

Name _____

Date _____

Abraham Lincoln

Born in Kentucky on the 12th of February 1809 to Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln, Abraham learned to work with his father from an early age. The family moved to Indiana when Abe was seven years old. Being big for his age, Abe helped his father build the family's log cabin home. The family was beset by many personal tragedies. Abe's younger brother died as an infant. Most difficult of all of these misfortunes was the passing of Abe's mother when she was just 34 years of age. Abe was just nineteen when his sister died. These three losses brought great sorrow to the young man who one day would be President.

As often happened in the 1800s, Abe's widower father left his two surviving youngsters with his cousin Dennis Hanks and he returned to Kentucky in hopes of finding a new wife. Abe's father did return to his children with a new wife, Sarah Johnston. She brought with her three children of her own and the Lincoln family grew literally overnight. Their little one room log cabin with a loft was not enough to provide for the needs of seven people. Abe worked with his father to enlarge the cabin in Indiana.

The new Mrs. Lincoln was very caring for the first Lincoln children and she encouraged Abe to read and study so that he could improve himself. Abe's father only let him go to school during the winter months. Otherwise Abe was to help with all of the chores on the farm. Due to his size, this one day President always was in demand to help with the hard work that the neighbors had as well. Abe was able to read, write and do basic mathematics even though he had barely a year of formal education. However, Abe was driven to learn and read every single book that he could find.

Illinois was next to claim ownership of the Lincoln name; Illinois calls itself the "Land of Lincoln." Abe's father left their farm in Indiana and moved the family to Illinois near the town of Decatur. Still only 19 years old, Abe was obliged to work for his father until he was twenty one. But after helping to build a new family log cabin and put in the entire first crop on the new farm, Abe Lincoln left home and moved to New Salem, Illinois, a small town, located along the Sangamon River. Young Lincoln got a job as a clerk in a general store.

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Abraham Lincoln (Cont'd)

By now Abe was a powerfully built man and well above average height of the men of his time. He was a true six feet four inches. His strength was legendary.

Indians in the area of New Salem were fighting to recover their land that they had been forced to give up. Abe volunteered to join a local militia unit to fight off the uprising. His own peers elected him to be captain of the unit but the collection of volunteers never actually saw fighting against the Indian tribes of Sauk and Fox.

History has called Mr. Lincoln "Honest Abe". These words were not idly spoken. When a store that Abe and a friend opened in New Salem failed to be successful, Abraham Lincoln spent the next seventeen years paying off his share of the debts for the failed venture.

After his militia service Abe ran for the Illinois legislature but was defeated. But in the year 1834 he ran again for the state legislature and won, running as a member of the Whig party. Popular with his constituents, Abe was re-elected three more times. He started to study law and by the year 1836 he received his law degree.

Abe Lincoln then moved to the capital of Illinois, Springfield. Abe met the daughter of a wealthy family from Lexington Kentucky. Mary Todd was bright, energetic, and Abraham Lincoln was in love. Abe and Mary became husband and wife in 1842 after a three year courtship. She was very charming and supportive of Abe's political efforts but she suffered from the beginnings of a mental illness that would affect Abe for the rest of his life.

Abe Lincoln was elected to the U.S. Congress as a member of the House of Representatives. He was not an abolitionist (a person who wanted to abolish slavery) but he did not want to see slavery expand any further. His first legislation to eliminate trade in slaves in the District of Columbia was soundly defeated. He even felt that the current U.S. President, James K. Polk, had instigated the war with Mexico. This put the freshman congressman in a bad light with many of his constituents as well as other congressmen. He was not re-elected to a second term.

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But the former congressman was a successful lawyer back in Springfield, Illinois. Again the issue of slavery as well as other related matters caused Lincoln, along with other moderate Whig party members, to form a new political party known as the Republican Party. This new party sought to change the Kansas-Nebraska Act that let each state decide whether to allow slavery or not. The Republican Party candidates were defeated in 1856 and the Democratic candidate James Buchanan became President of the United States.

But Abe Lincoln's destiny was still to rise. In 1858 the Lincoln-Douglas debates between the candidates for the U.S. Senate carried Abe to national prominence even though he lost to Stephen Douglas in the election. Lincoln's famous speech expressing his feelings that "A house divided cannot stand" rang loudly in the hearts of many throughout the nation.

