

# LESSON I: ABRAHAM & MARY A COUPLE OF CONTRASTS

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum

## INTRODUCTION

Our sixteenth president has been referred to as Savior of the United States and has taken ownership of such honorable nicknames as Honest Abe, The Rail Splitter and the Great Emancipator. Although fulfilled in her role as First Lady, and acknowledged in history as being well educated, intelligent, supportive, caring and gracious, Mary Todd Lincoln has been referred to as a shrew, hellcat, Her Satanic Majesty (John Hay's diaries) and eventually and perhaps the most controversial of labels: insane. She has been considered a liability to the President and ranked by some historians as the worst First Lady in America.

Yet, given so many contrasting personal characteristics, the Lincoln's marriage survived and at particular times even thrived, until death did, indeed, them part. Were Abraham and Mary Lincoln a classic case of "opposites attract" or "misery loves company?" Did they "feed off each other" or did Mary's "Mr. Lincoln" early on recognize and silently consider Mary's own social and political insight, interests and abilities as an attainable asset which could enable him to reach his own not yet publicly professed political ambitions? So, what common denominator or common characteristics were there between this tall, gangly man with mismanaged hair who at times in his childhood had been "rented out" by his own father and the fair, petite, socialite from a wealthy, slave-holding family in the South? These two seemingly very different and very complex people were not only bonded by their love for each other but by the tragedies that seemed to plague them.

## PROCEDURE

- To prepare students for this activity, they should read the "Meet Mary Todd Lincoln" narrative. To gain further perspective, they should also read the various quotes from historic associates of the Lincolns contained in "Views of Mary" handout.
- Hand out the "Venn Diagram Template" to students. If they are not familiar with this type of diagram, explain that a Venn Diagram is a visual organizer which can be used to compare and contrast information as well as to show similarities. The diagram is made up of two overlapping circles. The over-lapping portion is referred as the Intersection.
- For this activity, the



## MATERIALS

- "Venn Diagram Templates" (in this lesson plan)
- Overhead Projector
- "Meet Mary Todd Lincoln" Narrative in the Mary Lincoln Kit (and on this CD)
- "Views of Mary" handout (in this lesson plan)
- "A Couple of Contrasts" Student Page (in this lesson plan)

## Objectives

- Use a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast information.
- Use discussion/debate skills to enhance their knowledge and understanding of Mary Todd Lincoln
- Be able to process information to formulate perspective

circle on the left is labeled MARY and the circle on the right is labeled ABRAHAM. These two circles will represent *dissimilar* characteristics of the two. The Intersection will contain their *similar* or shared personal characteristics. The characteristics that are dissimilar or unique to each should be listed in

the appropriate circles marked "Mary" and "Abraham".

- Give each student a copy of the Student Page which contains a list of various personal characteristics. Students should read through the list and "assign" each characteristic to either Mary, Abraham, both if students feel that the Lin-

