TEACHER'S GUIDE
PRIMARY SOURCE SET

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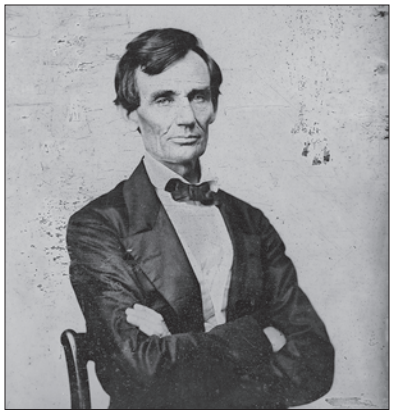
Abraham Lincoln Takes a National Role

Though now considered an icon of the state of Illinois, Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky. His father Thomas was not successful as a farmer and often moved around to find odd jobs. By 1830, the Lincoln family settled near Decatur, Illinois. The young Lincoln, determined to learn, sewed together sheets of paper to make himself a math notebook, which he used to work out math problems and measurements.



Abraham Lincoln
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007686613/

Historical Background

A poem Lincoln wrote in 1846 reflects the idyllic imagery of a backwoods childhood while also recalling the toll of death and illness on family and friends.

As a young man, Lincoln's personable demeanor and service in the 1832 Black Hawk War increased his profile enough to get him elected to a seat in the state legislature in 1834, where he became an influential voice in the state senate as a member of the Whig Party and a moderate critic of the practice of slavery. Lincoln moved to Springfield, Illinois in 1837, where he began to practice law. After he left the legislature in 1841, he met and courted Mary Todd, the future Mrs. Lincoln.

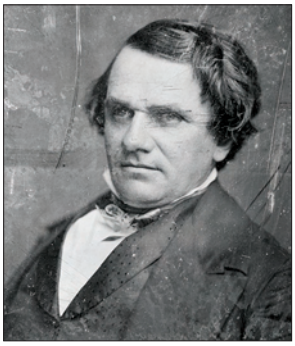
Lincoln Finds His Cause

Lincoln's stature among the Illinois Whigs and his popularity led to his election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1846. He ran on a standard Whig platform of "internal improvements," advocating a stronger role for the federal government in promoting American industries and improving infrastructure. Lincoln's positions against the war with Mexico and against slavery in the territories were in the minority in the thirtieth Congress, which was dominated by issues of expansion and Manifest Destiny.

In 1849, Lincoln left Washington, D.C. after deciding not to run for reelection. He returned to Springfield to take up law again and began to make a name for himself as he traveled around Illinois and advocated in Federal and circuit courts. His time in Illinois courtrooms allowed him to polish his skills in oratory and to establish a good reputation in the state's rural areas.

Lincoln had long supported attempts to ban slavery in the territories that the United States acquired from

Mexico after its victory in the Mexican-American War in 1848 – present-day California and much of the southwestern United States. This issue provoked furious political debate and polarized Congress along regional lines. It reached a crisis point in January 1854 when Senator Stephen Douglas introduced a bill that became known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The Act was passed in May and provided that new territories, and perhaps existing states, could decide on the status of slavery through their representatives ("popular sovereignty").



Stephen Arnold Douglas
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004663930/

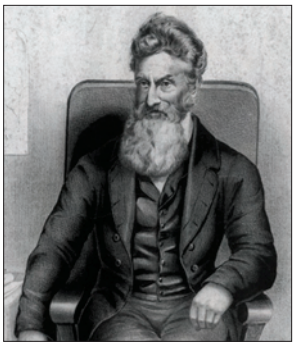
Lincoln's opposition to the measure and to the expansion of slavery was more vigorous than that of most members of the Whig Party. He ran for the U.S. Senate to act as a counterbalance to Stephen Douglas, but ultimately withdrew from the race. Many former Whigs banded together to create the Republican Party as a vehicle to oppose the expansion of slavery. Lincoln increasingly became associated with the Republicans and spoke at the Illinois Republican state convention in May 1856.

