

# LESSON 7: LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION

GRADE 5-8

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Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum

## Objectives

- Identify at least three individuals involved in Lincoln's assassination.
- Understand the motivations compelling Booth to assassinate the president.
- Define vocabulary relevant to an assassination, conspiracy, and trial.
- Assess and interpret the subject matter of an historic photograph or document.
- Appreciate the importance of collecting and preserving primary sources.
- Recognize how primary sources can be used in the understanding and telling of historic stories.



## INTRODUCTION

John Wilkes Booth was not the first person to ever consider killing Abraham Lincoln. Death threats to the President were frequent and common. They came from the disgruntled and the deranged. But no one really believed any would be carried out. No prominent figure in

American history had ever been assassinated. Still, concern for Lincoln's safety grew as the Civil War continued, and with good reason. Lincoln's politics, especially his stance on slavery, were divisive. The country was in turmoil and many blamed Lincoln.

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to the story of Lincoln's assassination and those who conspired to kill him, the issues dividing the United States at that time, and the techniques used by library and museum professionals in uncovering and interpreting history.

## Materials

- "Analyzing A Photograph Worksheet" (in this lesson plan)
- "Analyzing A Document Worksheet" (in this lesson plan)
- Primary documents from the "Lincoln Biography Reading Kit" (and on this CD)
  - #70 Ford's Theatre Announcement
  - #71 Ford's Theatre
  - #72 Martyrdom of Lincoln
  - #73 Telegraph
  - #74 Lincoln's Deathbed
  - #76 Funeral Procession
  - #77 Funeral Train Map
  - #78 Lincoln Lying in State
  - #79 A Nation Mourns
  - #80 Stanton Telegraph
  - #81 Lincoln Home in Mourning
  - #83 John Wilkes Booth
  - #84 Reward for Capture of Booth
  - #85 O'Laughlin
  - #86 Spangler
  - #87 Arnold
  - #88 Mudd
  - #89 Herold
  - #90 Atzerodt
  - #91 Payne
  - #92 Surratt
  - #93 Conspirators' Hanging



## LESSON 7: LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION

### PROCEDURE

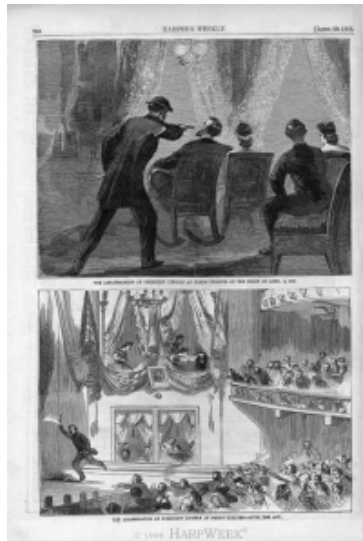
1. Review with your class the facts surrounding Lincoln's Assassination. For older students, you might pass out the short article on the assassination found in this lesson.
2. Ask your class: How do historians know what they know? From where do they get their information?
3. Present these questions: Do original documents or photographs make a story more interesting? Why? Why do we save these things? Should we?
4. Discuss with your students how historians can pull together documents, photographs and artifacts to tell a historic story in an exhibit.
5. Pass out the worksheets and handouts. Ask your students to work independently or in small groups to analyze the documents and images in order to complete the worksheets.

### Extension

1. Make a list of reasons why someone would want to harm or assassinate the president.
2. Pretend you are a journalist who landed an interview with one of the conspirators. Write a transcription of the interview or an article about the interview.
3. Pretend you are a defense attorney for one of the conspirators. Write up a defense of your client to present to the judge and jury.

### Discussion Prompts

1. Lincoln gave a speech a few days before his assassination at the White House. In this speech he made the statement that freed blacks should be given the right to vote. How was this received by the public?
2. John Wilkes Booth was the most famous actor in the North and South during and after the Civil War. Do you think this helped him influence people to adopt his political beliefs?
3. John Wilkes Booth had help in his plot to kill Lincoln. What similarities do you see between Booth and his conspirators?
4. No president or politically important person had ever been assassinated in the United States. What effect did the assassination of the president have on the American public?
5. Why didn't Lincoln's funeral train go straight back to Springfield?
6. What was the fate of each of the conspirators and why was Mary Surratt's fate so shocking?