By 1860, Lincoln's time had come and he became the Republican nominee for president. The nation was already on the verge of splitting. The Democratic Party could not unite within themselves between Northern and Southern members and had two men running separately for the highest office. The two Democrats Douglas and Breckinridge gathered between them almost 48% of the popular vote and a third party candidate by the name of Bell garnered almost 12%. So even though Abe had less than 40% of the vote he won the election. No one has ever become President with a voting percentage less than Mr. Lincoln.

The Southern fear of what would happen was so great that the 16th President of the United States had not even gotten to the White House to take the oath of office when a group of pro-slavery people conspired to assassinate him. The founder of the famous Pinkerton Detective Agency discovered the plot and Mr. Lincoln changed his planned inaugural train ride to Washington D.C. thus avoiding the would-be vicious killers.

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The Confederate States of America had formed by Lincoln's inauguration day. The presidential inauguration took place in March at that time in history. Even though his speech on the 4th of March 1861 clearly stated that he would not interfere with states that already had slavery, it was not enough to avoid civil war. The firing of Southern cannons at the battle of Fort Sumter initiated a war within the United States that would cost the lives of well more than one half a million people and continue its destruction of the country for four long years.

Lincoln and many others thought the war would be short but the South proved to be more than a match for the Northern armies at the outset of the war. The Battle of Bull Run was a rout against the North as was the first battle of Richmond. While the border states of Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and Delaware actually had slavery, they sided with the North. The loss of these critical states could have greatly changed the outcome for the Confederacy.

President Lincoln hoped desperately for a victory of a major battle. With such a win Lincoln felt that he could then once and for all denounce slavery and ultimately abolish it. The battle of Antietam was just such a turning point. With Confederate troops finally repulsed, President Lincoln gave his historic Emancipation Proclamation speech. This famous directive was to go into effect on the first of January 1863. The reality of this directive was that slaves were only freed in the defeated Southern states, not the entire nation. So the real end of slavery in the United States did not occur until the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, almost a year after the end of the Civil War.

Had it not been the Northern victories in Virginia and General Sherman's overwhelming defeat of the Confederate Army at Atlanta, Georgia Lincoln might never have been re-elected. But now people throughout the North felt that an end to the war was indeed in sight. Lincoln, a Republican, and his Vice-President Andrew Johnson, a Democrat, won the election. This was the first and only time a president and vice president were of different political parties.

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Lincoln's two most famous generals, Sherman and Ulysses S. Grant, continued to defeat the South everywhere. Sherman made his famous "March to the Sea" taking over not only Atlanta, Georgia, but also the port city of Savannah and all surrounding area. Grant took Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederacy, ultimately causing General Robert E. Lee to surrender the Southern forces to Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia. With that act the Civil War came to an end on the 9th of April 1865.

The life of Abraham Lincoln was to come to an end with a single shot from the pistol of John Wilkes Booth on the 14th of April in 1865. That night President Lincoln and his wife had gone to the Ford Theatre to watch a play. The nation mourned the passing of a truly great president.

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Abraham Lincoln Questions

Fill in the blanks with an answer from the list below.

Republican	Kentucky	Andrew Johnson
Whig	Georgia	Robert E. Lee
House of Representatives	Illinois	Ulysses S. Grant
Emancipation Proclamation	Senate	Stephen Douglas
13 th Amendment		

1. Although Abraham Lincoln was born in the state of _____, the state of _____ calls itself the "Land of Lincoln."
2. When Abraham Lincoln served in the U.S. Congress he was a member of the _____.
3. When running for Congress Lincoln debated with his opponent _____.
4. Lincoln was one of the founders of the _____ Party.
5. General _____ of the Union forces defeated General _____ of the Confederacy to end the Civil War.
6. The _____ freed the slaves in the Confederate States while it required the _____ to abolish slavery in the United States.
7. After Lincoln was assassinated Vice President _____ became president.

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Abraham Lincoln Answers

1. Kentucky
Illinois
2. House of Representatives
3. Stephen Douglas
4. Republican
5. Ulysses S. Grant
Robert E. Lee
6. Emancipation Proclamation
13th Amendment
7. Andrew Johnson