

Mr. Lincoln's Office

Once Upon a Blue Ridge

www.onceuponablueridge.com

A Visit with the President

Adaptation and Performance by Peter Holland

STUDY GUIDE



“That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

The Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln

MR. LINCOLN'S OFFICE

Mr. Lincoln's Office is a play based on the writings of Abraham Lincoln. Plays are different from movies or television shows because the story is happening live on stage as you are viewing it. As a member of the audience during the performance of a play, you are part of the total experience. You are expected to exercise good behavior, to be quiet, and to listen carefully to the story.

Usually, plays have fewer special effects, scenery, and big action scenes than movies and television shows. Plays rely on the language of the writer, the skills of the actors, and the imagination of the audience to make the story come alive.

In this play, you will be asked to forget about the modern world and go back in time to 1863. The play takes place in Mr. Lincoln's Office in the White House.



THE PLAY BEGINS- HOW DO I REACT?

As audience members you know that the man on stage with the old fashioned black suit, black beard, and stove-pipe hat is not Abraham Lincoln. He is an actor pretending to be Abraham Lincoln. It is a natural reaction to be **skeptical** when we are asked to pretend that something is true when we know it to be false. In other words, we know it's not Abraham Lincoln. He's been dead a long time. It's just an actor. So what?

If you can let go of your **skepticism** during the presentation, you may enjoy yourself and also learn a great deal about the ideas and words that were actually spoken by Mr. Lincoln. We hope that the actor portraying Mr. Lincoln will help you to understand the meaning of many of Mr. Lincoln's famous speeches against slavery, about the importance of preserving the union of the states, and about the civil rights of all Americans- issues that are as important now in the 21st Century as they were when Mr. Lincoln first delivered them in the 19th Century. After the play you will have the opportunity to ask Mr. Lincoln questions. So listen carefully!



LINCOLN'S HAT

Mr. Lincoln was a traveling lawyer for many years, and developed the habit of carrying court papers in the band of his hat. He called his hat his office. In the play the Lincoln actor will pull scraps of paper from his hat that may have jokes, dreams, letters, or speeches written on them. Mr. Lincoln's hat is a **symbol** for his ideas.



LINCOLN'S BOYHOOD AND EDUCATION

Lincoln was born in Kentucky to humble parents. His mother died when he was ten. His father couldn't read or write. When Lincoln was eight years old his family moved to the Indiana frontier. One day when his father was gone, young Abe shot a turkey and killed it. He was so tender hearted that he never shot another animal.

Lincoln was educated on the frontier. He tells a funny story about young Daniel Webster getting in trouble with the teacher of a one room school house like the ones he attended. He explains that all he learned in school was reading, writing, and "ciphering to the rule of three" (a kind of basic algebra where if you knew three parts of a problem, you could "cipher" the fourth part).

Although Abraham Lincoln probably did not attend school for more than a year all total, he took great pains to educate himself and was a life-long learner. As a boy, he was known to walk over ten miles to borrow a book he hadn't read. As a young man he taught himself how to accurately survey large tracts of land, and made his living for a time as a surveyor. Later, after being elected to the Illinois state legislature, he taught himself law and became a successful lawyer. It was perhaps this combination of a humble background, a powerful hunger for knowledge, and a deep sense of fairness that defined best the character of Abraham Lincoln.



LINCOLN'S SPEECHES

President Lincoln in the play will deliver selected parts of his most famous speeches and arguments against slavery. It was through the publication of these speeches that Mr. Lincoln became known to millions of Americans and was eventually nominated to be President.

During the delivery of the anti-slavery speeches the Lincoln actor will use a big voice and large gestures to simulate Mr. Lincoln giving speeches to thousands of people without the aid of microphones to amplify his voice or video cameras to show his every facial expression on large television screens. You may be asked to cheer or jeer during the speeches to create the atmosphere of the crowds who first heard these speeches. Many times Mr. Lincoln delivered his speeches to crowds who did not agree with him.

A LIST OF SPEECHES

These are a few of the speeches that **Mr. Lincoln's Office** covers.