Lincoln Finds a National Audience

This energy carried Lincoln into 1858, a congressional election year. He once again resolved to throw his hat in the ring for election to the Senate, running against Stephen Douglas, the Democratic incumbent. In a draft of a May 1858 speech on popular sovereignty, Lincoln wrote, "I do not understand, that the previlege [sic] one man takes of making a slave of another, or holding him as such, is any part of 'self government.'" In his June 16 acceptance speech after winning the Republican nomination to run against Douglas, he argued that the "government cannot endure, half-slave and half-free." On July 24, Lincoln wrote to Douglas formally asking him to agree to a series of debates.

The first debate took place in Ottawa, Illinois, on August 21. Over the course of the seven debates, the two candidates honed their messages and traded shots. Lincoln criticized Douglas's indifference to the expansion of slavery, while also warning that events such as the Dred Scott decision threatened to lead to the spread of slavery across the country, undercutting the Constitution and the egalitarian foundation of the republic. Douglas defended the idea of popular sovereignty while also accusing Lincoln of being in league with extreme abolitionists and an advocate of complete racial equality. Though the debates were well publicized and discussed around the nation, a vote of the state legislature elected Douglas over Lincoln on November 2, 1858.

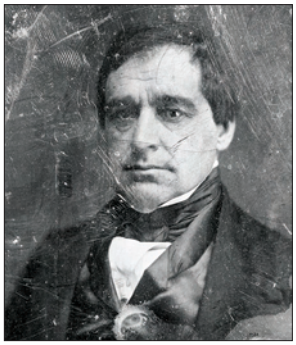
The exposure given to the debates made Lincoln a national figure and a potential candidate for the presidency the following year. Divisions and factions within the Republican Party concerned Lincoln, who stressed a moderate platform. He wrote to Schuyler Colfax in 1859, "My main object … would be to hedge against divisions in the Republican ranks generally, and particularly for the contest of 1860."



John Brown
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97515662/

A speech he made to the Cooper Institute in New York City on February 27, 1860, argued that the thirty-nine signers of the Constitution understood the role of the federal government in prohibiting slavery in territories where it had not existed. Intending to calm the southern states, he conceded that the federal government could not interfere with slavery where it already existed. Lincoln nonetheless refused to recognize slavery as

morally right. To those who linked the Republicans with John Brown and other violent abolitionists, Lincoln suggested that these were the natural consequences of slavery and would only be more frequent if slavery were to expand. Lincoln gained an instant reputation in New-York and the speech was well received nationally.



Hannibal Hamlin
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004663982/

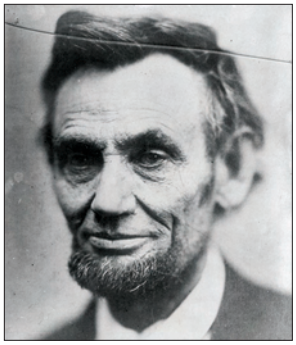
Lincoln approached the Republican National Convention in 1860 as a formidable candidate in his own right as well as a compromise candidate. He transcended many of the divisions within the party, and also cemented his popularity in northern and Midwestern states that voted for the Democrats in the 1856 presidential election. The convention nominated Lincoln on May 18, with Hannibal Hamlin of Maine as his vice-presidential candidate. Lincoln would be running against his old rival Stephen Douglas. However, Douglas did not have the support of southern Democrats, who nominated their own candidate.

Lincoln remained in Springfield for most of the election season while his supporters campaigned. One Republican partisan group, the "Wide Awakes," conducted mass marches by torchlight and rallied for the Republican Party. Lincoln was opposed by a number of parties, none of which posed much of a challenge individually. He won a majority of votes in the Electoral College, but his share of the vote was only 40% of the total. Lincoln did not carry a single southern state. Weeks after the election, South Carolina declared that it was seceding from the United States. Six other southern states followed suit and organized a separate government called the Confederate States of America.

