



# **The Life of Abraham Lincoln**

**Based on excerpts from the book by  
Henry Ketcham**

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**Teacher's Guide**

## **About the Story:**

This biography of one of America's greatest leaders was published in 1901. It offers young readers an intimate portrait of Lincoln with some anecdotes they probably have not previously read. Because it was published in 1901, the author was able to research Lincoln by reading many firsthand accounts of people who knew him well, especially his secretaries Nicolay and Hay. In addition, the author's brothers both fought during the Civil War. In fact, it is to them that the original book was dedicated. Although these are excerpts from the book, many have been edited and rewritten to make them easier for young readers to understand.

That dedication reads:

To my two older brothers, John Lewis Ketcham, and William Alexander Ketcham, who under Abraham Lincoln as Commander-In-Chief loyally served their country in the war for the perpetuation of the Union and the destruction of slavery, this book is affectionately dedicated.

The language of the book and these excerpts are authentic to the year it was published--1901--so they present a unique opportunity to read literature as it was written more than 100 years ago.

## **About This Teacher's Guide:**

For each chapter of this serial, we have provided a summary, a variety of vocabulary development exercises, comprehension questions, writing activities, and learning standards. Those activities are written directly to students and may be used just as they are. In addition, many of the chapter guides also include a character education lesson based on an aspect of Lincoln's life and/or a lesson about Black History, based on Lincoln's times. Those activities are directed to the teacher.

## **Chapter One: The Wild West**

### **Summary**

This chapter looks at Lincoln's boyhood years. He grew up during the early 1800s in a remote part of the country.

### **Vocabulary Development**

For each word in this list, have students identify the root words, prefixes and suffixes and find the definition.

enormous - greatly exceeding the common size, huge; immense

extraordinary - beyond what is usual, ordinary, regular, or established

impressions - an effect, feeling, or image retained as a consequence of experience

necessities - something necessary or indispensable

misshapen - badly shaped; deformed

revival - restoration to life, consciousness, vigor, strength

circumstances - a condition, detail, part, or attribute, with respect to time, place, manner

### **Comprehension Check**

1. What animals were found in the woods? Wild birds and wild beasts including bears, deer, wildcats, raccoons, wild turkeys, wild pigeons, wild ducks and similar creatures were found in the woods.
2. How did people get from place to place? They used horses, oxen and carts to get from place to place.
3. How could one tell that Lincoln had tanned, bluish skin? One could see that because there was usually a space of several inches between the breeches and the shoes.

### **In the News**

In 1825, when Lincoln was young, many items that we consider necessities of life had not yet been invented. What were some of the necessities that you think Lincoln lacked? Look in today's newspaper and find 5 items that you consider to be necessities. Find 5 items that are luxuries. Explain your choices.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

Compare and contrast how Lincoln's food, clothing and shelter as described in this chapter were different from the food, clothing and shelter of today.

### **Learn from Lincoln's Character**

Have students review carefully the description of Lincoln's early life circumstances, as presented in this chapter. You may want to have those paragraphs read aloud as others read along silently so that everyone concentrates on those passages.

Lincoln was very poor. He lived without many comforts or amenities. He spent a significant amount of time in the woods. His life was filled with difficult circumstances and a great deal of work. How do your students think this type of early life shaped his character? How might he have been different if he grew up wealthy with an "easier" life?

Assign students to write about how they think their life and the way they live it, is shaping their character.

Learning Standard: understanding the difference between necessities and luxuries

## **Chapter Two: The Early Years**

### **Summary**

Lincoln received little schooling but he loved to read and write. His mother, who also taught and greatly influenced Lincoln, died when he was only nine.

### **Vocabulary Development**

Use definitions of words to create word riddles. Give students clues about a vocabulary word's meaning that has been introduced to them in this chapter. Encourage students to use details from the text to guess the vocabulary word.

statesman - a person who is experienced in the art of government affairs

modest - having or showing a moderate or humble estimate of one's merits, importance

cipherin' - to solve problems in arithmetic (ciphering)

influence - the action or process of producing effects on the actions, behavior, opinions

unique - not typical; unusual

idolized - to regard with blind adoration, devotion

preserved - to keep alive or in existence; make lasting

mysterious - implying or suggesting a mystery: puzzling

predicted - to tell about, or make known in advance

noble - of an admirably high quality; excellent

### **Comprehension Check**

1. What great men were born in 1809? Charles Darwin, scientist, Alfred Tennyson, poet, William E. Gladstone, statesman, and Abraham Lincoln, liberator. were born in 1809.
2. What books were in Lincoln's library? Lincoln's library was small but it consisted of at least these three volumes: The Bible, Aesop's Fables and Pilgrim's Progress.
3. What happened to Lincoln's mother? Mrs. Lincoln came down with the "milk-sick" and died.

