

LEVELED Book • Z

ABRAHAM LINCOLN:

From Log Cabin to the White House

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Written by Bea Silverberg

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Focus Question

Why is Abe Lincoln considered one of the most famous American presidents?

Words to Know

abolition
campaign
civil rights
eloquence
emancipator
equality

homespun
legislature
privilege
secede
slavery
solemn

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Correlation

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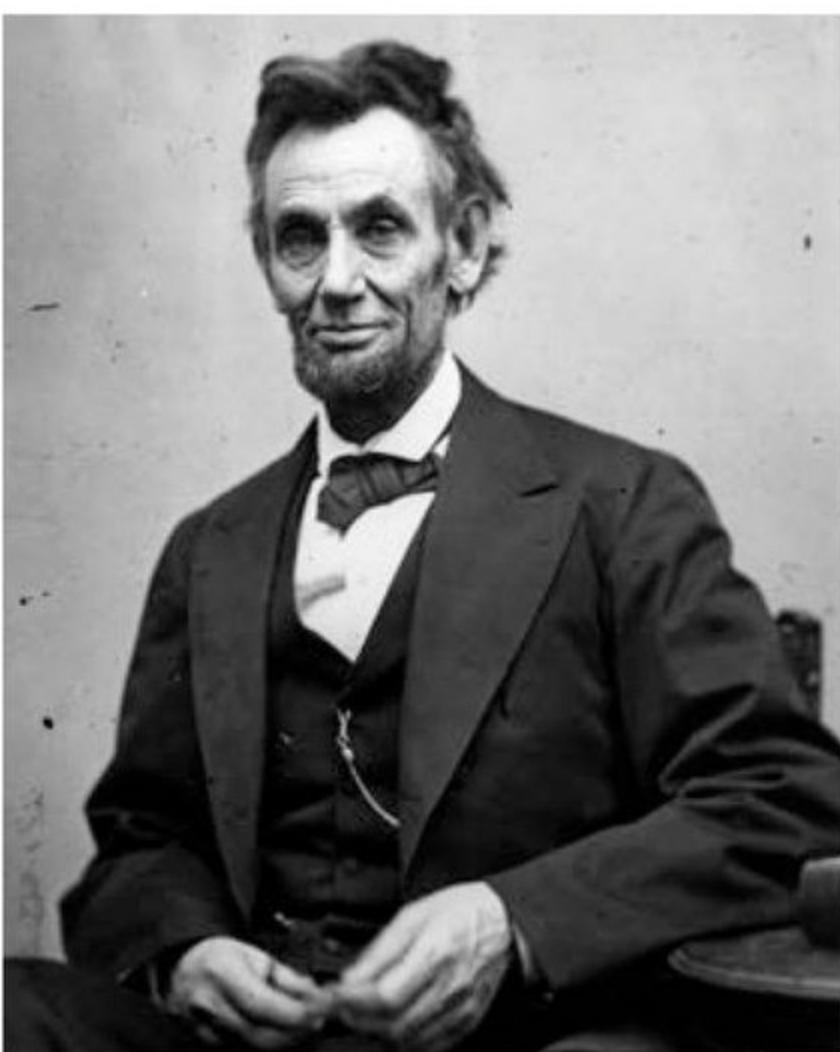
The Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
The Early Years	5
Law and Politics	8
America Divided	10
The War Years	12
Glossary	16

Introduction

Abraham Lincoln, one of the most famous American presidents, is remembered for his dedication to freedom. Lincoln led the United States during the Civil War when the Northern and Southern states fought to decide the future of the country. He is known as the “Great Emancipator” because he freed the slaves. After the war, the United States became one nation, pledged to freedom and democracy for all.



One of the last photographs taken of Lincoln, February 1865

are carved in stone at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Abraham Lincoln is often pictured as tall, lanky, and **solemn**. He is remembered as a “common man” who was born in a log cabin in Kentucky with little regular schooling. Yet he became a great lawyer, speaker, and political leader. His speeches about freedom, justice, and uniting all Americans

His belief was simple: “As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy.”

The Early Years

Abraham Lincoln was born to Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln on February 12, 1809, on a small log-cabin farm near Hodgenville, Kentucky. After moving to nearby Knob Creek, Abe and his older sister, Sarah, went to school for short periods during the winters. When Abe was seven, the family moved to Indiana, hoping for a better life. Two years after Tom built a new log cabin, Nancy became ill and died. Abe and Sarah mourned the death of their hard-working, loving mother.



