



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

(1809-1865)

President of the United States, 1861-1865

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## *A Day In The Life Of Abraham Lincoln*

A School Play

By Diane L. Henderson

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### ASSIGNMENT:

1. Choose a character you want to play.
2. Get a costume to wear
3. Research that person
4. Find 8-10 interesting facts about that character. Write them down.
5. Choose the best 3 by coming to a consensus with a partner, and write up a lead-in interview question with the answer for each one.

Be creative. You will be writing your play within the play.

Don't write a boring interview, have an idea of a little vignette. i.e., If you are Mrs. Lincoln you might pick a little fight with Ulysses Grant. *"I don't know why you didn't accept our theatre invitation, if you had, my Abe, who I'd loved for 23 years, might not have been shot!"* and then Mrs. Grant comes to her husband's aid and says:

*"It's not his fault, I didn't want to go, because frankly Mary Todd, I can't stand your guts! You were known as the "Storm Center" of the White House and that was a perfect nick name for your unpredictable, moody, and outspoken behavior!"*

To which Mrs. Lincoln replies: *"Oh dear, I feel one of my spells coming on, I've lost them, I've lost them... My boys... Eddie, Willie, and Tad...all dead. You know, my own son, the only one left, had me committed to a mental institution..."*

and she wanders off the stage.

You are the controversial but loving wife . You come from a wealthy, upper-class family which opposed your engagement to Lincoln because of his inferior social position and his "rough" appearance and character. You constantly wore black dresses, hats, usually tied with a black scarf over the hat and under your chin. Black gloves and even a black overcoat.

IN ORDER TO PLAY A CONVINCING PART,  
RESEARCH, AND THEN BECOME THAT PERSON.

Another Example: If you decide to be a slave, you can talk about being "non-human", someone else's property. You were a field hand that worked from dawn to dusk picking cotton. If you were a woman the master could

have his “way” with you, and you suffered the heartbreak of being separated from your family as they were sold on the auction block for as much as \$1,500 dollars.

Dreams of freedom nagged at you constantly, but the fear of being caught as a runaway and severely punished by castration, amputation and even hanging kept you from trying. You might get into a conversation with several other slaves, and let us “learn” about what it was like to be a slave through your conversation with several other slaves. Perhaps one had been a caught runaway who was going to try again, etc.

You would wear ragged clothes, a hanky on your head, an apron and a long skirt, possibly torn and dirty. Your children would all be barefoot etc. You’d be looking down, fearful, possibly tearful as you told your story. You might wring your hands.

## Characters and Additional People Needed For The Play

**Interview team:** Two people who will work together and decide on how they will run the interview sessions. An Oprah type thing or a Kathie Lee and Regis format..

**Lights:** Two people are needed to handle the lights. (One to turn on and one to turn off)

### **Class Room Characters:**

Teacher

Joe Kool

Chicky

Dudes 1&2

Miss Priss

Brain

Phonograph

### **The characters in Lincoln's life.**

Lincoln as a

-boy

-lawyer, young man

-president

Sarah Johnston Lincoln: Lincoln's stepmother felt great fondness for her good and honest stepson who never gave her any real problems.

Denton Offutt: A New Salen store owner, appreciating the young 22 year old Lincoln's strength, he gave Lincoln a job that helped him set out in the world. Said to be the "Discoverer of Lincoln" Got him involved in wrestling.

Billy Herndon: Lincoln's law partner of 30 years.

Stephen Douglas: A famous 19<sup>th</sup> century US senator from Illinois, They were in heated-debates together.

Mary Todd Lincoln: The crazy but loving wife.

Slaves I've left the number open for you to fill according to number of students.

Ulysses S. Grant: This hard-drinking, hard-fighting general achieved military victories that were a key in the Union's defeat of the Confederacy

Mrs. Grant: Wife

Robert E. Lee: General of the Confederacy

John Wilkes Booth: Here is the vain, good-looking actor. The brilliant assassin who felt he cheated that he didn't live long enough to travel throughout the South where he truly expected he would receive a hero's welcome. (He had a handle bar mustache, possibly why so many actors who played villains later on wore one!)

You could also have a Dr. Mudd Who set Booth's leg when it broke as he jumped from the balcony. That's where we get the saying: "Or your name is Mud." Meaning something derogatory. Dr. Mudd was thrown in jail for doing this! You could also have the doctors that assisted in Lincoln's care as well.

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**Teacher, Mrs. P:**

“Class! Class! Oh Class!”

**Mr. Joe Kool:** (Whistles) Listen up!

The teach is tryin’ to ‘splain somethin’, go ahead Mrs. P.