### **In the News**

There are some great men who were born in the same year as Lincoln. Use your newspaper to find three great people of today. Write 3 important facts about each one of the people you choose. What makes them "great?"

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

Lincoln wrote this poem to describe himself when he was a boy:

*Abraham Lincoln*

*His hand and pen*

*He will be good but  
God knows When.*

Write a similar short poem describing someone in the news.

### **Learn from Lincoln's Character**

Lincoln borrowed a book from a neighbor. The book got wet and was damaged. Lincoln cheerfully worked 3 days to pay for the damage. But then he determined to find out if his work paid just for the damage or for the book itself. What does that tell you about Lincoln's character and values? Specifically, what does it say about the things that Lincoln considered important?

Learning Standards: locating information, making judgments about personal characteristics

### **Chapter Three: In Indiana**

#### **Summary**

Lincoln's father remarried and his new wife improved the family situation. As a teenager, Lincoln showed his great physical strength and strong speaking skills.

#### **Vocabulary Development**

Have students sort the vocabulary words based on similarities and/or differences. Encourage students to describe how they grouped the words. Examine words for similarities using the question: What do these words have in common?

Have the students write their vocabulary word in a circle in the center of their paper. They can connect words or pictures related to their word with radiating lines from the center.

proposed - to offer or suggest

indescribable - impossible to describe

generous - liberal in giving or sharing; unselfish

idleness - not working or active

strictness - acting in close conformity to principles; stern

astonishing - surprising; amazing

admiration - an object of wonder, pleasure, or approval

revelation - the act of revealing or disclosing; something not before realized

enthusiastic - having great excitement and interest

eloquent - expressing yourself readily, clearly, effectively

epidemic - a rapid spread of a disease

threshold - beginning

### **Comprehension Check**

1. How old were the Lincoln children when their mother died? Sarah was eleven years old, Abe was ten years old, and the foster brother, Dennis (Friend) Hanks, a year or two younger when their mother died.
2. Who gave Lincoln his first lesson in speechmaking? He got his first lesson from one of the wealthy Breckenridges of Kentucky who was an attorney for the defense.
3. Why did Thomas Lincoln move to Illinois? He left because the epidemic “milk sick” reappeared in Indiana.

### **In the News**

Lincoln grew to six feet four inches. It was said that he could lift a hencoop weighing six hundred pounds. What other instances of measurement can you find in the news? Make a list of all the different measurements. Write an explanation of how each is used.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

Sally Bush writes several observations describing Abe Lincoln. Find someone in the newspaper or someone whom you know and write 5 observations about him or her.

### **Learn from Lincoln’s Character**

Direct students’ attention to the paragraph about Sally and the ways in which she changed Lincoln’s home life when he was a child. In particular, have them read this sentence, “She did not humor them to the point of idleness but wisely ruled with strictness.” Ask students to read that sentence and to think about the influence that parents have on their children. What do your students think it means to “wisely rule with strictness?” Why is it necessary for parents to be strict, sometimes? Facilitate an understanding among your students about the importance of raising children with rules, limits and boundaries. Have them write notes about this issue to their parents or guardians, showing their respect for rules.

Finally, have students review the last paragraph of this chapter where Lincoln’s character is detailed. Have them discuss each of his attributes and what each means.

Learning Standards: understanding measurement, writing explanations

## **Chapter Four: Second Journey to New Orleans**

### **Summary**

Lincoln was hired to take some merchandise down the Mississippi River. During that trip, he saw the horrors of slavery. After that trip, Lincoln's employer offered him a clerkship position. He proved to be extremely honest.

### **Vocabulary Development**

The students can create flash cards for their vocabulary words. They can write the word on one side of the card and definition or illustration on the other.

accomplished - completed; done; effected

cargo - freight

merchandise - the manufactured goods bought and sold

constructed - to form by assembling or combining parts; build

obstruction - something that blocks

ingenuity - cleverness or skillfulness

devising - to contrive, plan

determination - firmness of purpose; a fixed intention or resolution

averted - to ward off; prevent

tolerate - to put up with; endure

auctioning - a public sale in which property is sold to the highest bidder

righteous - acting in an upright, moral way

indignation - strong displeasure at something considered unjust

### **Comprehension Check**

1. Who hired Lincoln to take merchandise down the Mississippi? Denton Offutt hired Lincoln.
2. What did Lincoln see on the trip that horrified him? He saw some of the horrors of slavery.
3. How did Lincoln get the nickname "honest Abe"? He discovered that he had charged a customer six and a quarter cents too much, closed up the store at once, walked to the home of the customer, and returned the money.

