was an easy target for Southern anger, for he had frequently referred to the Declaration of Independence and often paraphrased "all men are created equal," in his strenuous denunciations of slavery.

In a day and age before television or radio, most Americans had neither seen nor heard Lincoln, so he made an extended railroad trip through the north on his way to Washington, D.C. for the inauguration. Nine days before his inauguration, Lincoln extemporaneously presented the featured speech of this lesson outside Independence Hall where he referred to sentiments embodied in that Declaration of Independence. "It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in that Declaration of Independence."

It is important for students to realize that in his 1861 inaugural address Lincoln pledged to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act and disavowed any intent to liberate slaves in the southern states. Lincoln did not emancipate slaves until January 1, 1863, and even then he did not free slaves in the border states or in certain areas of the Confederacy under Union control.

Acquisition Lesson: Pose the following question to students: What does the Declaration of Independence mean by "all men are created equal?" Each student will write a one-sentence answer. Sample student responses and write representative examples on the whiteboard.

Main Lesson: Document Analysis

Read Lincoln's speech in Independence Hall and discuss what Lincoln meant by "in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance."

- Why did he make this statement in this speech?
- Why was this a significant statement at Independence Hall?
- How did Lincoln's understanding of "all men are created equal" relate to his feelings about slavery in 1861?
- Did his words reflect his actions? Why or why not?
- Why did Lincoln not free the slaves in his inaugural address?
- How committed was Lincoln that "all men are created equal?" Cite and analyze language from this speech.

Read today's newspaper. Find an article in today's newspaper that shows a person or group whose "shoulders are weighted down" in some way in our locality, state, nation, or world. Explain the nature of these "weights." Analyze and discuss how these "weights" might best be removed.

Enrichment Activity: Read coverage of this speech in archives of the *New York Tribune* and you will find slight variations of Lincoln's wording. Identify the differences. Discuss why the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *New York Tribune* ran slightly different versions of the speech. Would that sort of thing happen to a speech today? Why or why not?

Lincoln's Speech in Independence Hall

February 22, 1861

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Mr. Cuyler:—I am filled with deep emotion at finding myself standing here in the place where were collected together the wisdom, the patriotism, the devotion to principle, from which sprang the institutions under which we live. You have kindly suggested to me that in my hands is the task of restoring peace to our distracted country. I can say in return, sir, that all the political sentiments I entertain have been drawn, so far as I have been able to draw them, from the sentiments which originated, and were given to the world from this hall in which we stand. I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence. (*Great cheering.*) I have often pondered over the dangers which were incurred by the men who assembled here and adopted that Declaration of Independence—I have pondered over the toils that were endured by the officers and soldiers of the army, who achieved that Independence. (*Applause.*) I have often inquired of myself, what great principle or idea it was that kept this Confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land; but something in that Declaration giving liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time. (*Great applause.*) It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance. (*Cheers.*) This is the sentiment embodied in that Declaration of Independence.

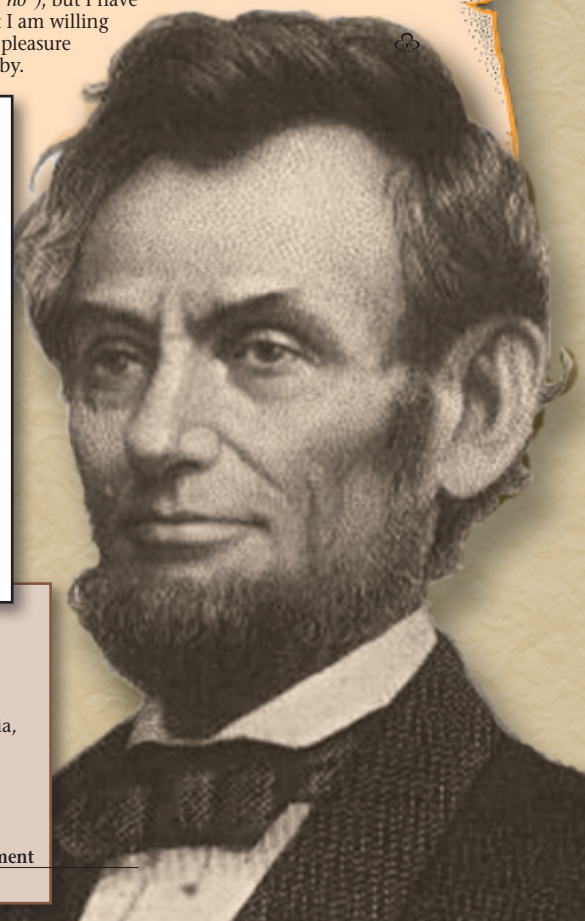
Now, my friends, can this country be saved upon that basis? If it can, I will consider myself one of the happiest men in the world if I can help to save it. If it can't be saved upon that principle, it will be truly awful. But, if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle—I was about to say I would rather be assassinated on this spot than to surrender it. (*Applause.*)

Now, in my view of the present aspect of affairs, there is no need of bloodshed and war. There is no necessity for it. I am not in favor of such a course, and I may say in advance, there will be no blood shed unless it be forced upon the Government. The Government will not use force unless force is used against it. (*Prolonged applause and cries of "That's the proper sentiment."*)

My friends, this is a wholly unprepared speech. I did not expect to be called upon to say a word when I came here—I supposed I was merely to do something towards raising a flag. I may, therefore, have said something indiscreet, (*cries of "no, no"*), but I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and, in the pleasure of Almighty God, die by.



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Resources:

The Civil War Institute – www.gettysburg.edu/civilwar/institute/
The Olive Civil War Archive (February 22, 1861)
<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=phillyinq>

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PA Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening

1.2.11B, 1.6.11B, 1.6.11D, 1.6.11F

PA Academic Standards for History

8.1.12B, 8.1.12C, 8.2.9B, 8.3.9B

PA Academic Standards for Civics and Government

5.2.12D, 5.2.12E, 5.2.12.M