This cabin is constructed of logs that are believed to be from Lincoln's birth cabin. The cabin is located at the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site in Hodgenville, Kentucky.

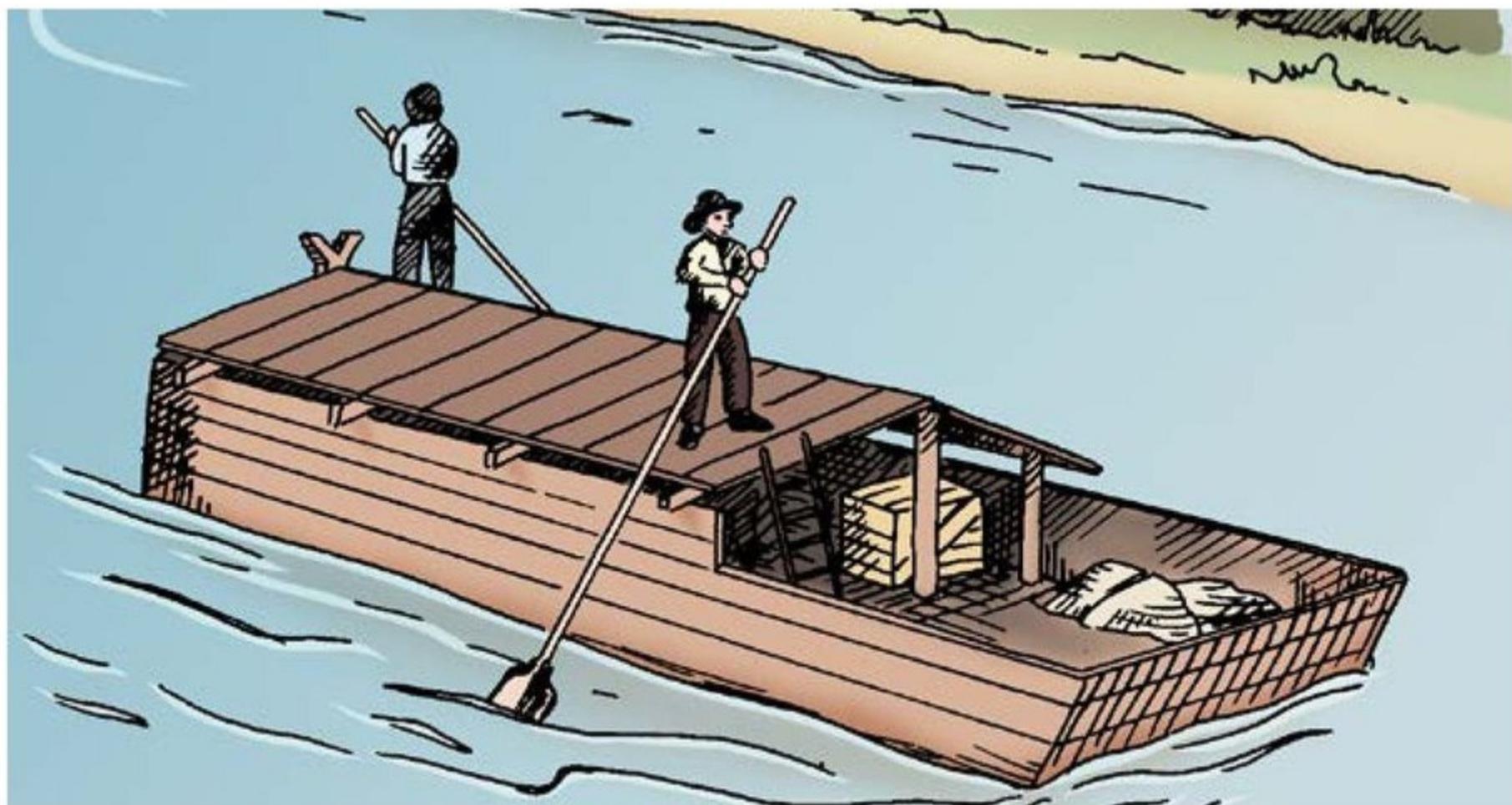
Soon after, Abe's father married Sarah Bush Johnston, a widow and mother of three whom Tom had known in Kentucky. With love and care, she created a warm life for Abe and Sarah. She encouraged Abe as he grew into a tall, awkward youth. Friends told of Abe's moody quietness, even though Abe told homey, humorous stories.



