



Did Lincoln Free the Slaves?

Grade: 8-12, adaptable

Overview

Adopted from: [“Who Freed the Slaves?”](#) from [Zinn Education Project](#)

President Abraham Lincoln, who led the country during the Civil War, is known as the “Great Emancipator.” He drafted the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed black slaves in the United States. Here, we examine President Lincoln’s viewpoints on slavery. Based on the evidence that follows, students can determine whether he actually freed the slaves.

Oregon Common Core State Standards

Language Arts Standards: See below for a full list of applicable standards.

- CCSS.ELA.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- CCSS.ELA.RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- CCSS.ELA.RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- CCSS.ELA.RH.6-8.8 Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Social Studies Standards: See below for a full list of applicable standards.

- Historical Knowledge 8.1. Evaluate continuity and change over the course of United States history by analyzing examples of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies, or nations.
- Historical Knowledge 8.2. Evaluate continuity and change over the course of United States history, by analyzing key people and constitutional convention, age of Jefferson, industrial revolution, westward expansion, Civil War.
- Historical Knowledge 8.3. Examine social, political and economic factors that caused westward expansion from American Revolution through reconstruction.
- Historical Knowledge 8.4. Evaluate the impact of different factors, including gender, age, ethnicity and class on groups and individuals during this time period and the impact these groups and individuals have on events of the time.
- Historical Knowledge 8.5. Analyze the causes as outlined in the Declaration of Independence, and examine the major American and British leaders, key events, international support, and consequences of (e.g., Articles of Confederation, changes in trade relationships, achievement of the independence by the United States) the American Revolution.
- Historical Thinking 8.6. Use and interpret documents and other relevant primary and secondary sources pertaining to U.S. History from multiple perspectives.

Materials

- Copies of newspaper articles from the [Historic Oregon Newspapers](#) website
- Paper for reflections
- Copies of the [Emancipation Proclamation](#)
- Handout (optional)
- Timeline material (optional)
- Student opinion chart (optional)
- Access to the Internet (optional)

Key Vocabulary

- Emancipation Proclamation
- Conscription
- Fugitive
- Inaugural
- Amendment
- Abolish/abolishment

Lesson

This lesson plan offers two options for presenting the historical walkthrough.

- *Introduction:* Pose the question of whether President Lincoln actually freed the slaves.
 - You may wish to start off the lesson with a discussion about students' opinions of whether President Lincoln freed the slaves.
 - Optional: Write down what students think on a piece of chart paper. (An opinion chart has been provided below.) Then, after the historical walkthrough, take another opinion survey. Lead a debrief session about why students' opinions have changed. Some questions to consider are provided below.
- *Option 1: Handout*
 - Give students the handout with information and read as a whole group.
 - Organize students into partners or groups to work on and read handouts together.
 - Encourage students to take notes on the pieces of information they have read. These should include initial reactions to the statement, whether they agree or disagree, something interesting they learned, etc. Also, encourage students to look up the original document using the link provided.
 - Once students have finished, bring together for debrief.
- *Option 2: Timeline activity*
 - Print handout and cut into strips. Tap, glue, or tack timeline somewhere students may access.
 - Pass out strips to each student. You may want to number each strip to minimize level of chaos, or have students line up in numerical order.
 - Choose the first event and have the student read out loud. Give students time to discuss what the event describes, as well as their initial reactions with their group members or partners.
 - Lead very brief discussions about each event.
 - Optional: Write down the class consensus about the event on the timeline
 - Tape or glue the event on the timeline.
 - Repeat the process.
 - Once students have finished, bring together for debrief.
- Some debrief questions to consider:

- From the articles, what would you consider President Lincoln’s opinion on slavery and slaves?
- Do you think President Lincoln can be described as freeing the slaves? Why or why not?

Extension Activity Ideas

- *Essay Prompt:* After the debrief session, assign students an essay prompt in which they can write a reflection about what they learned, some insights, initial reactions, etc., or assign the question, “Who freed the slaves?”
 - You may wish to assign the essay after the activity and discussion.
 - Give students the opportunity to present their essays to peers either through a formal or informal setting.