### **In the News**

The winter in Illinois 1830-31 was harsh with lots of snow. Find the weather page in your newspaper and write a detailed weather report for your local area based on the information you find.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

Abe, John Hanks, and John Johnston took a cargo of merchandise down the Mississippi River. Imagine a conversation between the three. Write the dialogue and include the punctuation.

### **Black History Lesson**

Direct the students to reread the paragraphs pertaining to what Lincoln saw during his trip to New Orleans, beginning with the paragraph starting, "The other event..." and ending

with the one that ends, “He hit it hard.” Have them write three facts detailing what Lincoln learned about slavery at that time.

Students can read a detailed description of a slave auction online at:  
[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/black\\_voices/voices\\_display.cfm?id=48](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/black_voices/voices_display.cfm?id=48)  
And at:  
<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/slaveauction.htm>

### **Learn From Lincoln’s Character**

What can your students conclude about Lincoln’s character based on his reaction to slavery? Do your students think that it’s possible Lincoln became a politician because he wanted to end slavery?

Learning Standards: writing weather reports, understanding punctuation

## **Chapter Five: Entering Politics**

### **Summary**

Lincoln met his first love and she unexpectedly died, leaving him heartbroken. He decided to run for the Illinois state legislature but lost the election. He ran for the legislature again where he served for the next eight years.

### **Vocabulary Development**

Create a word grid puzzle using seven words from your vocabulary list.

untimely - happening too soon or too early

earnestness - serious in intention

proceeded - to go forward

opponent - a person who is on an opposing side in a contest

remounted - to mount or get on again

degree - extent, measure, scope

recommend - to make desirable or attractive

swath - the piece or strip so cut

unanimous - of one mind; in complete agreement

legislature - the branch of government having the power to make laws

continuously - uninterrupted in time

flattering - to compliment excessively and often insincerely

### **Comprehension Check**

1. What was the best part of Lincoln’s job as postmaster? The best part of this job was the fact that it gave Lincoln the means of reading the newspapers.

2. What did Lincoln do when he was making a speech and his friend got into a fight? Lincoln walked down from the platform, grabbed his friend's opponent and threw him ten or twelve feet away on the ground.

3. Why did Lincoln only have ten days to campaign? Lincoln only had ten days to campaign because he had been serving in the army during much of the election season.

### **In the News**

Campaigning for Lincoln might include wrestling with the local champ. What lengths do candidates of today go through to win an election? The students can design a Venn diagram comparing campaigning today and in Lincoln's time. During one of his campaigns, Lincoln had only ten days to convince voters to vote for him. The presidential election of 2008 was a significantly longer campaign than ten days. What do your students remember the most about it?

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

While Lincoln served as postmaster at New Salem when his first love, Ann Rutledge, died. Write a letter to Lincoln to help him cope with his grief. What do you think a person learns from going through a very sad experience like that one?

### **Learn From Lincoln's Character**

This chapter includes a significant number of words that describe Lincoln's character. Have students identify each one and list them on the board. One of this chapter's sentences states, "...given all the things he was good at, he would sooner or later enter politics." Students should write essays explaining how Lincoln's character attributes made him a good president. Then have them look at the current president's character attributes.

Learning Standards: comparing, contrasting, writing creatively

## **Chapter 6: Entering the Law**

### **Summary**

Lincoln decided to study law while he was a storekeeper, postmaster, and surveyor. He established several successful law partnerships.

### **Vocabulary Development**

Have the students identify a synonym and an antonym for each vocabulary word. Then have them write a definition and an illustration.

surveyor - a person whose occupation is measuring land

interfered - to come into opposition, as one thing with another and hampering action

trustworthy - deserving of trust or confidence; dependable; reliable

assassination - to kill, especially a politically prominent person

embracing - to include or contain

contracting - an agreement between two or more parties

### **Comprehension Check**

1. What was the most important thing that happened to Lincoln in 1834? Lincoln became friends again with a man he had met while serving in the army, Major John T. Stuart who advised him to study the law.
2. Why did Lincoln often practice law outside? He had no office so he'd work outside using a slab of wood for a desk.
3. What did Joshua Speed do to make Lincoln happy? Speed offered to share a room with him so that Lincoln could practice law in Springfield and not have to develop a debt.

### **In the News**

Lincoln chose several different men with whom to enter into a partnership while practicing law. What characteristics would you look for in a business partner? Make a list of 5 questions you would ask someone before entering into a partnership. Which person in today's news would you choose as a partner? Why?