Lincoln made few public statements about the secessionist states and worked to placate the southern states through cabinet-level appointments. He left Springfield with his family on February 11, 1861. On March 4, in his inauguration speech, Lincoln asked the southern states to rethink their actions and not to dissolve the Union. At the same time, he made it clear that secessionists would be considered aggressors, and that he would work to "preserve, protect, and defend" the integrity of the Union. He now stood poised to resolve a conflict much greater than any he had encountered in his professional or political life.

Suggestions for Teachers

Lincoln's speech at the Cooper Institute was well received nationally. He used convincing arguments to persuade his audience. He argued against slavery by contending:



"Last Photograph of Lincoln from life"
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2009630692/

- The signers of the Constitution understood the role of the federal government in prohibiting slavery where it had not existed.
- Violent abolitionists were the natural consequences of slavery and would become more frequent if slavery expanded.

Have the students first find the places in Lincoln's Cooper Institute speech that address these arguments, and then have them find and paraphrase two more arguments against slavery Lincoln used elsewhere in the speech. Discuss how Lincoln handled these arguments, noting his appeal to authority, reason, and emotion.

All of the handwritten documents in this primary source set are accompanied by word-by-word transcriptions. Hand out photocopies of one of Lincoln's handwritten letters (such as "Abraham Lincoln to Schuyler Colfax"), and allow students a few minutes to read it on their own. Then present the Library of Congress-provided transcription. Direct students to paraphrase a portion of the letter in their own words. Discuss the difference between reading the original handwritten note and the print transcription. Which do students prefer? Why?

After teaching the checks and balances of the U.S. government, use the "Diagram of the Federal Government and American Union" to facilitate a discussion about how aspects of the government have changed since the Civil War. Ask students what they notice about the states as they are represented in the diagram. Why are some of the "states" treated differently—that is, why do Nebraska, Nevada, etc. have fewer lines leading to and from them than the 34 states at the center? Ask students to come up with a list of questions they will they need to have answered in order to answer that question.

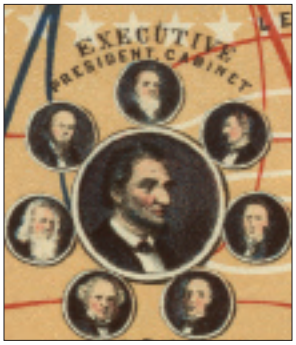


Diagram of the Federal Government...
http://loc.gov/pictures/item/98503857/

- What can be learned from this diagram? What issues could be reflected this way today? Compare an issue from Lincoln's time with a divisive modern issue and present it in a diagram.
- Based on the textual information presented on the diagram, have students draw a key or legend for the elements described in the text (for example, a blue line represents the democratic idea of union).

Have half of the class use the Primary Source Analysis Tool to analyze "Diagram of the Federal Government and American Union" and have the other half analyze "Reynolds Political Map of the United States." Put students into small groups to compare the two documents.

Analyze the poem Lincoln wrote, My Childhood Home. What obstacles did he overcome? How did these make him a stronger person?

Compare the campaign posters of Lincoln's time to modern campaign publications. What are the similarities and differences? How do the slogans of each side vary? How are they appealing to a different audience? What messages were the artists trying to send?

Abraham Lincoln, Republican candidate for president
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003689297/

What was the purpose of membership in the Wide Awake Club? Do we have similar organizations today that promote a candidate?

Take a close look at the Abraham Lincoln's Student Sum Book. Do these notes make sense to you?
What can you figure out from it? If you were to make your own sum book, what would you include? If you wanted it to be clear to a future generation, what notations would you make to show what you included and why?