Although he rarely went to school, Abe was devoted to learning.

Abe educated himself mainly by borrowing books and newspapers from neighbors and travelers. Stories of pioneers such as Daniel Boone and Johnny Appleseed, along with the books Abe read, sparked ideas of a world larger than his backwoods.

As a teenager, Abe, now a strong 6 feet 4 inches (2 m), traveled down the Mississippi River on a flatboat. He floated to the busy port of New Orleans. For the first time, Abe saw black men, women, and children chained as slaves to be bought and sold.



Abe traveled on a flatboat to the city of New Orleans.

At the age of 22, Abe moved to New Salem, Illinois. He worked different jobs, including storekeeper, land surveyor, and builder. He became well known as a wrestler and as a skilled speaker in the New Salem Debating Society. He ran for the Illinois state **legislature** and lost in 1832, but he won two years later. A lawyer and fellow legislator, John Todd Stuart, encouraged Abe to study law. Abe read law books, passed the exams in March 1837, and joined Stuart's law practice. He moved to Springfield, where the Illinois legislature met.

Law and Politics

Abraham Lincoln's views were based on his strong belief that each person was important regardless of wealth or **privilege**. He became a respected member of the Whig Party, which supported strong central government in Washington, D.C. The other leading party, the Democrats, believed that states should control their own affairs.

At the age of 30, Lincoln met his future wife, Mary Ann Todd. They married three years later, in 1842, and a year after that their first son, Robert, was born. When Robert was a toddler, Lincoln won the election for Illinois representative to the U.S. Congress and moved to Washington, D.C., with his family.



Mary Todd Lincoln, 1846

Lincoln was in Congress as the Northern and Southern states became more divided over the issue of **slavery**. The North depended on paid laborers in its factories and small farms, and believed in a strong central government. Slavery was outlawed in the Northern states. The South depended on “King Cotton” grown on large plantations and used slave labor. Slaves, primarily black Africans, were owned as property. Most slaves lived under very poor conditions. They had no personal or **civil rights**. The laws of Southern states allowed and protected slavery.

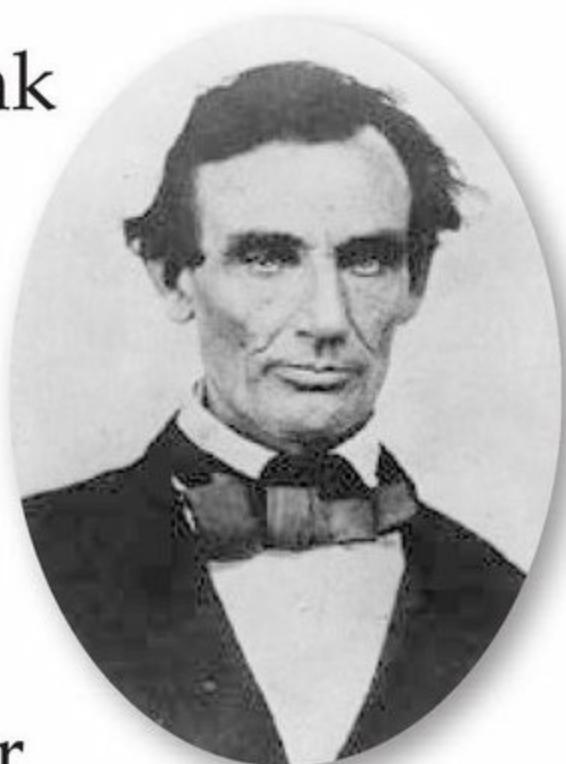
As the United States expanded, western territories asked for statehood. Would these states enter as “free” or “slave” states? Lincoln opposed slavery. As an Illinois representative in Washington, he believed that state laws in the South protected slavery. However, he fought the spread of slavery in the western territories.

Lincoln returned to Springfield after two years in Washington and for the next few years shared a successful law practice with his partner, William Herndon. Lincoln became known for his honesty, legal skills, wit, and fine speeches.

America Divided

Meanwhile, the pro- and anti-slavery forces struggled for power. Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. The new law allowed the residents of each territory to decide whether they wanted to be free or slave states.