### Online Resources

Ford's Theatre National  
Historic Site

[www.nps.gov/foth/index2.htm](http://www.nps.gov/foth/index2.htm)

Surratt Society-The Original  
John Wilkes Booth Escape  
Route Tour

[www.surratt.org/su\\_bert.html](http://www.surratt.org/su_bert.html)

The Trial of the Lincoln  
Conspirators

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lincolnconspiracy/lincolnconspiracy.html>

Assassination of President  
Abraham Lincoln, Abraham  
Lincoln Papers, Library of  
Congress

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alrintr.html>

### VOCABULARY LIST

**Abet** – To approve, encourage, and support an action or a plan of action; urge and help on.

**Apparition** – An unusual or unexpected sight; a ghostly figure.

**Assassin** – A person who murders a well-known or important person, such as a president.

**Assassination** – The murder of a politically important or famous person.

**Catafalque** – A raised structure on which a deceased person's body lies.

**Conspirators** – People who join together in a secret agreement to do an unlawful or wrongful act.

**Conspiracy** – A secret, illegal plan made by two or more people.

**Ferry** - A boat or ship that regularly carries people over a body of water.

**Fugitives** – A person who runs from the law.

**Manacles** – Metal irons used on the hands and feet of prisoners.

**Penitentiary** – A state or federal prison in the United States.

**Plot** - A secret plan, usually to do something wrong or illegal.

**Sympathizer** - A person who supports a particular group or cause.

## WHO KILLED LINCOLN?

**J**ohn Wilkes Booth was an accomplished Shakespearean actor and member of a well-known theatrical family. He performed in many plays throughout the country. Booth was also a passionate racist and enthusiastic supporter of the South during the Civil War. He grew to hate Abraham Lincoln, who stood for everything that Booth opposed. In March 1864 Booth made plans with a small group of conspirators to kidnap Lincoln while he visited a hospital in Washington, take him to Richmond and hold him ransom in exchange for Confederate prisoners of war. The plan failed when Lincoln's schedule was changed at the last minute.

Two days after General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865 at Appomattox, Lincoln made a speech to a crowd outside the White House. Booth was in the crowd and heard the President say that blacks should be allowed to vote. Incensed at this, Booth changed his plans to kill Lincoln rather than kidnap him.

President and Mrs. Lincoln were scheduled to attend a performance of *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theatre on Good Friday, April 14. Booth found out about the schedule and had one last meeting with his co-conspirators to finalize plans for the assassination. The conspirators also planned to kill other government officials on the same day, including Vice-President Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward. They

hoped this would lead to confusion and lack of direction in the government, allowing the South to return to power.

President and Mrs. Lincoln invited several people to attend the performance with them, but many declined, including General and Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant. Major Henry Rathbone and his fiancé, Clara Harris, finally agreed to attend the play with the Lincolns. Shortly after 10 pm, Booth walked past where Lincoln's bodyguard had left his post. He entered the presidential booth and shot Lincoln in the back of the head. He stabbed Major Rathbone and then jumped from the booth to the stage below. As he jumped, he shouted "*Sic temper tyrannis*" (Latin for "as always to tyrants") and he caught his heel on a display flag, breaking his leg. Still, he managed to run across the stage and fled the theater without being caught.

President Lincoln was taken across the street to a lodging house, the Petersen home, where he was laid diagonally across the bed because it was too short for him. Lincoln never regained consciousness. Surrounded by his family and government officials, Lincoln died at 7:22 a.m. the following day. After Lincoln's death, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton spoke the famous words, "Now he belongs to the ages."

Booth escaped but was caught in a barn in Virginia thirteen days later. He was shot and killed by armed soldiers. The other eight conspirators were also

caught and tried by a military tribunal. Four of the conspirators were executed by hanging, one fled the country, two were given life prison sentences and the last received a six-year prison term. For many years, it was thought that Confederate officials planned the assassination, but it has never been proven.

Lincoln was not popular while he was president, but in death he became a martyr and a hero. No president or politically important person had been assassinated in the United States and it

*"Lincoln's politics, especially his stance on slavery, were divisive. The country was in turmoil and many blamed Lincoln."*

was an extreme shock to the American people. The country was overcome with grief. Thousands viewed Lincoln's body lying in state in Washington in the White House and in the Capital Rotunda. In fact, one in four Americans, viewed Lincoln's body either in Washington or in the many cities on the long, mournful route home to Springfield. Lincoln's funeral train traveled the country from Washington to his final resting place in Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois.