**Teacher:** Yes well, as you know we are studying the Civil War Era, and I thought it would be sooo fun (clap hands) if we did a play: “Abraham Lincoln This is Your Life!” In my day, it was a very popular television show!

**Chickey:** Yeah right, Like, soooo fun.

**Dude 1:** As fun as when Kool here kicked the sh.....ah you know outta me.

**Doo-op Duet:** (Together) Borrrrr-ing!

**Dude 2:** In your day wasn’t Howdy Doody also a good time?

**Teacher:** That’s it!

I’ve had it!

I’m done!

You think teaching is so easy, well then Joseph Kooloski,  
YOU teach these, these...Id...

**J. Kool:** Intellectual Delinquents. OK I’ll teach you all somethin’  
School’s out! Recess...

**Students:** Yay! (Start to leave.)

**Teacher:** (Rings Bell) Oh No, There’s a catch. I don’t care how you teach these students, but at the end of the week you WILL take my final exam. Furthermore, everyone will get the lowest grade achieved! One grade! (hold up one finger) So it doesn’t matter if little Miss Pollyanna Priss over there (points) gets an A... if Floyd flunks, you all do! You are all responsible to teach each other.

I quit! I'm going to Mr. Spar's office right now.

**Dude 1:** Mrs. P I got ten bucks says J. Kool can learn us.

**Teacher:** (sarcastic mimic, laughing) Yeah right, like, put your money where your mouth is... make it twenty.

**Dude 1:** (confident) Done Deal.  
Mrs. P slams door, and leaves laughing crazily.

**Miss Priss:** (furious) Thanks a lot you morons...at least with Mrs. P I could get my usual A+, I don't want to slum with the rest of you idiots!

**Doo-op Duet:** Do something Joe Kool

**Brain:** It's too bad we couldn't get on some sort of time machine, and just warp outta here into the Civil War times.

**Chicky:** (Sarcastic) Oh yeah, like...Beam me up Scotty.

**Miss Priss:** No wait, I think that's a great idea. Why don't we all become a character back then, and research it 'til we know how they looked and talked and you know, historical stuff.

**Brain:** Yeah, and then we'll interview these guys like on Oprah or something.

**Chicky:** (Excited) And we'll learn by reading ...(sarcastic) for those of you who know how to read... and by listening to the interviews!

**Nerdy student named Phonograph, He talks with a stutter:**

I I I I wanna bbbbbe AAAb Lincoln.

Chicky (Bratty) Yeah right, like you can't even speak normal in the TTTTTwo thousands.

**Joe Kool:** Gives the man a chance. OK Phonograph...teach us somethin'.

**Phonograph:** (Takes a deep breath, closes eyes and really gets into the character of Lincoln). Starts to stand tall and says clearly and confidently:

I'm Abe Lincoln. I was born on February 12 1809 and I love tellin' stories.

**Doo-op Duet:** Golly Gee...

**Brain:** That's it! He's got it!  
OK everybody decide who they want to be.

**Miss Priss:** And come dressed in the proper clothes.

**Joe Kool:** Find out a bunch of historical stuff so you can answer questions inna interview.  
Class Dismissed!

**(You put your student's facts and they play their parts,  
in this Time Warp section here.)**

**Last Act:**

Everyone is seated at desks taking the test. Absolute quiet.  
Lots of paper, Lots of writing, wiping sweat and then the bell rings.  
Black out  
Spot Light on teacher at desk correcting papers.

**Teacher:** I can't believe it...everyone...incredible, absolutely incredible...  
Throws papers in the air and walks over to the chalk board where it says:  
Final History Grade:  
She chawks the grade, A+ and starts to walk off, Mr. Spar, oh Mr. Spar you  
wouldn't have twenty dollars I could borrow would you?  
Lights out.

**Editors Note:**

**Background:** My daughter asked me if I would write a play for her civil war/Abraham Lincoln studies so they could perform it as their final grade, and oh could I also direct it! Thinking back on this undertaking I must say she must have had a lot of faith in me. It had been many years since I had been advisor to the senior class play when I taught high school and even longer since I had performed in a play, AND I had never written



one; but oh well, I threw my hat in the ring to rave reviews and wouldn't ya know it, that's how I got back into teaching again! ☺

My daughter's 8<sup>th</sup> grade history class absolutely LOVED doing this play. Because they had to research "interesting information" for their parts they read so much more and really got into their part. They learned a lot more than their teacher said she could have taught them and it was done in an extra fun way. The whole school turned out for the play in the auditorium! It was a wonderful success and a great mother-daughter memory for us. ☺ Plus I got the bug to be back in the classroom. Thanks Kelli!