Lincoln decided it was time to speak out against the spread of slavery and to try again for political office. He joined the new Republican Party, which opposed slavery. He was nominated in 1858 as their candidate for senator. His opponent was Senator Stephen Douglas. During the **campaign**, they held the Lincoln-Douglas debates, which captured the attention of the country. Lincoln declared that slavery was causing a national crisis. “A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.” Lincoln argued that blacks had the “right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” just like whites. Douglas said that the Constitution guaranteed **equality** only to white citizens, not to blacks. Each state, he believed, had the right to decide whether it would be slave or free.

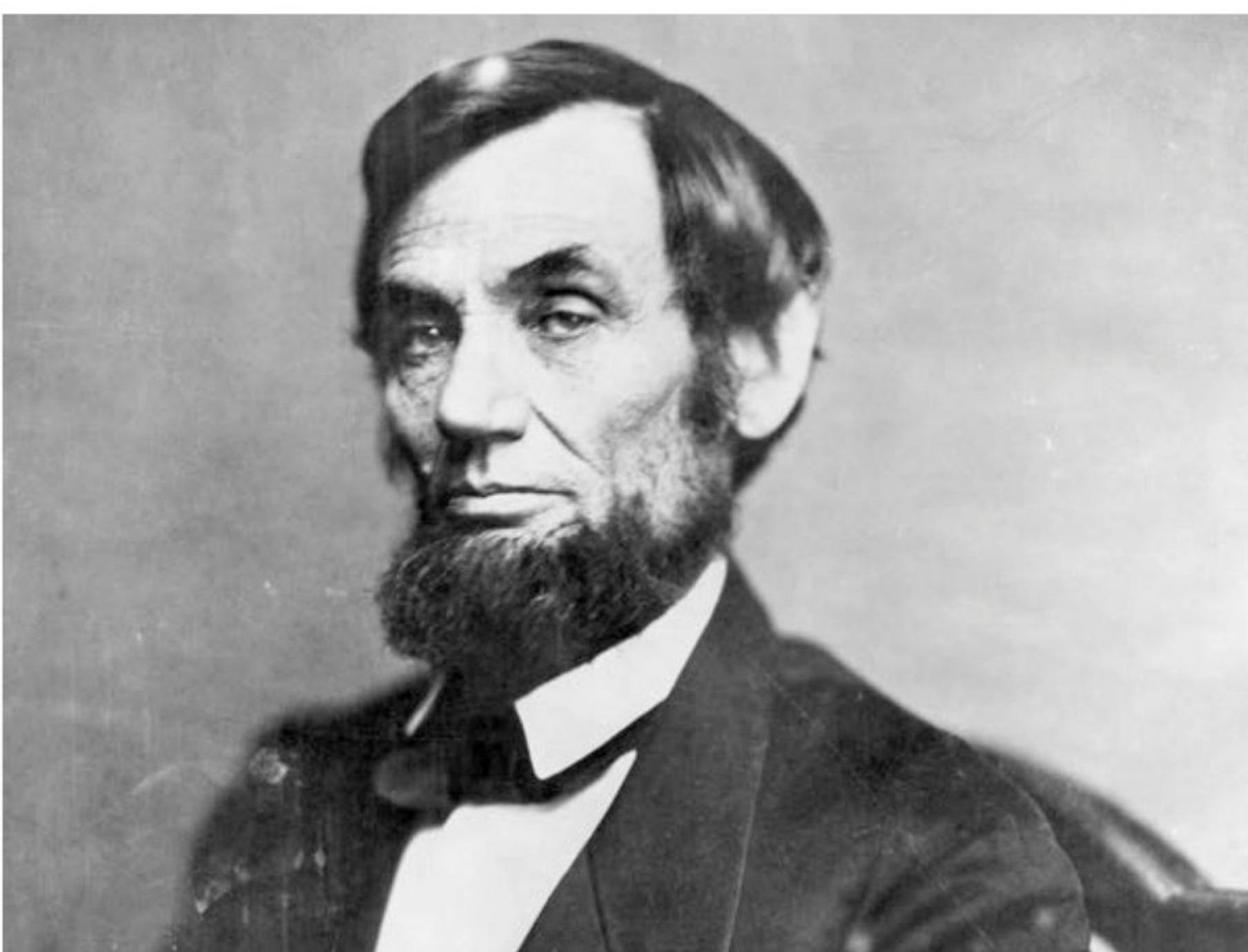


Lincoln in 1858,
two weeks before
his final debate
with Douglas



Stephen A.
Douglas

Lincoln lost the election, but the debates made him popular, especially in the Republican Party. By 1860, he was the party's choice for U.S. president. During his campaign, he was called "Honest Abe," the **homespun** man of the people who stood for equality and freedom. He won the election. The North and the western territories rejoiced; the South was outraged. Even before Lincoln's inauguration, seven Southern states voted to **secede** from the United States of America. The pro-slavery states established a government called the Confederate States of America, and its leader, President Jefferson Davis, prepared the Confederate states for war.