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

This story was written more than 100 years ago. How is the story's writing style different from a story that was written recently? Look through your newspaper for different writing styles. Compare the style of a hard news story to a columnist's work to an editorial and a feature story. Which writing style is most like yours?

### **Learn From Lincoln's Character**

In this chapter we learn that Lincoln was greatly saddened by the thought of a debt he might be unable to repay. In the Shakespeare play, Hamlet, we find the idiom, "Neither a borrower or a lender be; For loan oft loses both itself and friend." Assign students to write a reaction to that quote as they think Lincoln would have reacted. Do your students borrow items from their friends? Why or why not? Have them draw up a list of "Rules for Borrowers."

Learning Standards: portraying positive characteristics, evaluating writing styles

## **Chapter Seven: On The Circuit**

### **Summary**

Lincoln gains a reputation for being a great storyteller and a fair and just lawyer. His income was not great. Lincoln married Mary Todd and they had four children - all boys.

### **Vocabulary Development**

Have the students try to figure out the meaning of the words in their vocabulary list by reading each word in context. They can write a sentence for each word or a vocabulary word story using as many of their words as they can.

qualities - a characteristic

appropriateness - suitable or fitting for a particular purpose

annoyance - a person or thing that annoys; nuisance

contempt - willful disobedience to or open disrespect for the rules of a court

adjournment - to suspend until a later stated time

complicated - difficult to analyze, understand, explain; involved

contested - to struggle or compete

accumulated - to gather or collect

conscience - the inner sense of what is right or wrong in one's conduct or motives

technicality - a detail that is considered insignificant

genealogy - a record or account of the ancestry and descent of a person, family, group

hospitable - treating guests or strangers warmly and generously

centuries - a period of 100 years

exceptions - one that does not conform to a rule or generalization

sentiment - a mental feeling; emotion

### **Comprehension Check**

1. Why did Lincoln have a small income? Lincoln had a small income because he never could bring himself to charge large fees.
2. Where was Mary Todd from? She was from a wealthy family from Kentucky.
3. In the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, what remarks of Thomas Jefferson's were taken out? Remarks about the King's part in the slave traffic were taken out.

### **In the News**

When Lincoln came into court it was usually with a new story. As he would tell it in low tones the lawyers would crowd about him to the neglect of everything else, and to the great annoyance of the judge. Choose an interesting story from the newspaper and write a "retelling" of it that is entertaining.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

Lincoln reduced his fee to a client because the case required less time than he thought it would take. What do you think about Lincoln's reasoning? What would you do if you were in the same position?

## **Black History Lesson**

The last two paragraphs in this chapter provide a background about slavery. Have students read it carefully and then write an essay comparing Lincoln with Thomas Jefferson, based on their views on slavery. Thomas Jefferson owned slaves; Lincoln did not. Do your students think Lincoln and Jefferson had much in common?

Learning Standards: retelling, evaluating, reasoning

## **Chapter Eight: The Birth of the Republican Party**

### **Summary**

Lincoln and other establish a new anti-slavery party - the Republican party. He ran for the U.S. Senate against the Stephen Douglas. Lincoln challenges Douglas to a series of debates that make him nationally known but Lincoln loses the election.

### **Vocabulary Development**

Give the students definitions of the words and have them match the word to the definition.

marvelous - superb; excellent; great

devotion - earnest attachment to a cause, person

enthusiasm - an activity in which such interest is shown

overmastering - to overpower by superior force; overcome

editorials - An article in a newspaper expressing the opinion of its editors or publishers

abolitionists - people who favor abolishing slavery

discordant - not in agreement or harmony

hostile - opposed in feeling, action

inaugurate - to induct into office with formal ceremonies; install

senatorial - of, concerning a senator or senate.

expire - to come to an end

### **Comprehension Check**

1. Why was it hard for Lincoln to leave the Whig party? It was hard for Lincoln to leave the Whig party because his idol, Henry Clay was a member of the Whigs.
2. What role did newspapers play in the anti-slavery movement? A number of papers printed editorials calling for a convention.
3. Why was Stephen Douglas such a difficult opponent? In 1858, Douglas was perhaps the most well known man in the United States and he was the leader of the Democratic party.

Lincoln challenged Senator Douglas to a series of debates when they were competing for the senate seat. Debate an issue in the news and make a list of 3 reasons why you favor the issue and 3 reasons why you oppose it.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

Look through this chapter and identify the main problem, the solution, the people involved and where the situation took place. Then go through the newspaper and select an article to read. Identify the main problem, the solution, the people involved and where the situation took place.