*Embellishing a witness's recollection that the moon shone with a reddish hue on the night Lincoln was shot, Illinois' celebrated prairie poet Carl Sandburg popularized the phrase "Blood on the Moon" in connection to the Lincoln assassination.*



## LESSON 7: LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

#### Abraham Lincoln

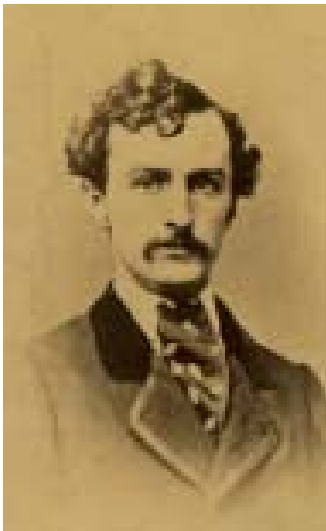
Sixteenth president of the United States. Kept the country united in the midst of a bloody Civil War and worked to end slavery with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment.

#### Mary Todd Lincoln

Wife of President Abraham Lincoln.

#### John Wilkes Booth

The most famous actor of his time. He assassinated President Lincoln.



#### Clara Harris

Daughter of a New York senator, and fiancé of Major Henry Reed Rathbone. She was Lincoln's guest at Ford's Theatre the night of the assassination.

#### Major Henry Reed Rathbone

Attended the theater with the Lincolns and his fiancé, Clara Harris. Major Rathbone

never forgave himself for not protecting the president and eventually went crazy.

#### Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton

Ran the investigation and the trial against the conspirators. When Lincoln died, Stanton said, "Now he belongs to the ages."

#### Ulysses S. Grant

Head of the Union Armies. Grant and his wife, Julia, were unable to attend the theater with the Lincolns on the night of the assassination.

#### Michael O'Laughlen

Suspected of aiding Booth in his conspiracy. Also suspected of planning to assassinate General Grant.

#### David Herold

Suspected of helping Booth escape.

#### Samuel B. Arnold

Suspected of participating in Booth's conspiracy on the basis of a letter found in Booth's hotel room.

#### Edman Spangler

Suspected of aiding the conspiracy by tending to Booth's horse and helping the actor escape from the back of Ford's Theater.

#### Mary Surratt

The mother of conspirator John Surratt. Suspected of

aiding Booth's conspiracy by supplying arms and materials at her tavern in Surrattsville, Maryland. She also hid the conspirators at her home. She was the first woman executed by the United States government.

#### George Atzerodt

Suspected of planning to assassinate Vice-President Johnson and participating in Booth's conspiracy.

#### Lewis Powell

Also known as Lewis Payne. Suspected of attempting to murder Secretary Seward and in participating in Booth's conspiracy.

#### Dr. Samuel Mudd

Suspected of aiding Booth's conspiracy by treating the assassin's broken leg and helping him escape.

#### Secretary of State William Henry Seward

Lincoln's strongest supporter in the Cabinet. He was also a target for attack by Booth's conspirators on the evening of April 14.

#### Andrew Johnson

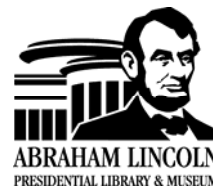
Vice-President of the United States, Johnson became president upon Lincoln's death.



*Lewis Powell, also known as Lewis Payne.*

# PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## Observation

Study the photograph carefully. Fill in the chart with the appropriate information

People	Objects	Activities

## Inference

Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Knowledge

Why is this photograph important to history?

What do you know about this time period or event?

## Questions

What questions does this photograph raise in your mind and what resources would you use to find the answers to them?

## Activity

Write a diary or journal entry or write a newspaper article as a companion to the photograph.

# DOCUMENT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. Circle the type of document  
Letter                      Speech or Address                      Telegram                      Map or Chart  
Meeting Minutes                      Political Cartoon                      Report                      Resolution  
Public Law                      Diary/Journal                      Patent                      Public Record  
Executive Order                      Newspaper or Magazine Article                      Email                      Press Release  
Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Does the document have any unique physical qualities?  
Letterhead                      Handwritten                      Seal  
Notations                      Watermark                      Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Who is the author (or creator of the document)?
  
4. Is the document dated \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No    If yes, what is the date?    If no, are there clues in the document to help you date it?
  
5. What is the author's title or position?
  
6. For what audience was the document written?
  
7. List three things the author said that you think are important.  
a.  
b.  
c.
  
8. Why do you think this document was written?
  
9. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written?    Quote from the document.
  
10. Does this author state opinions? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No    If yes, give example of an opinion the author presented.
  
11. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written.  
a.  
b.
  
12. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document.

