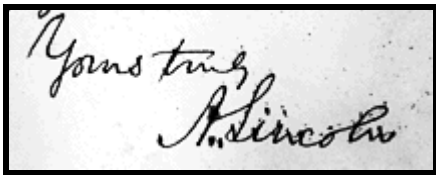


**Summer 2009 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly
Learning Activity – Secondary Level**

“Was Abraham Lincoln an Abolitionist?” Activity



Abraham Lincoln to Albert G. Hodges, April 4, 1864. [Fragment]
Available at *Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress*,
Manuscript Division (Washington, D.C.: American Memory Project,
[2000-02]), <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/almss/ln001.html>

OVERVIEW

Overview

In this activity, students engage in the complex questions of slavery and abolition in the 1850s and 1860s. Intended for use as an activity within a larger unit of study, students will first review prior knowledge about these topics and define the term, “abolitionist,” together as a class. Working in small groups, students investigate Abraham Lincoln’s position on the subject of the abolition of slavery by analyzing his own writings for evidence. Lastly, students present a case for or against applying the term “abolitionist” to Lincoln based on their primary source findings.

Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Define the term “abolitionist”
- Satisfactorily analyze Lincoln’s writings for evidence of abolitionism
- Establish a position on the question of Lincoln’s abolitionism
- Present a case for or against applying the term “abolitionist” to Lincoln, using his writings as evidence

Time Required

Two class periods

Recommended Grade Range

8-12

Topic/s

African American History; Presidents; War, Military

Subject

Social Studies

Standards

McREL 4th Edition Standards & Benchmarks

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

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OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

United States History

Standard 12. Understands the sources and character of cultural, religious, and social reform movements in the antebellum period

Language Arts

Standard 4. (Writing) Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Standard 7. (Reading) Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

Standard 8. (Listening and Speaking) Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Credits

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PREPARATION

Materials

Have these selected materials ready before the activity.

Print one set of all six documents below (including both the original and transcript versions of each document) for each group of students. Alternatively, depending on students' reading levels, provide each group with only a subset of the documents but ensure the entire set is distributed among the class.

Abraham Lincoln, [January 1849] (A Bill to Abolish Slavery in the District of Columbia) [Draft]

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&fileName=mal1/004/0042500/malpage.db&recNum=0>

Rationale for selection: This document offers insight into Lincoln's personal and political reactions to the existence of slavery in the District of Columbia while serving in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Abraham Lincoln, [September 1860] (Memorandum on Lincoln's 1837 protest against slavery)

[Fragment]

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&fileName=mal1/055/0555000/malpage.db&recNum=0>

Rationale for selection: This document indicates that Lincoln's anti-slavery stance was not unconditional, as he attempts to clarify his position in the memo.

Abraham Lincoln, July 22, 1862 (Preliminary Draft of the Emancipation Proclamation) –

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&fileName=mal1/172/1723200/malpage.db&recNum=0>

Rationale for selection: In this document, Lincoln sets the legal machinery in motion for the emancipation of all slaves in the United States, which did not occur until ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment on December 6, 1865. This document declares as forever free all slaves in any state of the Confederate States of America that did not return to Union control by January 1, 1863, and carefully crafts that emancipation so as to mollify several competing factions in the debate.

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PREPARATION (CONT'D)

Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862 (Clipping from Aug. 23, 1862 New York Tribune) –

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&fileName=mal2/423/4233400/malpage.db&recNum=0>

Rationale for selection: In this document, Lincoln explains his position with regard to slavery within the larger context of the Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln to James C. Conkling, August 26, 1863 (Draft of letter to be read at Union mass meeting in Springfield) –

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&fileName=mal1/258/2584600/malpage.db&recNum=0>

Rationale for selection: This document suggests that Lincoln continually was called upon both to act on the matter of slavery and to defend or clarify his position.

President Abraham Lincoln to Albert G. Hodges, editor of the Frankfort, KY, *Commonwealth*, April 4, 1864 [Autographed Draft] –

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&fileName=mal1/320/3207700/malpage.db&recNum=0>

Rationale for selection: In this document, Lincoln continues to advance his nuanced position about public governance and express his personal feelings about slavery.

“Was Lincoln an Abolitionist?” worksheet

- One copy for each document to include with the documents in a folder for each group
- One additional copy of the worksheet per student

Resources

Before guiding students through the activity, teachers can familiarize themselves with the background of the abolition movement during the pre-Civil War historical era and the Emancipation Proclamation (issued September 22, 1862; enforced January 1, 1863) by reviewing:

The African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship (Section III. Abolition)

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aopart3.html>

Special Presentation: The Emancipation Proclamation

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/almintr.html>

Additional Library of Congress resources relating to Lincoln include:

The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/abraham-lincoln-papers/>

The Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/lincolniana/>

With Malice Toward None: The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Exhibition

<http://myloc.gov/exhibitions/lincoln/Pages/default.aspx>

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PROCEDURE

1. Connect to students’ prior knowledge about the abolition movement during the 1850s and 1860s through facilitated class discussion. Prompt students with guiding questions to define and reach consensus on the term, “abolitionist.” Possible questions include:

- What common goal united all abolitionists?
- What strategies and activities did abolitionists engage in to promote their cause?
- Who were some of the leading abolitionists in the United States prior to the Civil War?
- How did abolitionists’ efforts contribute to the passage and ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, which formally ended all slavery in the United States?

