



The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

A NEW BIRTH OF FREEDOM: LINCOLN'S PRESIDENCY AND THE CIVIL WAR



Grade 8
United States History and Geography

I. Introduction

In composing his first inaugural address, delivered March 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln focused on shoring up his support in the North without further alienating the South, where he was almost universally hated or feared. He avoided any mention of the Republican Party platform, which condemned all efforts to reopen the African slave trade and denied the authority of Congress or a territorial legislature to legalize slavery in the territories. The address also denied any plan on the part of the Lincoln administration to interfere with the institution of slavery in states where it existed. But to Lincoln, the Union, which he saw as older even than the Constitution, was perpetual and unbroken, and secession legally impossible. Until the final draft, Lincoln's address had ended with a question for the South: "Shall it be peace or sword?" In the famous concluding paragraph, Lincoln moderated his tone dramatically and ended on a memorable note of conciliation:

I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Alas, a little more than a month later, the Confederate army attacked Fort Sumter, and the bloody four-year long contest to determine the fate of United States was underway. To paraphrase historian James McPherson, the Civil War was the great trauma and tragedy of American history, but it was also a great triumph of nationalism and freedom. The Northern victory represented a new birth of freedom in two distinct ways: First, it settled the question as to whether or not the United States could survive as a single nation with a republican form of government; and, second,

in freeing four million slaves, it also abolished the institution of slavery that had divided the country from the beginning.

II. Objectives

- ◆ To study the lives of soldiers and leaders in the Civil War.
- ◆ To analyze primary source materials to gain an understanding of the Civil War.
- ◆ To examine Lincoln's leadership through his writings as President.

III. History-Social Science Standards Addressed

- 8.10 (4) Discuss Abraham Lincoln's presidency and his significant writings and speeches and their relationship to the Declaration of Independence, such as his "House Divided" speech (1858), Gettysburg Address (1863), Emancipation Proclamation (1863), and inaugural addresses (1861 and 1865).
- (5) Study the views and lives of leaders (e.g., Ulysses S. Grant, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee) and soldiers on both sides of the war, including those of black soldiers and regiments.
- (6) Describe critical developments and events in the war, including the major battles, geographical advantages and obstacles, technological advances, and General Lee's surrender at Appomattox.
- (7) Explain how the war affected combatants, civilians, the physical environment, and future warfare.

IV. Materials Needed

Class set copies of the following primary documents:

- Document A:** Abraham Lincoln: Letter to Gideon Welles (March 29, 1861)
- Document B:** William H. Hamner, Signed Autograph Statement (1865)
- Document C:** Abraham Lincoln: Letter to Parents of Col. Elmer E. Ellsworth (May 25, 1861)
- Document D:** Annual Message to Congress (December 1, 1862)
- Document E:** Gettysburg Address (November 19, 1863)
- Document F:** Abraham Lincoln: Letter to Ulysses S. Grant (April 30, 1864)
- Document G:** Abraham Lincoln: Letter to Francis P. Blair (January 18, 1865)
- Document H:** Second Inaugural Address (March 4, 1865)
- Document I:** Lincoln Letters to George McClellan (October 24 and 27, 1862)
- Document Analysis Worksheet**

