Abraham Lincoln was born Feb 12, 1809, in a single room log cabin, Hardin County, Kentucky. His family upbringing was modest; his parents from Virginia were neither wealthy nor well known. At an early age, the young Abraham lost his mother and his father moved away to Indiana. Abraham had to work hard splitting logs and other manual labor. But, he also had a thirst for knowledge and worked very hard to excel in his studies. This led him to become self trained as a lawyer. He spent eight years working on the Illinois court circuit; his ambition, drive, and capacity for hard work were evident to all around him. Lincoln became respected on the legal circuit and he gained the nickname Honest Abe. He often encouraged neighbors to mediate their own conflicts rather than pursue full legal litigation. Lincoln also had a good sense of humor and was deprecating about his looks.

Work colleagues and friends noted that Lincoln had a capacity to defuse tense and argumentative situations, though the use of humor and his capacity to take an optimistic view of human nature. He loved to tell stories to illustrate a serious point through the use of humor and parables

Lincoln was shy around women but after a difficult courtship, he married Mary Todd in 2841. Mary Todd shared many of her husbands political thinking but they also had different temperaments. Mary was more prone to swings in her emotions. They had four children, who Lincoln was devoted to. Although three died before reaching maturity which caused much grief to both parents.

As a lawyer, Abraham developed a capacity for quick thinking and oratory. His interest in public issues encouraged him to stand for public office. In 1847, he was elected to the House of Representatives for Illinois and served from 1847 to 1849. During his period in congress, Lincoln criticized President Polks handling of the American Mexican war, arguing Polk used patriotism and military glory to defend the unjust action of taking Mexican territory. However, Lincolns stance was politically unpopular and he was not elected again.

After his political career appeared to be over, he returned to working as a lawyer in Illinois. However, the 1850s saw the slavery question reemerge as a prominent divisive national issue. Lincoln abhorred slavery and from a political perspective wished to prevent slavery being extended and ultimately be phased out.

He gave influential speeches, which drew on the Declaration of Independence to prove the Founding Fathers had intended to stop the spread of slavery. In particular, Lincoln used a novel argument that although society was a long way from equality, America should aspire towards the lofty statement in the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln had a strong capacity for empathy. E would try to see problems from everyones point of view, including southern slaveholders. He used this concept of empathy to speak against slavery.

Lincolns speeches were notable because they drew on both legal precedents but also easy to understand parables, which struck a chord with the public.

In 1858, Lincoln was nominated as Republican candidate for the Senate. He undertook a series of high profile debates with the Democratic incumbent Stephen Douglass. Douglass was in favor of allowing the extension of slavery, if citizens voted for it. Lincoln opposed the extension of slavery. During this campaign, he gave one of his best remembered speeches, which reflected on the divisive nature of America.

In this House Divided speech, Lincoln gave a prophetic utterance to the potential for slavery to divide the nation.

Although he lost this 1858 Senate election, his debating skills and oratory caused him to become well known with the Republican Party.

On February 27, 1860, Lincoln was also invited to give a notable address at Cooper Union in New York. The reputation he gained on the campaign trail and speeches on the East coast caused him to be put forward as a candidate for the Republican nominee for President in 1860. Lincoln was an outsider because he had much less experience than other leading candidates such as Steward, Bates, and Chase, but after finishing second on the first ballot, he went on to become unexpectedly nominated.

After a hard fought, divisive campaign of 1860, Lincoln was elected the first Republican President of the United States. The south strongly disagreed with Lincolns position on slavery.

On September 22, 1862, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation that declared the freedom of the slaves within the Confederacy. The proclamation came into force on January 1, 1863.

Lincoln was assassinated April 15, 1865 by John Wilkes Booth while visiting Fords Theatre.