Note: Display the agreed-upon definition of “abolitionist” for reference throughout the activity. For example, the class might define an abolitionist as “a person who actively opposed slavery in the United States, especially prior to the start of the Civil War.”

2. Pose the question, “Was Abraham Lincoln an abolitionist?” to the class. Explain that students will work in small groups to evaluate a set of primary sources—selected papers of Lincoln—for evidence of abolitionism. Their assignment will be to:

- analyze each primary source using an analysis sheet
- establish a group position on the assigned question, “Was Abraham Lincoln an abolitionist?”
- prepare to present and defend a position for or against applying the term “abolitionist” to Lincoln in a class discussion, using Lincoln’s own words as evidence.

3. Pass out copies of the **“Was Lincoln an Abolitionist?”** worksheet, and display Lincoln’s **A Bill to Abolish Slavery in the District of Columbia [Draft]**. Model the analysis portion of the group activity for students, using the worksheet’s questions to guide the class in analysis of the draft.

4. Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with a folder containing the primary sources and copies of the worksheets. Support students as needed in analyzing the primary sources, evaluating the evidence, establishing a positive or negative group position on the assigned question, and constructing a case for this position based on Lincoln’s own words.

5. Facilitate a class discussion responding to the question, “Was Lincoln an abolitionist?” Each group should participate by presenting and defending a positive or negative position based on their evidence. Possible questions to help guide this discussion include:

- How did Lincoln express his personal viewpoint on the issue of slavery? His political viewpoint?
- What conflicting statements, if any, did Lincoln make about slavery? Why might his position on this subject have been inconsistent (e.g., progress of the war, political pressures, audience, etc.)?
- Do you think Lincoln thought of himself as an abolitionist? Why or why not?

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ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS

--Students could develop a presentation that creatively argues their position. This presentation could take the form of a brief debate, a breaking news report, an interview, or any other engaging medium.

--Students could research various historical or current cultural perspectives, such as those among U.S. Southern, African American or international communities, on Lincoln's management of the slavery issue.

--Students could further explore the Library of Congress Web site and other print and electronic resources to uncover additional statements Lincoln made on slavery (for example, the texts of the Abraham Lincoln-Stephen Douglas Debates of 1858) or the responses of others (the public at large, political adversaries, personal friends, etc.) to Lincoln's actions and statements regarding this subject.

EVALUATION

--Active, thoughtful participation in class discussions

--Active engagement in group analysis of primary sources resulting in thorough completion of the sources analysis sheets

--Active engagement in group presentation of a brief oral argument responding to the question, "Was Abraham Lincoln an abolitionist?" using his papers as evidence, evaluated with a rubric focusing on:

-use of primary sources: are specific quotes from Lincoln's papers used to support a position?

-persuasion: does primary source evidence selected make a compelling case for the position?

-public speaking qualities: did the students engage eye contact, project voices with good diction?

-(optional) creativity: how did the students share what they had learned?

“WAS LINCOLN AN ABOLITIONIST?”
WRITTEN DOCUMENT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Name: _____

Date: _____ Period: _____

Abraham Lincoln wrote all of these documents; however, he wrote them at different points in time, for different purposes and for different audiences. Remember to keep these differences in mind as you analyze each document for evidence of Lincoln’s views on slavery and abolition.

- 1) Carefully review the document in its original form. What details do you notice? Record any unique qualities you see—for example, is it handwritten, on letterhead or marked in any way?

- 2) Identify the following information, using either the original document or the typed transcription:
 - a) Title or Name of the Document:
 - b) Date/s of Document:
 - c) Public office or position held by Lincoln at time of writing (if known):
 - d) Historical events taking place at time of writing (if known):

- 3) Read the transcript of the document, underlining any phrases or sentences you think may relate to Lincoln’s views on slavery and/or abolition.

For what purpose do you think Lincoln wrote this document?

Who do you think Lincoln intended to read it, if anyone?

“WAS LINCOLN AN ABOLITIONIST?”
WRITTEN DOCUMENT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

- 4) List up to **THREE** phrases or sentences from the document that may offer insight into Lincoln’s position on slavery or abolition.

How do these statements help you better understand Lincoln’s view on slavery?

- 5) List up to **THREE** phrases or sentences from the document that make it harder to understand Lincoln’s position on slavery or abolition.

Do you find these statements to be inconsistent, vague or confusing? Why?

- 6) List up to **THREE** names, places, events or other references in the document that you might need to research to better understand what was happening at the time when Lincoln created it.

What more information, related to this document, do you want to know?