



# THE CIVIL WAR

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

## LESSON

Grade Level: 8-12

Subject: American History

Estimated Time of  
Required:

The first activity in which students assess the roles Lincoln played as president could be completed in one class period. To complete all activities including the simulation itself would require a minimum of four class periods.

## THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

### LINCOLN AND RECONSTRUCTION

#### *The Role of President Lincoln in Reconstruction 1863-65: A Simulation Activity*

#### OVERVIEW

This lesson focuses on Lincoln's role as president during the Civil War. After reading a variety of primary sources written by Lincoln or to him, students analyze under what provisions of the Constitution he acted as president. They then try to imagine what a week in the life of the President might have been like by writing a diary as Lincoln or his secretary. The lesson then focuses on Lincoln's role in reconstructing the nation, which he initiated in his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction of December 8, 1863. Students role play members of his cabinet as they hear from a variety of constituents about the effect this document is having on the course of the war and the future of the Freedmen. The cabinet considers a variety of amendments to Lincoln's plan and through debate, either adopts or rejects them.

#### OBJECTIVES

- *To study the role of the Executive Branch of government, especially in wartime.*
- *To learn about Presidential Reconstruction during the Civil War years.*
- *To gain an appreciation of the complex issues the nation would face after the Civil War as Congress took on the role of reconstructing the nation.*

#### MATERIALS

This lesson uses a variety of primary sources available in the National Archives, and in the Abraham Lincoln Papers of American Memory. Suggestions are made for using parts of episodes 6, 7 and 8 of the PBS series The Civil War, but these are not required.

#### RELEVANT STANDARDS

This lesson correlates to the standards of the National Center for History in the Schools at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/>

#### Era 5

- *Evaluate the Union's reasons for curbing wartime civil liberties.*
- *Compare the human and material costs of the war in the North and the South and assess the degree to which the war reunited the nation.*
- *Contrast the Reconstruction policies advocated by Lincoln.*
- *Explain the economic and social problems facing the South and appraise their impact on different social groups.*
- *Analyze how African Americans attempted to improve their economic position during Reconstruction and explain the factors involved in their quest for land ownership.*

by Joan Brodsky Schur

**PROCEDURE:**

***Activity 1: Presidential Hats***

Start by asking students what they think a day in the life of the president would be like today. What kinds of activities or meetings would the president schedule or attend? What kinds of issues would cross his or her desk? What room would there be for a personal life? What kind of decisions would need to be made?

Now tell students that they are going to look at a variety of documents written by Abraham Lincoln, or sent to him, during the Civil War to see how many “hats” or roles he played. (They will also look at some photographs.)

Divide the class into groups such that each group looks at a minimum of two of the documents. These can be downloaded and printed (one copy each), or students can work directly on their computers.

**To find all documents used in this lesson do the following:**

For documents in the National Archives go to

[http://www.archives.gov/research\\_room/nail/index.html](http://www.archives.gov/research_room/nail/index.html). Click on “Search Archival Holdings.” On the next page click on “NAIL Digital Copies Search” and put in the keywords <President Abraham Lincoln> (or in one case <Mrs. Abraham Lincoln>). Then look for the documents specified below. Or, search for them by exact title.

For documents in American Memory of the Library of Congress go to

<http://memory.loc.gov/>. Hit “Search” and then scroll down to “Lincoln, Abraham Papers” for written documents. Then use the names and dates of the documents listed below. For photographs scroll down to “Civil War Brady Studio” and do the same.

*Note: For most written documents in the Abraham Lincoln Papers of American Memory there is an option to hit “transcription” for a typed version of the handwritten original.*

Before starting ask students to review the powers of the Executive Branch according to the Constitution. Ask what if any extraordinary powers he or she might have in war time. List those powers that students can remember on the board and then ask them to add to that list by reviewing all of Article II, and Article I Section 9.

**Now ask each group to fill in one of the forms from the National Archives for each of the documents assigned to it.**

For Photo Analysis Worksheet go to

[http://www.archives.gov/digital\\_classroom/lessons/analysis\\_worksheets/photo.html](http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/analysis_worksheets/photo.html)

For Written Document Analysis Worksheet go to

[http://www.archives.gov/digital\\_classroom/lessons/analysis\\_worksheets/document.html](http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/analysis_worksheets/document.html)

**THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS**  
**LINCOLN AND RECONSTRUCTION**

**Documents:**

**Lincoln's Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, October 3, 1863.** In the National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/5687/images.txt>).