Lincoln first grew a beard after winning the presidency but before moving to Washington. The beard was a suggestion from an 11-year-old girl.

The War Years

President Lincoln hoped to avoid war, but events moved quickly. By April 14, Northern troops had surrendered Fort Sumter after South Carolina cannons fired on the fort. Both the Union and the Confederacy moved quickly to call volunteers and collect arms and supplies.



The inauguration of Lincoln took place on March 4, 1861, at the U.S. Capitol, which was still under construction.

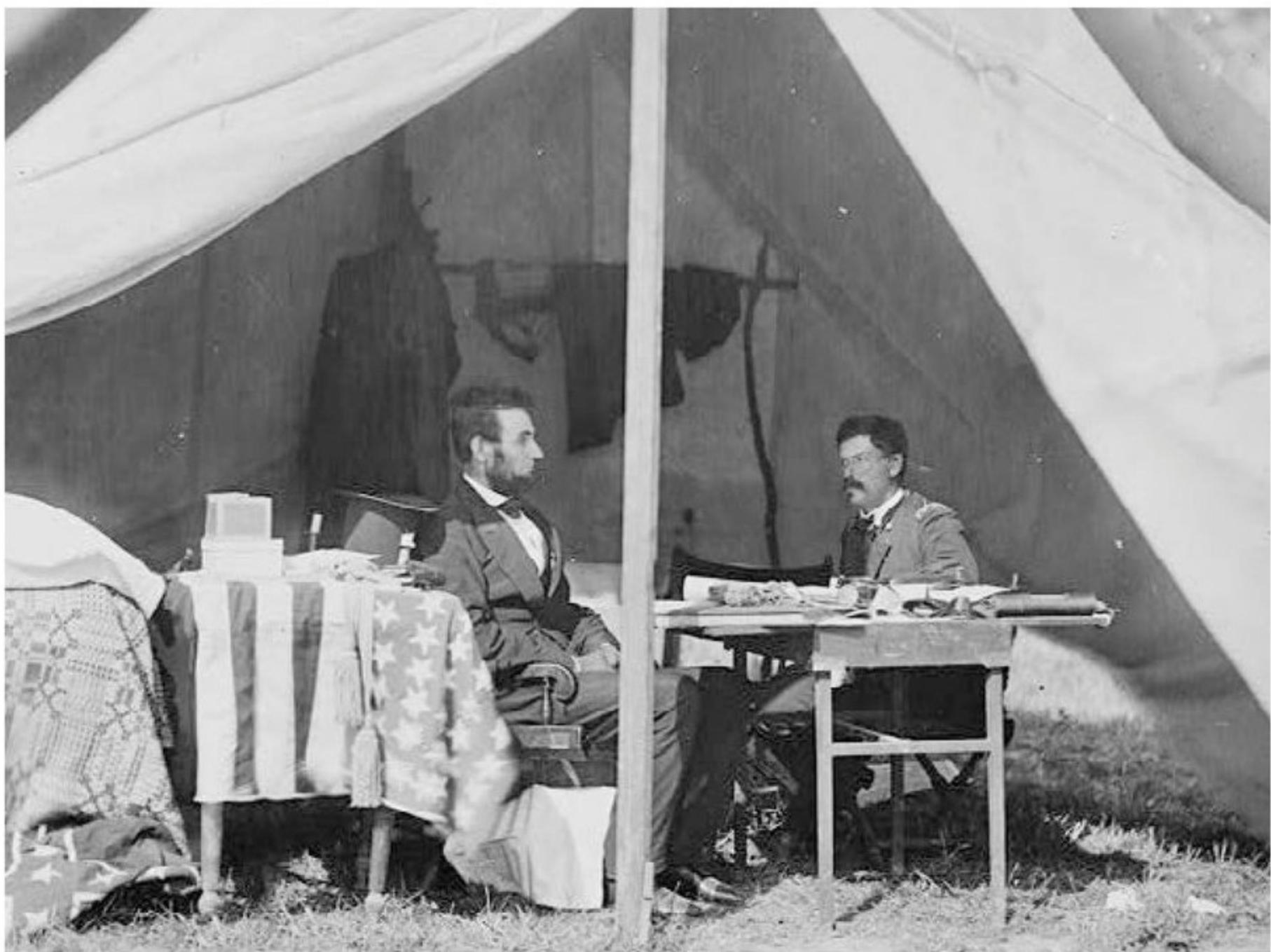
The South's better military leadership defeated Union forces in the first battle at Bull Run. Lincoln struggled to find strong leaders for the Union troops throughout the war. Under General George B. McClellan, the Union troops had some successes, but by 1862 they were stopped by Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Union forces controlled New

