



**Educator Guide:
Abraham Lincoln Leadership Case Study**

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Overview: Students will explore the characteristics of leadership through a 90 minute study of Abraham Lincoln. The first 45 minutes will feature an educator facilitated presentation on Abraham Lincoln. The second 45 minutes will feature a collaborative exercise at the student level.

Envision Platform & National Standards Alignment:

- CCSS ELA Alignment
 - Middle School Anchor: SL.6-8.1
 - High School Anchor: SL.9-12.1
- C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards Alignment
 - Middle School: D2.Civ.14.6-8; D2.His.3.6-8
 - High School: D2.Civ.14.9-12; D2.His.3.9-12
- Envision Education Platform
 - Dimension 1: Core Skills – Standard 1D, Critical Thinking
 - Dimension 3: Behaviors & Practices – Standard 3D, Leadership and Responsibility

Expected Outcomes & Desired Results:

1. Students will gain a greater appreciation for the figure of Abraham Lincoln.
2. Students will recognize that leaders are not born, but are carefully and methodically produced.
3. Students will analyze the central characteristics of Abraham Lincoln’s leadership style with a focus on “personal responsibility,” “attitude,” “conflict resolution,” and “teambuilding.”
4. Students will attempt to directly relate Abraham Lincoln’s leadership characteristics to their lives by analyzing varying responses to conflict.
5. Students will understand that failure, if properly understood, is very often the means to success.

Facilitating the Presentation:

- Overview/Introduction Talking Points:
 - a. For most of human history, there have not been leadership conferences. Generally, you studied the lives of past leaders, both good and bad. Indeed, the Greeks and the Romans perfected this art of leadership case study as the writings of Suetonius and Plutarch illustrate.
 - b. These studies were interested in those universal human qualities or character traits that individuals practiced that led to both their significance and success.
- Slide 2 Objective: Students embrace/understand Lincoln’s most important philosophical approach to leadership—namely, failure is often the root of success
 - a. Talking Point: Allow 3-4 students to explain how failure in their own lives often leads to success (i.e. sports, academics, etc.)
- Slide 3 Objective: Students will be impressed by the accomplishments/successes of AL
 - a. Talking Point: Begin by asking the students “What made AL great?” or ask them to define greatness/success
 - b. Additional talking points include:
 - i. In a recent Presidential ranking by American History Professors, Lincoln was labeled as the greatest American President

- ii. Lincoln is the only U.S. President to be awarded a patent (a device to lift boats over shoals that was never manufactured)
 - iii. Lincoln was one of the leading thinkers leading towards the eventual abolition of slavery (though it would be wrong to label him an abolitionist in his early years—though he appears to have always been morally opposed to the institution)
 - iv. He was known for his mental toughness, self-confidence, self-restraint and teambuilding/networking skills
 - v. He was a shrewd politician and years ahead of his time in terms of teambuilding, coalition building and networking
- Slide 4 Objective: Students will understand that AL was not an accidental or expected leader; he proactively prepared himself for leadership.
 - a. Talking point: Ask the students, “What if your family was so poor that you immediately had to work and could never attend school? What are your prospects?”
 - b. Ensure that students are wondering/asking, “How did Lincoln achieve so much? Why was he able to emerge as perhaps the most significant leader of the United States in spite of all of his “road blocks?”
 - c. These questions need to be directly tied to the answers of the next few slides, namely, personal responsibility, attitude, conflict resolution and teambuilding.
- Slide 5 Objective: Students will understand that the foundation of Lincoln’s leadership style was his willingness to take personal responsibility.
 - a. Talking Point: What does it mean to take personal responsibility?
 - b. AL knew that to be truly great, you must first be truly good.
- Slide 6 Objective: Students will understand that attitude was central to AL’s preparation for and ultimate execution of leadership.
 - a. Lincoln’s life was fraught with hardship, and he endured many bouts with depression
 - b. Two of his four sons preceded him in death
 - c. Both of his siblings died before he was 18
 - d. His father often abused him
 - e. His mother died when Lincoln was 9
 - f. He had no formal education and was raised in poverty
 - g. His wife had constant emotional struggles and depths of depression approaching insanity due to the death of their sons
 - h. It is claimed that Lincoln once noted that “People are about as happy as they choose to be.”
- Slide 7 Objective: Students will understand that conflict resolution for AL, meant the ability to recognize conflict (acknowledge the current status quo), own that conflict (“I destroy/I make”) and then change the perceptions of that conflict (transition from enemy to friend).
 - a. Lincoln did not attempt to “escape” from conflict or “attack” those opposed to him
 - b. Lincoln built bridges rather than barriers
 - c. Talking Point: What is the difference between a bridge and a barrier?
- Slide 8 Objective: Students will understand that Lincoln was largely successful in saving the union because of the team that he assembled.
 - a. Following the nomination of Lincoln for President by the Republican Party, every other candidate agreed that the party had selected the wrong individual