**Antietam, MD. President Lincoln with General George B. McClellan and group of officers, October 3, 1862.** Photograph in American Memory (<http://memory.loc.gov>).

**Abraham Lincoln. List of Sioux Indians Pardoned, April 30, 1864.** American Memory Collection (<http://memory.loc.gov>). Use together with the following document.

**From John Pope to Abraham Lincoln, November 24, 1862** (Telegram concerning execution of 300 Sioux). In American Memory Collection (<http://memory.loc.gov>).

**Presidential Proclamation 95 of September 24, 1862 Suspending the Writ of Habeas Corpus.** National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/5687/images.txt>).

**President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863.** National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/5687/images.txt>).

**Telegram from General William T. Sherman to President Abraham Lincoln announcing the surrender of Savannah, 1864.** National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/5687/images.txt>).

**President Abraham Lincoln, President U.S. photo.** National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/5687/images.txt>).

**Telegram from President Abraham Lincoln to Mrs. Lincoln, April 28, 1864.** National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/5687/images.txt>).

**Correspondence, Union Pacific Railroad, January 21, 1863.** National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/6444/images.txt>).

**Message of President Abraham Lincoln nominating Salmon P. Chase to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, December 6, 1864.** National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/5687/images.txt>)

**Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, photo.** National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/6781/images.txt>).

**Message of President Abraham Lincoln nominating Ulysses S. Grant to be Lieutenant General of the Army March 1, 1864.** National Archives (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/5687/images.txt>).

**Salmon P. Chase to Abraham Lincoln July 11, 1861 asking Lincoln to sit for a photograph.** American Memory (<http://memory.loc.gov>).

**President Abraham Lincoln and Tad Lincoln.** National Archives photo (<http://monitor.nara.gov:80/cgi-bin/starfinder/5687/images.txt>).

*Lincoln Document Analysis Form*

1. In this document do we see Lincoln performing a role as a public or private person, or both? Explain.
2. If the document is of a purely personal nature (relating to his role as father, husband), what if anything can we surmise about the life of Lincoln during the Civil War years?

**All the following questions pertain to documents of a public nature:**

3. Briefly summarize the content of the document. What is the president trying to accomplish in it, or what is being asked of him?
4. Under what Constitutional authority is the president acting in this document? Do you feel he is acting within his powers as president given that the country is at war, or do you think he may have exceeded them?

### *Activity 1: Presidential Hats (cont.)*

Now ask each group to fill in an index card about each of their documents that state the following:

- *Title of the document*
- *Date of the document if available, including day and month*
- *Author or creator of the document*
- *Nature of the document – personal or private*
- *Two or three sentence summary of the document*
- *The document and its relationship to the Constitution (if relevant). Under what powers of the Executive branch does it fall, if any?*

Create a time line on a bulletin board. Ask each group to post their index cards on the time line in chronological order of their creation, as best they can determine. If possible, also have them post copies of their documents. As you call the groups up ask one member of each one to briefly summarize for the whole class the nature of the documents they are posting.

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### *Activity 2: Discussing Lincoln's Roles as President*

After all students have an understanding of the scope of the documents, pose the following questions in discussion:

- *What do you think daily life might have been like for Lincoln in the White House?*
- *How many roles did he play?*
- *How do you think daily life is different for the president today? What might account for some of these differences?*
- *What types of issues other than the progress of the Civil War did President Lincoln need to address?*
- *In order to prosecute the war, what extraordinary powers did Lincoln use? Do you think the President would be justified in using these powers today in order to fight the "war on terrorism"? Why or why not?*

Next, encourage students to imagine a "Week in the life of President Lincoln." How many pressing issues might he have to address at once? Which would have priority? What about his family? Pick a date during the Civil War years and ask students to research what was happening at that time. Then assign students to write a diary entry for each day of that week, either as President Lincoln or his secretary.

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### *Activity 3: Lincoln's Plans for Reconstruction*

As students learned in activity 1, Lincoln had many responsibilities to fulfil simultaneously as president. One that is often overlooked is that while the war was being prosecuted on the battlefield, Lincoln had to think ahead to reconstructing the nation after the war. Lincoln's initial plan was elaborated in the document **Abraham Lincoln, December 8, 1863 Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction** at American Memory (<http://memory.loc.gov>). Access this document and either make an overhead of it or distribute copies to students.