Orleans and the Mississippi River, but there were few victories. Lincoln took over more of the military planning as the North called for action. Great numbers of young soldiers on both sides were killed, wounded, or missing as the war continued into its second year.

The Union lost the second battle of Bull Run, and at Antietam both sides suffered the bloodiest battle of the war. Powerful Republican senators urged President Lincoln to make the **abolition** of slavery a war goal. They argued that to fight the war successfully, the Union needed to remove the issue that caused the war. Lincoln was finally convinced that as president he could order abolition in the South. On January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, which freed all the slaves in the South. Freed blacks rushed to join the Union army, and by the end of the war, more than 180,000 former slaves had volunteered.



Company E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry was composed of former slaves and other free black men.



President Lincoln with General McClellan at Antietam. General McClellan was replaced in November 1862.

The summer of 1863 brought victory to Union forces at Gettysburg, which was a turning point in the war. President Lincoln, while dedicating a cemetery to the many soldiers who had died, delivered his famous Gettysburg Address. The speech lasted only two minutes, yet it is remembered for its simple beauty and **eloquence**. Lincoln spoke of the war as a test of whether the nation could survive as a democracy. He challenged those still alive to complete the unfinished work of those who had died. He challenged them to make sure “that the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Under the newly named General Ulysses S. Grant, the Union troops won victories in the West and South. Lincoln saw hope of the war's end as Confederate troops were defeated in Georgia and Virginia in late 1864. He was re-elected president and, in early 1865, cheered Congress passing the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which outlawed slavery in the United States.

The war lasted four years and cost 600,000 lives. The Union survived, and slavery was abolished. But only six days after the end of the war, President Abraham Lincoln lay dead from an assassin's bullet. John Wilkes Booth, a Confederate supporter, shot Lincoln while he attended a play at Washington's Ford's Theatre. As Lincoln's body was carried back to his beloved Illinois on a funeral train, mourners silently saluted this great American hero.



An 1865 depiction of Lincoln's assassination

Glossary

abolition (<i>n.</i>)	the act of doing away with or ending something; the act of making slavery illegal (p. 13)
campaign (<i>n.</i>)	a planned series of actions designed to reach a certain goal (p. 10)
civil rights (<i>n.</i>)	legal, social, and economic rights that guarantee freedom and equality for all citizens (p. 9)
eloquence (<i>n.</i>)	the ability to speak or write clearly and effectively; clear, effective writing or speaking (p. 14)
emancipator (<i>n.</i>)	a person who sets others free (p. 4)
equality (<i>n.</i>)	the condition in which everyone has the same rights (p. 10)
homespun (<i>adj.</i>)	humble; from a simple rural background (p. 11)
legislature (<i>n.</i>)	a group of elected government officials whose job is to make or change laws (p. 7)
privilege (<i>n.</i>)	a special benefit enjoyed under certain conditions; an honor (p. 8)
secede (<i>v.</i>)	to formally withdraw from membership in an organization or group (p. 11)
slavery (<i>n.</i>)	the state or condition of being a slave, or the property of another person (p. 9)
solemn (<i>adj.</i>)	serious or sad (p. 4)

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A *Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book*

Word Count: 1,518

Connections

Writing

Create five interview questions that you would ask Lincoln if you could. Develop responses to the questions based on how you think Lincoln would respond.

Social Studies

Look up the text of the Gettysburg Address. Research vocabulary you do not understand. Rewrite the speech in your own words.



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