Student opinion chart

Do you think Lincoln freed the slaves?	
Yes	No

Handout

Date	Information	Link	Thoughts
September 1858	This is part of the debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas for U.S. Senate. (This would be two years before Lincoln was elected president.)	The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858	
January 1861	Southern states secede. These states have an estimated four million black slaves.	Oregon Argus	
March 1861	Lincoln's Inaugural Address contains a promise of a constitutional amendment guaranteeing slavery could never be abolished, even in those Southern states that still legalized it, if the states would return to the Union.	Oregon Sentinel	
April 1861	President Lincoln, expecting the conflict to be quickly resolved, makes a request for 75,000 volunteers to lure the Southern states to reunify.	Daily Ohio Statesman	
October 1861	By governmental orders, slavery is not to be interfered with. Slaves are not to be given freedom by Northern armies. <i>"Order from Gen. McDowell forbidding all fugitive slaves to be harbored within the lines."</i>	Oregon Argus	
December 1861	Slaves trying to escape to Union lines are to be returned. <i>"In regard to the return of fugitive slaves. Halleck says that it was a military necessity."</i>	Oregon Sentinel	

<p>May 1862</p>	<p><i>“Mr. Lincoln’s message proposes no freedom to the slave but announces subjection of its power to the will of the Union—in other words, to the will of the North.”</i></p>	<p><u>State Republican</u></p>	
	<p>President Lincoln continues to support slavery.</p> <p><i>“Neither General Hunter nor any commander has been authorized by Government to make any proclamation declaring slaves free; and that proclamation now in question is altogether void.”</i></p>	<p><u>Oregon Sentinel</u></p>	
<p>July 1862</p>	<p>Directly quoted letter from President Lincoln.</p>	<p><u>Oregon Argus</u></p>	
	<p>The people and Senate of the North, not the president, try to force a proclamation that would directly affect the slaves.</p> <p><i>“President Lincoln has been waited on by several Senators and members of the House. He will be visited by large delegation to-day, to urge him to issue a proclamation... requiring the Generals commanding the various departments to accept the services of all persons coming within our lines.”</i></p>	<p><u>State Republican</u></p>	
	<p>President Lincoln has no interest in interfering with current slave laws. Gov. Stanly on the laws of North Carolina:</p> <p><i>“Gov. Stanly will not allow the negroes at Newbern to be taught to read and write, because the laws of North Carolina forbid it.”</i></p>	<p><u>State Republican</u></p>	
	<p>General Rousseau reiterates to the South that the North does not want to change its slavery laws, but if the war continues, slavery will be lost to all.</p> <p><i>“I have warned our Southern friends of the danger of continuing it much</i></p>	<p><u>Oregon Sentinel</u></p>	

	<i>longer; and I tell you to-nigh that, if this war continues a year longer, there will not be a slave on the continent."</i>		
August 1862	If the war had been going in North's favor, there would have been no necessity of calling out more men. <i>"I have decided to call into the service an additional force of 300,000 men."</i>	<u>State Republican</u>	
	<i>"Cairo, 17. The Granada Appeal acknowledges a heavy loss at Baton Rouge. A brother of Mrs. Lincoln was killed, Breckinridge lost his right arm, and General Williams is also reported killed. The rebel force is estimated at 6,000 and the Federals at 2,500."</i>	<u>State Republican</u>	
September 1862	Another plea to the president to use slaves, from Governor Yates of Illinois: <i>"... Summon to the standard of the republic, all men willing to fight for the Union. Let loyalty, and that alone, be the dividing line between the nation and its foes. Generals should not be permitted to fritter away the services of our brave men in guarding the property of traitors, and in driving back into their hands loyal blacks who offer us their labor and who seek shelter under the Federal flag."</i>	<u>State Republican</u>	
	<i>"My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and not to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves, I would do it."</i>	<u>State Republican</u>	
	Emancipation Proclamation: <i>"States, which may then have voluntarily adopted, or may voluntarily adopt the immediate or gradual abolishment of slavery."</i>	<u>State Republican</u>	