### **Learn from Lincoln's Character**

Lincoln idolized and looked up to Henry Clay. But, Lincoln's hatred for slavery was even stronger than his admiration for Clay. So, when it came time for Lincoln to take a stand and either be part of Clay's party or start a political party of his own which would stand against slavery, Lincoln chose to start one of his own. He obviously felt very strongly about slavery. How do your students think Lincoln learned to feel so strongly about slavery? This chapter tells us that, in fact, slavery was one of the reasons Lincoln's dad chose to leave Kentucky—because it was a slave state. That tells readers that Lincoln's father was also against slavery. Do your students believe that Lincoln's father had a strong influence on him? At this point, they've read quite a bit about Lincoln's childhood. Do they think his father was a great influence on him?

Ask students to write about the values they believe they learned from their own families.

Learning Standards: justifying a personal perspective, identifying a problem

## **Chapter Nine: The Nomination of 1860**

### **Summary**

Lincoln was unexpectedly nominated to be the Republican candidate for president at an exciting convention. He won the presidential election against three opponents.

### **Vocabulary Development**

Working in pairs the student can ask yes or no questions to each other to guess the meaning of the selected vocabulary word.

nominated - to propose someone for appointment or election to an office

temporary -lasting for a limited time

candor - being frank, open, and sincere

prominent - leading, important, or well-known

restored - to bring back into existence or use

humble - low in rank, importance, status, quality

spontaneous - happening without apparent external cause

secured - to get hold or possession of

phenomenal - highly extraordinary; exceptional

exaggeration - the act of overstating

timidly - lacking in self-assurance, courage; shy

electoral - relating to or composed of electors; "electoral college"

procession - a group of persons moving along in an orderly manner

### **Comprehension Check**

1. How do we know that Lincoln was not interested in the presidency in 1858? We know that Lincoln was not interested in the presidency in 1858 because he said, "I must in all candor say that I do not think myself fit for the presidency."
2. What was Lincoln's local newspaper? The Sangamon Journal was Lincoln's local newspaper.
3. Who ran against Lincoln for president? Douglas, Breckinridge and Bell ran for president against Lincoln.

### **In the News**

Lincoln's campaign slogan for the presidential election was ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE RAIL CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT IN 1860.

Write a slogan to support your favorite personality or cause from the newspaper.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

According to one story, Lincoln made eight little girls happy when he wrote a sentence and his name on a sheet of paper for each one. Look through your newspaper to find an act of kindness that made someone happy. Write about a time when you did something nice for someone.

### **Black History Lesson**

Here are three events that happened before Lincoln was elected president on November 6, 1860.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852. It exposed the horrors of slavery.

One of America's earliest colleges for black people, Lincoln University, was chartered in 1854.

In 1857, the Supreme Court decided that an African American couldn't be a U.S. citizen and therefore had no citizenship rights.

Direct students to choose one of these events and research it online. They should write a report telling what they learned of the event and how it may have led to Lincoln's election.

Learning Standards: communicating effectively to a variety of audiences

## **Chapter Ten: Lincoln His Own President**

### **Summary**

As President, Lincoln's main job was to keep the Union from splitting up over the issue of slavery. A long, bloody civil war followed during which Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The Union won the war but Lincoln was assassinated.

### **Vocabulary Development**

Assign each student a vocabulary word and have them draw a picture which represents the definition of the word. They can cut the picture into 5 pieces to make a puzzle. They can reveal one piece of the puzzle so the class can try to guess the word. If the class cannot guess the word, another piece of the puzzle is shown.

seceded - to withdraw formally from a political union

withdrawn - removed from contact

aggressor - a person, group, or nation that attacks first

assail - to attack vigorously or violently

patriotism - devoted love, support, and defense of one's country

evacuation - the removal of persons from an endangered area

enlistments - the period of time for which one is committed to military service

literally - actually; without exaggeration

emancipation - freeing someone from the control of another

proclamation - a formal public statement

legacy - anything handed down from the past

### **Comprehension Check**

1. How did the Civil War begin? The Civil War began when the South fired on Fort Sumter, SC, a Union military base.
2. Why did Lincoln call up only 75,000 volunteers to serve in the Union Army? The reason why the number was so small was that this was the largest number that could be clothed and armed quickly.
3. What did the 13th Amendment to the Constitution do? The 13th Amendment abolished slavery.

### **In the News**

Using the information in this story, create a timeline of events in Lincoln's life. Then find a story in your newspaper, highlight the main events and create a timeline for that story.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum**

What does it mean when the author writes that Abraham Lincoln's legacy lives on? What do you think is Lincoln's legacy? What kind of president and man was Lincoln? What politician today is most like Lincoln? How?

Learning Standards: writing timelines, writing for fluency