Two excellent sources that give overviews of Lincoln and Reconstruction are: James M. McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford University Press, 1988), pages 698-717, and Eric Foner *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877* (Harper and Row, 1988), pages 35-60. Eric Foner writes that "It would be a mistake to see the 10% plan as a hard and fast policy from which Lincoln was determined never to deviate. Rather than as a design for a reconstructed South, it might better be viewed as a device to shorten the war and solidify white support for emancipation" (p. 36).

## THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

### LINCOLN AND RECONSTRUCTION

After students have read the document pose the following questions in class discussion or for homework.

- *Under what Constitutional powers granted to the Executive branch of government does Lincoln justify his actions?*
- *If secession was illegal did the Confederate states ever leave the Union? If the Confederate states have declared themselves a new nation and a foreign country, are they subject to the laws of Congress and proclamations of the President? What is your view? What is Lincoln's view?*
- *Who is pardoned under the proclamation? Who is not pardoned? What is the purpose of denying many Southerners a pardon?*
- *How does President Lincoln insure that the newly constructed loyal states will abolish slavery? Does he do so to your satisfaction?*
- *Other than their freedom, what does the President provide for the freed slaves? What else could he or should he provide in your opinion?*
- *Do you think that a state should be considered loyal when 10% of its population takes the loyalty oath? Why or why not? What was Lincoln's purpose in arriving at this figure?*
- *In terms of the Union war effort, imagine what might happen in a state like Arkansas or Louisiana (among the first to be reconstructed under this plan). What benefits or problems could you predict?*
- *Who has the ultimate responsibility for seating the representatives of the newly reconstructed states in Congress? Could they be elected in their states but refused seats in Congress? Why or why not?*
- *In what ways do you feel this is a good working plan for Reconstruction? In what ways do you think it needs revision?*
- *Do you feel Lincoln has exceeded his powers as Chief Executive under the Constitution? Why or why not?*

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#### ***Activity 4: Lincoln holds cabinet meetings through 1864 and 1865 on the subject of Reconstruction***

This part of the lesson is a role play during which Lincoln's cabinet will hold a hearing on the Proclamation of Amnesty, listen to a variety of people who have written to Lincoln on this matter, and then consider adapting revisions to Lincoln's proclamation. Seven students will play letter writers. Each one in turn will present an issue to Lincoln's cabinet based on a request or complaint expressed in one of the primary source documents below. A portion of the class will play Lincoln's cabinet. They will hear and discuss the letters. Five students will listen to the letters and the cabinet session and then write amendments to Lincoln's Proclamation of Amnesty which they will propose to the cabinet. The teacher can play Lincoln, or appoint a student to do so.

Students who role-play the letter writers should be instructed to "be" the letter writer. First they need to try to figure out who the letter writer might be (Freedman, military leader, etc.), where he is writing from, and what it is he wants to see changed (or left as is) in the Amnesty Proclamation. Ask the student to try to present the contents of the letter without reading it, and to make us believe he has some first hand experience of a situation that he or she has "lived through." (Note that Salmon P. Chase's letter was written within days of Lincoln's assassination.)

**Overall questions for the cabinet to consider: Is the Amnesty Proclamation an effective way to restore the Union as the war proceeds? Is the Amnesty Proclamation a fair way to restore the Union? How can the Amnesty Proclamation best be revised?**

## THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

### LINCOLN AND RECONSTRUCTION

#### Cabinet Session 1:

- *The first four letter writers come before the cabinet and present their cases in the **American Memory Collection** (<http://memory.loc.gov>).*
- ***Russell A. Alger to John G. Nicolay**, February 9, 1864. (He views the Amnesty Proclamation as an effective way to undermine the Confederacy.)*
- ***Bland W. Ballard to Abraham Lincoln**, June 11, 1864 (Recommends revoking the Amnesty Proclamation on the basis that the Rebels are merely using it to plot further treachery against the Union.)*
- ***Horace Maynard to Abraham Lincoln**, February 2, 1864. (He complains that men always loyal to the Union are being put on the same footing as men who had joined the Confederacy and later pledged loyalty under Lincoln's Amnesty Proclamation.)*

Give the cabinet open debate time on these issues and the questions they raise.

#### Cabinet Session 2:

Ask students impersonating the following people to present the issues in their letters. Then give the cabinet time for open unstructured debate.