V. Lesson Activities

1. Use **Document E** to frame the lesson on Lincoln's leadership during the Civil War. First have students study textbook accounts of the battle, then ask them to transcribe the Gettysburg Address document. Lead a discussion about the following points:
 - When did the battle of Gettysburg take place? What was the number of casualties on each side?
 - Where in the Gettysburg Address does Lincoln refer to the Declaration of Independence?
 - Why does Lincoln say “We cannot dedicate this ground?”
 - What is “the great task remaining” to which he refers?
 - What does Lincoln mean by a “new birth of freedom?”
 - Extension activity: Access the Library of Congress Web site to find the invitation Lincoln received to speak at the dedication of the Gettysburg battlefield site < <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trt031.html> > , as well as correspondence he received after his speech < <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trt032.html> > . For photographs of Lincoln at Gettysburg, see the online exhibit at the Chicago Historical Society < <http://www.chicagohistory.org/LINCPHOTOESSAY/le29.html> > .
2. Use an overhead transparency (or printed copies) of **Documents A and B** to provide documentary evidence of the beginning of the Civil War. Have students explain how Ft. Sumter became the site of the start of the war.
3. Distribute **Document C** and have students use the “Document Analysis Worksheet” to study the letter from President Lincoln to the family of a Union soldier who was killed early in the Civil War. Have them consult their textbooks or other sources to review the statistics of battle casualties and destruction of property during the war.
4. Pass out (or use a transparency of) **Document D**, excerpts from Lincoln’s speech to Congress on December 1, 1862. Have students study Lincoln’s message at the end of 1862, the year in which he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Consider the following issues in the speech:
 - What is the “fiery trial” to which Lincoln refers?
 - How does Lincoln address the war aim of saving the Union?
 - At which point does he address the new war aim—freeing the slaves?
 - What, according to Lincoln, is at stake in the Civil War? Why?
5. In order to lead a discussion about Union military leadership during the Civil War, share **Document F**, the letter from Lincoln to Ulysses S. Grant.

Use the Document Analysis Worksheet to analyze the letter. In closing, have students share what they think Lincoln's opinion of Grant is in the spring of 1864.

- Extension Activity: Consult the two letters to George McClellan that Lincoln wrote on October 24th and 27th 1862, in which he expresses his frustration with McClellan's inactivity. (**Document I**). Next, access the Library of Congress Web site to find a four-page letter from Mary Todd Lincoln to her husband on November 2, 1862, in which she complains about McClellan's slowness, and encourages the President to replace him with a "fighting general" who will take advantage of the good weather and mount an effective battle campaign. (<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm061.html>).
6. In early January 1865, Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederate States of America, declared that he was ready to negotiate an end to the Civil War in order to "secure peace to the two countries." Have students study **Document G** to find Lincoln's response to Davis's offer, and ask them to explain the President's reference to "the people of our one common country."
 7. Share excerpts of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address (**Document H**), which was given less than a month before the end of the war. Have students write an essay in which they summarize the key points of Lincoln's speech, including:
 - The outbreak of war
 - Slavery as a cause of the war
 - The immediate future of the nation
 - Extension activity: To chart the course of the end of the Civil War, access a letter on display at the Chicago Historical Society from Lincoln to General Grant in early April, 1865 < <http://www.chicagohistory.org/LINCPHOTOESSAY/le10.html> > and the materials related to Lee's surrender that are online at the National Archives < http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/american_originals/parole.html > .

Abraham Lincoln: Letter to Gideon Welles (Secretary of the Navy)

March 29, 1861

Executive Mansion
March 29, 1861
Honorable Secretary of the Navy,
Sir: I desire that an expedition, to move by sea, be got ready to sail as early as the 6th of April next, the whole according to memorandum attached, and that you co-operate with the Secretary of War for that object.
Your Obedient Servant
A. Lincoln.

William H. Hamner, Signed Autograph Statement
1865

The undersigned was Regimental
Quartermaster Sergeant of the 1st Regt
U. S. Artillery, a part of which composed
the garrison of Fort Sumter, Charleston
Harbor, S. C. during its bombardment,
April 12th & 13th 1861. I lowered the flag
upon the evacuation^{of} Sumter, by Major
Anderson and forces under his command,
April 14th 1861.

I was present when the ^{camp} flag was
hoisted over the ruins of Sumter, on
April 14th 1865.