## LESSON 1: ABRAHAM & MARY

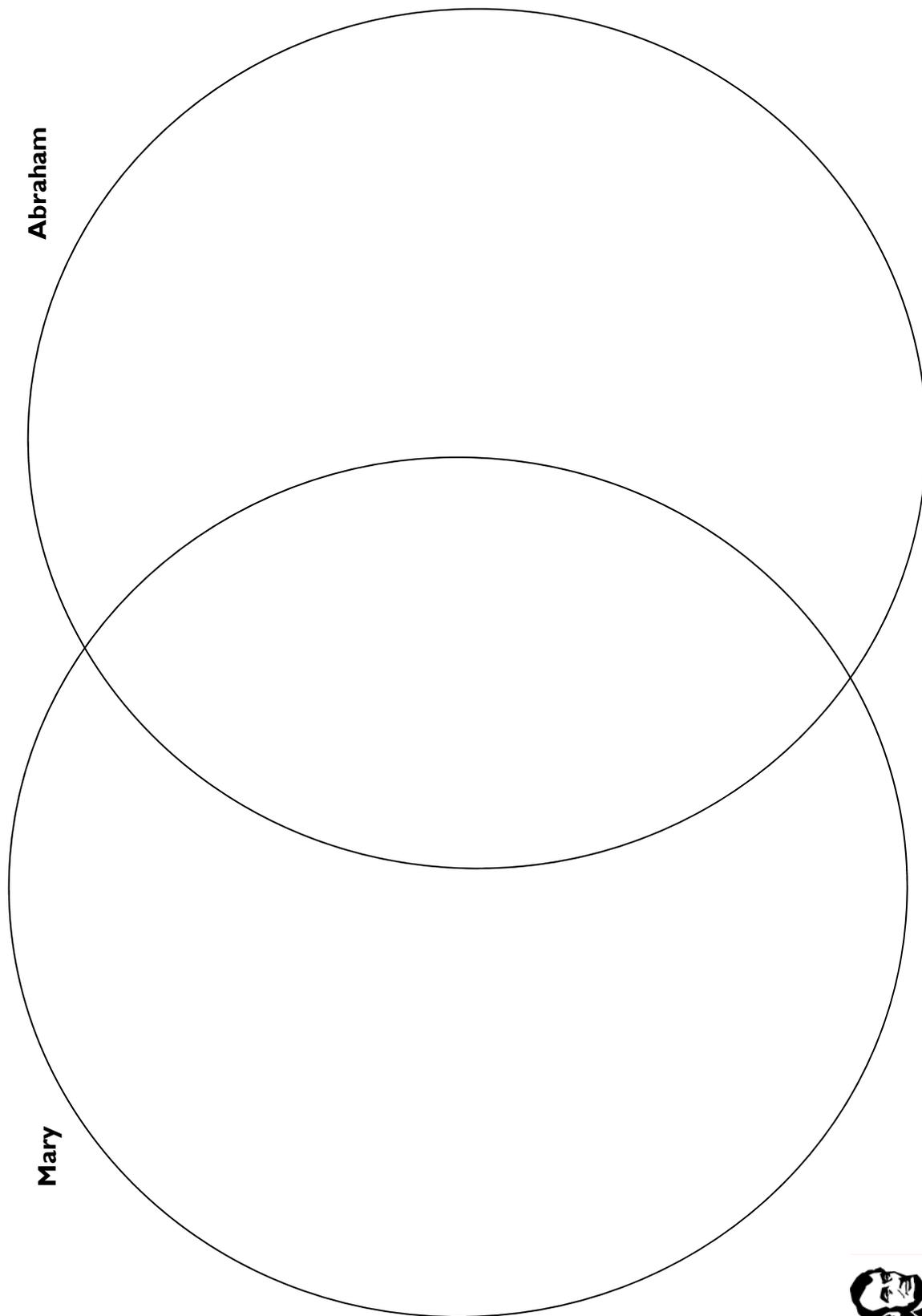
### PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- colns shared a particular characteristic or neither if students feel it does not apply. Students should write M (Mary), A (Abraham), B (Both) or N (Neither) next to each word.
- Lay four large place cards evenly spaced horizontally on the floor. One card should be titled MARY, one ABE, one BOTH and one NEITHER. Review the list of characteristics, calling out one, such as "Sensitive". Have students look at their list and determine if they assigned that characteristic to Mary, Abe, Both or Neither. Ask students to stand behind the card that depicts their choice for this characterization. For instance, if students feel only Mary was "sensitive" they should stand behind the card that reads "Mary"; if they feel that only Abe was "sensitive" they should stand behind the card marked "Abe". If they feel that both Mary and Abe were "sensitive", students should stand behind the card indicating "Both." If students feel that neither Mary nor Abe was sensitive, they should stand behind "Neither".
  - After students have taken their places, discuss with them why they chose to stand where they are. Students should back up their "standings" by offering any examples of behavior exemplifying that characteristic. Students should be allowed to rebut, argue or debate. The student exchange of opinions and perceptions will offer opportunities to see Mary and Abe Lincoln from someone else's perspective and may influence the student thinking. Follow this procedure with several other characteristics from the list.
  - Next, have students review their list again and assign the characteristics to either Mary, Abe, or Both on the Venn Diagram. Any characteristics students marked as "Neither" will not be listed on the Diagram. All "shared" characteristics should be listed in the Intersection of the diagram.
  - Using an overhead projector, project the blank Venn Diagram on the board. With the class, review each characteristic, discuss and decide the unique vs. similar characteristics and list them on the overhead for students to see.