- ***E.D. Jennings to Abraham Lincoln**, January 22, 1864 (<http://memory.loc.gov>). Jennings wants to know what Lincoln plans to do for the Freedmen. The student playing this role can make a variety of his or her own suggestions in this case.*
- ***John F. Dent to Abraham Lincoln**, February 16, 1864 (<http://memory.loc.gov>). Dent complains that slaves and Freedmen are being "enticed" and "coerced" off lands that needs workers.*
- ***Norreddin Cowen to Abraham Lincoln**, January 24, 1864 (<http://memory.loc.gov>). Cowen is reporting on the condition of Freedmen in Louisiana and asking for seed for them to plant.*
- ***Salmon P. Chase to Abraham Lincoln**, April 11, 1865 (<http://memory.loc.gov>). Chase believes that Freedmen must be given the vote.*

After having listened to the two cabinet meetings, ask each amendment writer to write one amendment that changes one aspect of the Amnesty Proposal as it would apply during war time. Assign students the following topics such that the next day the cabinet will have amendments to consider on all of the following topics:

- *Changes to the oath of loyalty.*
- *Changes as to who is eligible or not eligible to be pardoned.*
- *Changes as to the percentage of oath takers required to make a state eligible for reconstruction.*
- *Changes as to who is eligible to vote in the reconstructed state.*
- *Changes as to what will be provided to the Freedmen either by the Federal government or the reconstructed state.*

THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS  
LINCOLN AND RECONSTRUCTION

*Amendment Form*

I hereby submit the following amendment:

The following portion of the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction of December 8, 1863 which reads:

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Shall henceforth read as follows:

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The reason for the suggested change is that:

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## THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

### LINCOLN AND RECONSTRUCTION

Depending upon how many class sessions you can devote to this activity, you may need to set a time limit on debate on each of these issues. If the cabinet cannot reach consensus within that time then the proposed change does not take effect.

**Viewing video segments (optional):** As the cabinet is holding hearings, or in between sessions, play some of the following segments from episodes 6, 7 and 8 of *The Civil War*. This will help students to understand that while reconstruction was under discussion, Lincoln needed to get reelected, Sherman was cutting through the South on his march, and Lee and Grant were facing off towards Richmond. The rather intellectual arguments about reconstruction under discussion by “the cabinet” would result in real life consequences as the Confederate government faced defeat and the slaves were emancipated.

- *From Episode 6 show Chapter 6 from 21:27-36:50 about the Union war strategy and Grant and Lee in the Battle of the Wilderness.*
- *From Episode 7 show Chapter 6 from 14:09 to 9:15 and Chapter 13 from 54:59-59:42 both about Lincoln’s re-election.*
- *From Episode 8 show Chapter 2 from 3:10-4:59 about the passage of the 13th Amendment, the formation of the KKK and the defeat of Atlanta.*

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#### ***Activity 5: Debriefing***

This lesson provides an excellent bridge into the study of the Reconstruction era itself. Topics to be discussed in a debriefing session include:

What might the Reconstruction era have been like had Abraham Lincoln lived? Would Lincoln’s policies on Reconstruction have evolved over time had he lived? If so, speculate on how. Would we consider him a greater or lesser president had he steered the nation through this most difficult time period?

Discuss Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address in terms of how it relates to Reconstruction. To whom is the speech addressed; are Americans living in Confederate states included? Does Lincoln view the end of slavery as incidental to the war or central to its meaning? What does the speech bode in terms of Lincoln’s understanding of the process of Reconstruction?

The lesson can conclude with the assignment of one of the essay topics listed in Assessment.

#### **ASSESSMENT**

- *Students can be assessed for their participation as letter writer, cabinet member, or amendment writer. Did they demonstrate a good grasp of the issues? Did they voice their opinions clearly and with conviction?*
- *Students can be assessed for the care and accuracy with which they filled in any or all of the document analysis sheets.*
- *Students can be assigned one of the following essay topics to write about. (In some cases the presentation of a graphic chart using a compare/contrast model would be appropriate.)*
  - *Compare Lincoln’s Amnesty Proposal to the Wade-Davis bill and analyze why he vetoed it.*
  - *Compare the Reconstruction goals of Democrats, Republicans and Radical Republicans after the war.*
  - *Compare Lincoln’s Amnesty Proposal with Congressional Reconstruction after the war.*
  - *Analyze the role that freed men and women played in shaping Reconstruction policy.*

THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS  
LINCOLN AND RECONSTRUCTION

**EXTENSIONS**

Hold a Reconstruction Congress in which Democrats, Republicans and Radical Republicans present bills before Congress, debate them and formulate a program.

Compare and contrast how the Reconstruction era was interpreted in U.S. history books before and after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's.