W. H. Hamner
St. Cal. U. S. A. Retired

Abraham Lincoln: Letter to Parents of Col. Elmer E. Ellsworth
May 25, 1861

Washington D.C.
May 25. 1861
To the Father and Mother of Col.
Elmer E. Ellsworth:
My dear Sir and Madam,
In the untimely
loss of your noble son, our affliction
here, is scarcely less than your own.
So much of promised usefulness
to one's country, and of bright hopes
for one's self and friends, have rarely
been so suddenly dashed, as
in his case. In size, in years, and
in youthful appearance, a boy
only, his power to command men,
was surpassingly great. His power,
combined with a fine intellect, an
indomitable energy, and a taste all
together military, constituted in him,
as seemed to me, the best natural
talent, in that department, I ever knew.
H425383

Annual Message to Congress
December 1, 1862

. . . The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We-even we here-hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free-honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth.

Gettysburg Address

November 19, 1863

57
Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon 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 battle-field 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 can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not 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

Gettysburg Address

Page Two

us— that from these honored dead we take increas-
ed devotion to that cause for which they here 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.

Abraham Lincoln: Letter to Ulysses S. Grant

April 30, 1864

Executive Mansion
Washington, April 30, 1864

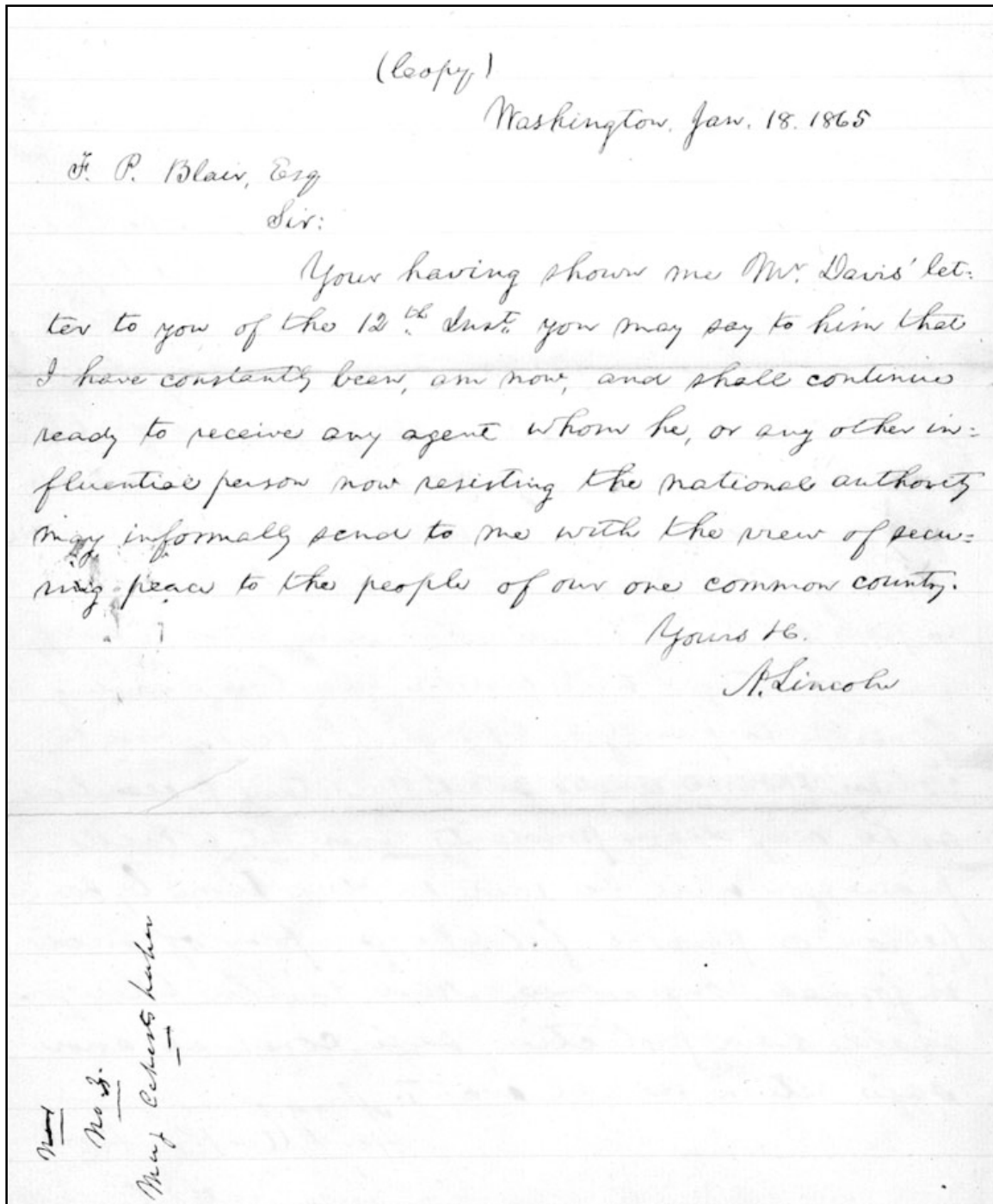
Lieutenant General Grant.