- b. “The conduct of the Republican Party in this nomination is a remarkable indication of small intellect growing smaller. They pass over...statesmen and able men, and they take up a fourth rate lecturer, who cannot speak good grammar.” (The *New York Herald* on the nomination of Lincoln for President, May 19, 1860)
- Slide 9 Objective: Students will review the four central leadership characteristics practiced by AL
 - a. Picture is a silver print from the 1860’s showing the Apotheosis of Lincoln (i.e. becoming divine); author unknown
- Slide 10 Objective: Students are directed to think about AL’s life of leadership in terms of the relationship between failure and success
 - a. Stress that Lincoln probably experienced more adversity, more failure and more hardship than probably any other U.S. President and probably more than the average American
 - b. Lincoln was able to use his failure as foundation for success; ultimately, he realized this success through his ability to build teams of support

Facilitating the Small Group Workshop:

Break up students into groups of three or four individuals and distribute the worksheet, using the following guidelines to frame and debrief the conversations.

- Question 1: Responses to Conflict
 - Begin by discussing how Hollywood movies and TV shows generally portray conflict resolution strategies (Harry Potter, 24, American Idol). Introduce students to the “attack” and the “escape” response.
 - Attack Response: Usage of power to quickly extinguish conflict
 - Escape Response: Used to avoid or ignore conflict
 - Students should begin to complete the grid and list ways that they have seen the “attack” and “escape” response manifested. Items that you want to encourage discussion of include...
 - Attack Examples: Verbal (slander/libel), physical (actual fighting), bullying/intimidation, destruction of property, etc.
 - Escape Examples: Denial of conflict, quitting, and not accepting blame, stating/assuming that you are powerless, etc.
 - After students complete their grids, discuss the detrimental results of the “attack” and “escape” responses. Ask them, “How might the Civil War and American History turned out differently if Lincoln had “attacked” all political opponents rather than attempting to win them to his side or simply tried to deny the reality of the situation by failing to make a stand on anything with the Southern States?”
- Question 2: Building Bridges or Barriers
 - Talking Point: Is it odd to think of Lincoln as a “bridge builder” when he was the President who presided over the Civil War?”
 - Refer to Lincoln’s reasons for the origin of the Civil War in his Second Inaugural Address
 - “On the occasion corresponding to this [Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address] four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, urgent agents were in the city seeking to *destroy* it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them

would *make* war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish, and the war came.”

- Discuss steps like Conflict Recognition, Conflict Analysis with a focus on the roles of respect and communication.
- Lincoln was ultimately able to build bridges because he was self-aware and understood his own strengths and weakness.
- Question 3: Why Lincoln?
 - Get the students talking about destiny and the role of “prospects?” Why should we have expected Lincoln to not emerge as a great leader?
 - Be sure that students are stressing how Lincoln essentially “controlled” his own destiny as much as possible.