### POSSIBLE CHARACTERISTICS

POETIC	OPINIONATED	CALCULATING
MOODY	SUBTLE	AMBITIOUS
LITERARY	PRACTICAL	CHAGRINED
DICTATORIAL	PATIENT	SYMPATHETIC
A "PEOPLE" PERSON	MISUNDERSTOOD	POLITICALLY AS-
PETTY	STUBBORN	TUTE
HUMBLE	INSIGHTFUL	MORAL
DOMINATED BY FEARS	INSPIRED	ECCENTRIC
SENSITIVE	DEPRESSED	SUSPICIOUS
COMPLICATED	EMPATHETIC	INSANE

NAME:-----





# Views of Mary

***“Among the many ladies who visits the hospitals none is more indefatigable than Mrs. Lincoln.”***

*Washington Daily Chronicle,*

*August 29, 1862*

**“I have no doubt but that she is insane.”**

*John Todd Stuart to Robert Todd Lincoln, 1875*

I have no hesitation, in pronouncing her sane, and far more reasonable, and gentle, than in former years...Surely, the evidences of derangement exhibited last spring, must have arisen from physical disorder—she informs me that her health was poor before going to Florida, and during her stay there, and on her return, was often conscious of the presence of fever—moreover, had used Chloral very freely, for the purpose of inducing sleep—those causes, had doubtless much to do, with producing the sad result.”

*Elizabeth Todd Edwards to Robert Todd Lincoln, November 5, 1875*

“The weak minded Mrs. Lincoln had her bosom on exhibition, and a flower pot on her head...”

*Senator James W. Nesmith to his wife, Washington, February 5, 1862*

**“She tells me she is a conservative, repudiates the idea that her secessionist brothers can have any influence on her, spoke of the Herald as a paper friendly to Mr. Lincoln.... She told what orders she had given for renewing the White House and her elegant fitting up of Mr. Lincoln’s room, her conservatory and love of flowers...and ended with giving me a gracious invitation to repeat my visit and saying she would send em a bouquet. I came home entranced.”**

*George Bancroft*

“Mrs. Lincoln is making and unmaking the political fortunes of men and is similar to Queen Elizabeth in her statesmanlike tastes.”

*New York Times, February 23, 1861*

“Are the President and Mrs. Lincoln aware there is a Civil War? If they are not, Mr. and Mrs. Wade are for that reason decline to participate in feasting and dancing.”

*Senator Benjamin Wade, 1862*

*“Aunt Mary is nervous and dependent upon the companionship of someone.”*

*Elizabeth Todd Edwards to her daughter, April 26, 1862*

*“As you look at her [Mary Lincoln] and talk with her, the fact that she has so many enemies strikes you as one of the moral curiosities of this venomous time, for she has never in any way harmed one of the men and women who are so recklessly assailing her.”*

*William O. Stoddard*

“I was in Washington some day since and saw all. Mrs. Lincoln is a very curious—excentric—wicked woman. Poor Lincoln! He is domestically a desolate man—has been for years to my own knowledge.”\

*William H. Herndon to Caroline H. Dall, Springfield, January 28, 1862*

“The devil is abroad, having great wrath. His daughter, the Hell-Cat [Mary Lincoln], sent Stackpole in to blackguard me about the feed of her horses. She thinks there is cheating round the board and with that candor so charming in the young does not hesitate to say so. I declined opening communication on the subject.”

*John Hay to John Nicolay, April 5, 1862*



# A COUPLE OF CONTRASTS STUDENT PAGE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

poetic\_\_\_\_

moody\_\_\_\_

literary\_\_\_\_

dictatorial\_\_\_\_

a "people" person\_\_\_\_

petty\_\_\_\_

humble\_\_\_\_

dominated by fears\_\_\_\_

sensitive\_\_\_\_

complicated\_\_\_\_

opinionated\_\_\_\_

subtle\_\_\_\_

practical \_\_\_\_

patient\_\_\_\_

misunderstood\_\_\_\_

stubborn\_\_\_\_

insightful\_\_\_\_

inspired\_\_\_\_

depressed\_\_\_\_

empathetic\_\_\_\_

calculating\_\_\_\_

ambitious\_\_\_\_

chagrined\_\_\_\_

sympathetic\_\_\_\_

politically astute\_\_\_\_

moral\_\_\_\_

eccentric\_\_\_\_

suspicious\_\_\_\_

insane\_\_\_\_

other\_\_\_\_\_