Not expecting to see you again before the Spring campaign opens, I wish to express, in this way, my entire satisfaction with what you have done up to this time, so far as I understand it. The particulars of your plans I neither know, or seek to know. You are vigilant and self-reliant; and, pleased with this, I wish not to obtrude any constraints or restraints upon you. While I am very anxious that any great disaster, or the capture of our men in great numbers, shall be avoided, I know these points are less likely to escape your attention than they would be mine. If there is anything wanting which is within my power to give, do not fail to let me know it.

And now with a brave Army, and a just cause, may God sustain you.

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln: Letter to Francis P. Blair
January 18, 1865



Second Inaugural Address

March 4, 1865

Fellow-Countrymen: At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. . .

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war-seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came.

One eighth of the whole population was colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slave constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. . .

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. . .

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right that God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Source: *Library of America*, Vol. 2, pp. 686-7.

Lincoln: Letters to George McClellan
October 24, 1862

Washington City, D.C.
Oct. 24. 1862
Major Gen. McClellan

I have just read your despatch
about sore tongued and fatigued horses—
Will you pardon me for asking what the
horses of your army have done since the
battle of Antietam that fatigues anything?

A. Lincoln

Lincoln: Letters to George McClellan
October 27, 1862

Executive Mansion,

Washington, Oct. 27, 1862

Majr Gen. Mr. McClellan.

Yours of yesterday received.

Most certainly I intend no injustice to any; and if I have done any, I deeply regret it. To be told after more than five weeks total inaction of the Army, and during which period we have sent to that Army every fresh horse we possibly could, amounting in the whole to

7918 that the Cavalry horses were too much fatigued to move, presented a very cheerless, almost hopeless, prospect for the future; and it may have forced something of impatience into my despatches. If not peremptory, and peremptory then, when could they ever be? I suppose the river is

Document Analysis Worksheet

1. Type of Document: (check one)

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Map | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram | <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional Record |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patent | <input type="checkbox"/> Press Release | <input type="checkbox"/> Census Report |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum | <input type="checkbox"/> Report | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify type) _____ | | |

2. Unique Physical Qualities of the Document (check one or more)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten | <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting Letterhead |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Typed | <input type="checkbox"/> "Received" Stamp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seals | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Notations | |

3. Date(s) of the Document: _____

4. Author (or creator) of the document:

Position (Title)

5. For what audience was the document written?

6. Document information:

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

B. Why so you think this document was written?

C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

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- Freedman, Russell. *Lincoln: A Photobiography*. New York: Clarion Books, 1987.
- Holzer, Harold, editor. *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The First Complete Unexpurgated Text*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
- Kunhardt, Philip B., Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III, and Peter W. Kunhardt. *Lincoln: An Illustrated Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.
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Web Sites

- A House Divided: America in the Age of Lincoln* < <http://www.gliah.uh.edu/ahd/introduction.html> >
- The Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History* < http://www.gliah.uh.edu/resource_guides/content.cfm?tpc=12 >
- Library of Congress, < <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trt031.html> >
- National Archives
< http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/american_originals/parole.html >
< http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/civil_war_documents/civil_war_documents.html >