- The Gettysburg Address
- The First Inaugural Address
- House Divided Speech
- Cooper Union Address

UNDERSTANDING SLAVERY IN AMERICA

As to the importance of understanding the institution of slavery in America, nothing about the history of the United States can really be understood without first studying the history of slavery in America.

It is a sad fact that our country's first **Constitution** allowed slavery to continue in the United States- contrary to the idea that "all men are created equal" that was written in the **Declaration of Independence**. Many of the founders of our country considered slavery to be a necessary evil and that it would eventually die out. But with the invention of the **cotton gin** in 1792, the mass production of cotton in the South was made possible and highly profitable. Southern plantation owners and merchants in the North and South made millions of dollars by selling the slave picked cotton to the looms of Europe.

In the early 1800's there were a series of **Compromises** enacted by the US **Congress** to restrict the spread of slavery into the new western territories. The most famous of these was the **Missouri Compromise** proposed by Henry Clay. After the **Kansas-Nebraska Act** and the **Dred Scott Decision** by the **Supreme Court** in the early 1850's, previous compromises that had restricted the spread of slavery into the western territories were overturned. With the threat of slavery becoming legal in the new territories, and possibly the Free states as well, Abraham Lincoln was "roused as he had never been before". This motivated him to run for the US **Senate** against Judge Stephen Douglas and to make a series of speeches against the spread of slavery and the institution of slavery itself.

HOW COULD PEOPLE BELIEVE IN SLAVERY?

People- then and now- usually believe what they are told. If you were told from a very young age that a certain type of person was not your equal, would you believe it to be true?

It is very difficult for us to understand how differently people could be treated back in the 1800's just because of the color of their skin. But many of your grandparents can share their memories with you of the **Civil Rights Movement** of the 1960's- which was less than fifty years ago! As Americans, you are never too young to learn that equal rights for all was won by the blood and sacrifice of many people, black and white, male and female. As Americans, it is our duty and responsibility to always treat everyone, regardless of differences, equally and fairly, as we would be treated ourselves.

UNDERSTANDING SLAVERY

To better understand slavery in America it is suggested that you read some true accounts of slaves who escaped to freedom and helped create the **abolitionist movement** in the free northern states. While Abraham Lincoln is often given credit for freeing the slaves, it was the brave African American people like **Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass**, and thousands of others, who freed themselves, swayed public opinion against slavery, and led their people to freedom. Mr. Lincoln may have issued the **Emancipation Proclamation** that legally freed the slaves in the southern states, but it was the positive action of the African American people that led them to free themselves.

THE CIVIL WAR AND THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

Upon the election of Mr. Lincoln on November 6, 1860, the southern states **seceded** from the Union and the Civil War began. Mr. Lincoln vowed to keep the country together at all costs. At the beginning of the war many people thought it would be over soon and that there would be little loss of life. But as the war dragged on for years and thousands were killed on both sides, many Americans grew weary of war and wondered when it would end and what the war meant for the future of the country. To Lincoln, the preservation of the Union for his generation and all generations to come was what the war was all about. He considered slavery a great evil, but would have allowed slavery in the southern states to continue if the Union could be maintained. Lincoln realized that the South had to be defeated militarily in order to save the Union. It was to achieve that goal and bring about an end to the War that he issued the **Emancipation Proclamation** in 1862 which freed the slaves in the southern states. After the Civil War was over in December, 1865, Congress enacted the **13th Amendment** to the **Constitution** which finally **abolished** slavery in all the United States forever.

LINCOLN'S MOOD

The time of our play is November, 1863- just five months after the bloody battle of *Gettysburg* where the southern army, under the command of *General Robert E. Lee*, was defeated and forced to withdraw to Virginia. It was a major turning point in the war. Never

again would southern armies threaten northern states. But at the time of our visit with Mr. Lincoln he doesn't know that the Union will ultimately be preserved. He's depressed because the end is not yet in sight. He's still mourning the death of his young son, Willie, two years before. His Emancipation Proclamation is not popular with many white Americans in the North. His chances for re-election the following year seem bleak. As he had done many times in his life when events were beyond his control and troubles were overwhelming, Abraham Lincoln took out his pen and wrote of his hopes for our country.

THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

Mr. Lincoln had been asked to make a few remarks at the dedication of a new national cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. He used his *Gettysburg Address* to answer many people's doubts and fears about the War, and to define for all generations of Americans what it truly means to be an American. For his inspiration and the beginning of his most famous speech, he quoted from the Declaration of Independence:

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

At the conclusion of the *Gettysburg Address*, Mr. Lincoln implores his listeners to **"resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."**

STYLE, DREAMS, AND MR. LINCOLN'S 200TH BIRTHDAY

Although the play is about a real, historical character, the play is not realistic in style. **Style** is defined as the manner of presentation. *Mr. Lincoln's Office* is a dream play- not a photograph of reality.

Mr. Lincoln was a powerful dreamer and had prophetic dreams that even foretold his own death in 1865. The assassin, John Wilkes Booth, may have ended the mortal life of Abraham Lincoln with a bullet; but Mr. Lincoln's spirit can never really die. We Americans won't let him die. He exists in that eternal shadow world of truth and justice that we call the American Dream. His courage and sense of fairness can be seen today in the lives of millions of common Americans, from every possible background, who work hard to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. Abraham Lincoln is a member of our family- a favorite Uncle who inspires us to be the best that we can be and to always listen to what he called "the better angels of our nature". As we celebrate his 200th birthday in 2009, we should all be proud that he forever remains- just one of us.



A FEW IMAGES



KEYWORDS

Civil War

Skepticism

Style

Symbolism

The Constitution

Declaration of Independence

Cotton gin

Missouri Compromise

Congress

Kansas-Nebraska act

Dred Scott Decision

Supreme Court

Senate

Civil Rights Movement

Abolitionist movement

Harriet Tubman

Sojourner Truth

Frederick Douglass

Emancipation Proclamation

Seceded

13th Amendment

Abolished

The Gettysburg Address

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What inspires you most about the life of Abraham Lincoln?
2. What challenges will you have to overcome to achieve your dreams?
3. How can we make sure that our government is truly "of the people, by the people, for the people"?
4. Are all Americans treated fairly and equally?
5. What responsibilities do you have as an American citizen?



A FEW CORRELATIONS TO THE NORTH CAROLINA STANDARD COURSE OF STUDY

SOCIAL STUDIES, LANGUAGE ARTS, AND THEATRE ARTS

FIFTH GRADE UNITED STATES HISTORY, CANADA, MEXICO, AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Competency Goal 4: The learner will trace key developments in the United States history and describe their impact on the land and people of the nation and its neighboring countries.

EIGHTH GRADE NORTH CAROLINA: CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE

Competency Goal 4 The learner will examine the causes, course, and character of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and their impact on North Carolina and the nation

ELEVENTH GRADE UNITED STATES HISTORY

Competency Goal 3 Crisis, Civil War, and Reconstruction (1848-1877) - The learner will analyze the issues that led to the Civil War, the effects of the war, and the impact of Reconstruction on the nation

(**Mr. Lincoln's Office** also correlates to other Social Studies, Language Arts, and Theatre Arts Standards. National Standard Correlations available upon request)

BOOKS FOR YOUNG ADULT READERS

(BOOKS FOR YOUNG ADULT READERS-AS LISTED BY THE HISTORY CHANNEL www.history.com/classroom/ "Learning with Lincoln -Abraham Lincoln: A Model of Life Values. Unit for 5th and 8th Graders, A List of Websites are also available on The History Channel's website.)

- Bausum, Ann. *Our Country's Presidents*. Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2001.
- Bracken, Thomas, Sandra Stotsky, and James Scott. *Abraham Lincoln*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1998.
- Davis, Kenneth C. *Don't Know Much About Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Harper Collins Children's Books, 2004.
- Freedman, Russell. *Lincoln: A Photobiography*. New York: Clarion Books, 1989.
- Harness, Cheryl. *Abe Lincoln Goes to Washington: 1837-1865*. Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1997.
- Judson, Karen. *Abraham Lincoln*. Springfield: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 1998.
- Marrin, Albert. *Commander in Chief: Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1997.
- North, Sterling. *Abe Lincoln, Log Cabin to White House*. New York: Landmark Books, Random House, 1993.

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