

Abraham Lincoln as President

Overview:

Students will evaluate Lincoln's presidency.

Materials:

Worksheet (pdf version)

The Emancipation Proclamation (pdf version)

The Gettysburg Address (pdf version)

Excerpt from *Drawn with the Sword*, James M. McPherson, Pages 204-205. (pdf version)

Aim/Essential Question:

To what extent does Abraham Lincoln deserve to be called one of our nation's greatest presidents?

Background Information:

During his presidency, Lincoln had to deal with momentous crises that demanded crucial and exceedingly difficult decision-making. For example, in the early war years the Union won few battles, battle-field deaths were high, border states threatened to bolt the Union if forced to give up slavery, he was buffeted by contradictory demands regarding emancipation, people were weary of war, and Lincoln faced possible defeat in the election of 1864.

Objectives:

1. Students will develop criteria for judging greatness in presidential leadership.
2. Students will read and analyze documents related to Lincoln's response to major questions and crises.
3. Students will role-play the president and write how they would respond to these their "solutions" to the problems Lincoln faced.
4. Students will evaluate Lincoln's presidency.

Motivation:

In a recent poll of historians, Abraham Lincoln has been listed as one of the nations greatest presidents. If you were asked to create a form listing characteristics of greatness, what would you include? Using your form, to what extent would Lincoln's actions merit his inclusion in the list of great presidents?

Due to the use of the worksheet and the nature of the materials this lesson should be taught in at least two class periods.

Procedures (Part a):

Distribute the attached worksheet and have students write their response in the space provided. Students will present their solutions to the class and then have the opportunity of comparing their “solutions” to those of President Lincoln.

Procedures (Part b):

1. After the class is given time for their response on the worksheets, they will be given an opportunity to present their solutions.
2. Students will then compare their responses to Lincoln’s determination to continue the war, his Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address and his refusal to compromise on the issue of slavery during the presidential campaign of 1864.

Pivotal Questions:

Was Lincoln right to continue the war or should he have sought a negotiated peace?

Abraham Lincoln in his First Inaugural Address was willing to compromise with the Confederate states to preserve the Union. By 1863 he had issued the Emancipation Proclamation, an action that made the destruction of slavery a major issue in the Civil War. How can we explain this evolution in Lincoln’s thinking and actions?

How was the Emancipation Proclamation designed to meet the demands of the Border States and at the same time satisfy those who wanted an end to slavery?

Many commented that the Emancipation Proclamation did not free any slaves. At the same time Frederick Douglass and most African Americans celebrated this document. Why did the African American community strongly support the Emancipation Proclamation?

How does Emancipation Proclamation support the belief that Lincoln was one of our great presidents?

The Declaration of Independence established the twin goals of democracy and equality and democracy. To what extent did the Gettysburg Address expand the original meaning of the Declaration of Independence?

How does the Gettysburg Address support the belief that Lincoln was one of our greatest presidents?

Lincoln refused to abandon the goal of emancipation in order to win the election of 1864. Does this qualify him as one of our great presidents? Explain.

Lincoln could have used the war as an excuse to cancel an election that he thought he would lose. Instead, he made sure that the election of 1864 took place. Why did Lincoln believe that the election must go forward? Does this action support those who believe that Abraham Lincoln was one of our greatest presidents?

Summary:

Does Abraham Lincoln deserve to be called one of our great presidents? Why or why not?

Which of Lincoln's actions or documents do you believe is most important in evaluating Lincoln's inclusion as one of our great presidents? Explain.

Return to the form you created at the start of the lesson. Based on the qualities on your form, evaluate Abraham Lincoln's presidency.

Application Questions:

1. Write a pre and/ or post election editorial newspaper piece regarding the presidency from either a Copperhead or Peace Democrat position.
2. Stage an 1864 election debate between a supporter of Lincoln and a supporter of McClellan.
3. Write a letter home to a loved one from the perspective of a African American Union soldier who is participating in a major battle in the aftermath of the Election of 1864
Note: Many African American troops participated in the siege of Petersburg.
4. Write a letter home to a loved one from the perspective of a Confederate soldier in the field in the aftermath of the election of 1864.
5. On butcher paper or newsprint design an 1864 election banner for either Lincoln or McClellan.
6. Draw a post-1864 political cartoon from either a pro- Lincoln or pro- McClellan position.
7. As Lincoln's life ebbed away, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton uttered the words, "Now he belongs to the ages." Based on this, how did Stanton view Lincoln's legacy? Would you agree or disagree with Stanton? Explain.

Abraham Lincoln as President: Worksheet

1. Radical politicians within your party are making demands. Protestant ministers, African American freedmen and many citizens in the North ask that you issue a proclamation freeing the slaves. At the same time, many in the North including soldiers in the Union army express, in terms that are frequently overtly racist, their opposition to emancipation. The Border States, including Kentucky, Maryland and Missouri threaten secession if you free the slaves. As president, write what you would do to meet this crisis.
2. You have been asked as Chief of State to take part in the ceremonies dedicating the cemetery at Gettysburg to those who fell in battle. You have been asked to make a few short remarks because the great orator Edward Everett will give the main address. Write an outline of a speech that you believe will be appropriate.
3. In the summer of 1864 the staggering cost of the lives of its young men weakened the will of many people of the North to continue the war. The Democratic Party platform contained a plank for peace negotiations to restore the Union with slavery. You are told that you will lose the election unless you back down on emancipation. How do you respond to this election crisis?

MATERIALS

Document A

The Emancipation Proclamation

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States."

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth[]), and which excepted parts, are for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

By the President: ABRAHAM LINCOLN
WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.

(http://www.gilderlehrman.org/search/display_results.php?id=GLC01208)

Document B

The Gettysburg Address

"Fourscore 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.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us--that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion--that we here highly 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."

(http://www.gilderlehrman.org/search/display_results.php?id=GLC06811)

Document C

Excerpt from: James M. McPherson, *Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

In the summer of 1864 Northern morale had plummeted again. The staggering cost of the lives of its young men had corroded the will of the North to continue the war. Lincoln was severely criticized for refusing to abandon emancipation as a pre condition for negotiations with the South. The democrats contained a plank for peace negotiations to restore the Union with slavery. Almost all thought, including Lincoln, that he would lose the election. The pressure on Lincoln to back down on emancipation caused him to waiver temporarily but not to buckle. Instead he told the weakened republicans, “more than one hundred thousand black soldiers and sailors were fighting for the Union and Lincoln. They would not do so if the Union intended to betray them... “If they stake their lives for us they must be prompted by the promise of freedom. And the promise must be kept. There have been men who have proposed to me to return to slavery the black warriors who have fought for the Union. I should be damned in time and eternity for so doing. The world shall know that I will keep faith to friends and enemies, come what will.”