Additional Resources

Abraham Lincoln: A Resource Guide (Web guide)

http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/presidents/lincoln/

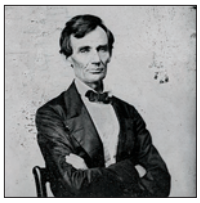
Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress (American Memory)

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html

Themed Resources for Teachers

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/themes/lincoln/

Primary Sources with Citations



Butler, Preston, photographer. Abraham Lincoln, half-length portrait, seated. Photograph. 1860. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.
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"Abraham Lincoln." Print. 1865. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.
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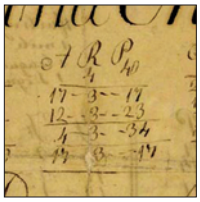

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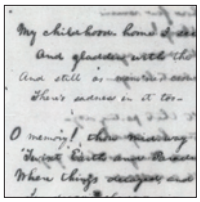

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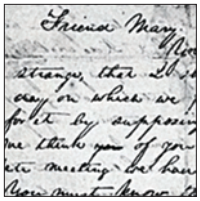

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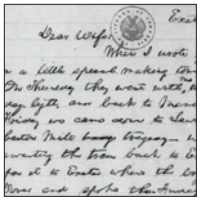

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Reynolds, William C. Reynolds's political map of the United States, designed to exhibit the comparative area of the free and slave states and the territory open to slavery or freedom by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Map. New York 1856. From the Library of Congress, Map Collections.
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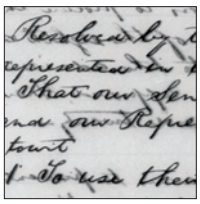

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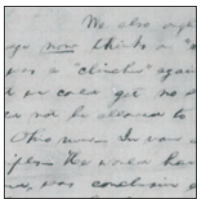

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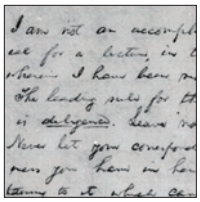

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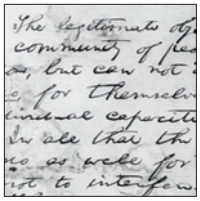

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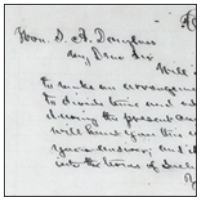

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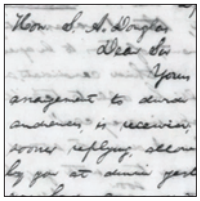

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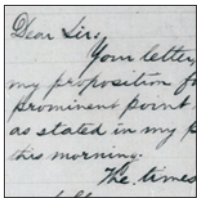

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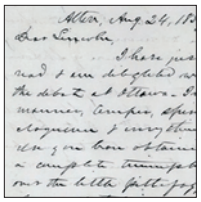

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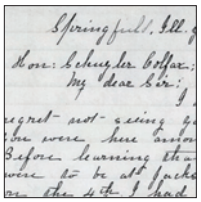

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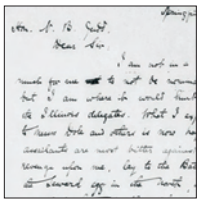

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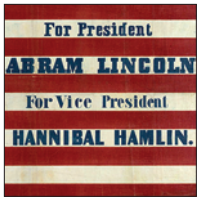

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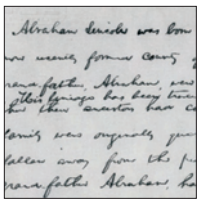

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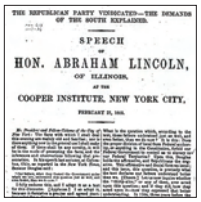

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"Free speech, free soil, free men. This is to certify that [blank] is a member of the [blank] Wide-awake Club." Lithograph. NY: Gavit & Co., 1860. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.
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"Chicago Wide-Awake Republican Club to Abraham Lincoln." Document. June 1, 1860. From the Library of Congress, *The Abraham Lincoln Papers*.
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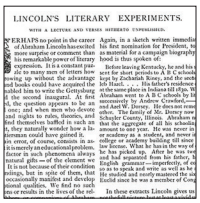
LINCOLN'S LITERARY EXPERIMENTS.

WITH A LECTURE AND VERSES HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED.

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Inauguration of Mr. Lincoln, March 4, 1861. Photograph. Washington, D.C.: 1861. From the Library of Congress, Miscellaneous Items in High Demand.
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/00652332/