	<p>If states or even parts of states rejoin the Union before January, they won't have to lose their right to slavery.</p> <p><i>"On the first day of January 1863, all persons held as slaves within the States ... in rebellion against the United States, shall be then and ever after free."</i></p>	<p><u>State Republican</u></p>	
December 1862	<p>President Lincoln addresses Congress about the Emancipation Proclamation and complete abolishment of slavery by 1900. Government gives bonds to the states of the value of their slaves once there is no more slavery in those states. Yet if they decide to use slavery again, the state must reimburse the government.</p>	<p><u>"The President's Message," Oregon Sentinel</u></p>	
January 1863	<p>On January 1, President Lincoln declares which states were in rebellion, thus their slaves are considered free.</p> <p><i>"...after a period of one hundred days from the date of the above mentioned order, and designate the States and parts of States therein, the people whereof, respectively, are at this day in rebellion against the United States, to be the following, to-wit ..."</i></p>	<p><u>Oregon Sentinel</u></p>	
July 1863	<p><i>"Washington, July 3. – It was officially announced, yesterday, that drafted persons under the Conscription Act, are exempt by paying \$300."</i></p>	<p><u>Oregon Argus</u></p>	
	<p>The original Conscription Act targeted only whites, and whites who could not buy their way out this resulted in riots.</p> <p><i>"New York, 13th. – Last evening 1,800 men formed a mob, which is reported to have increased to 3,000. It seems to have been a preconcerted plan of resistance to the conscription."</i></p>	<p><u>Oregon Sentinel</u></p>	
August 1863	<p><i>"...when the draft began on Tuesday morning, an armed mob suddenly appeared and ordered the Marshal to stop. He refused, then the mob fired into the room, killing the Marshal and three others."</i></p>	<p><u>Oregon Sentinel</u></p>	

	More on the riots.	<u>Oregon Sentinel</u>	
	<i>"Since the first of January last every negro in the rebel states has been free, yet if they cannot be allowed to fight in defense of a free Government that other negroes fought to establish then they are free only in name."</i>	<u>Oregon Argus</u>	
September 1863	<i>"Negroes are glad to enlist in order to escape servitude."</i>	<u>Oregon Sentinel</u>	
	President Lincoln: <i>"I think the Constitution empowers its Commander-in Chief with the laws of war in time of war. Now, the most that can be said is that slaves are property. Is there – has there ever been any question that, by the laws of war, property, both of enemy's and friends, may be taken when needed?"</i>	<u>Oregon Sentinel</u>	
December 1863	Eleven months into the Emancipation Proclamation. <i>"...one hundred thousand are now in the United States military service... So far as tested, it is difficult to say that they are not as good a soldier as any."</i>	<u>Oregon Sentinel</u>	
April 1865	General Lee surrenders ending the Civil War. <i>"General Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia this afternoon."</i>	<u>Dayton Daily Empire</u>	
April 15, 1865	Lincoln Assassinated	<u>Nashville Union</u>	

Timeline Activity

September 1858	This is part of the debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas for U.S. Senate. (This would be two years before Lincoln was elected president.)	October 1861	By governmental orders, slavery is not to be interfered with. Slaves are not to be given freedom by Northern armies. <i>"Order from Gen. McDowell forbidding all fugitive slaves to be harbored within the lines."</i>
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April 1861	President Lincoln, expecting the conflict to be quickly resolved, makes a request for 75,000 volunteers to lure the Southern states to reunify.	May 1862	President Lincoln continues to support slavery. <i>"Neither General Hunter nor any commander has been authorized by Government to make any proclamation declaring slaves free; and that proclamation now in question is altogether void."</i>
July 1862	Directly quoted letter from President Lincoln.	July 1862	General Rousseau reiterates to the South that the North does not want to change its slavery laws, but if the war continues, slavery will be lost to all. <i>"I have warned our Southern friends of the danger of continuing it much longer; and I tell you to-night that, if this war continues a year longer, there will not be a slave on the continent."</i>

<p>July 1862</p>	<p>The people and Senate of the North, not the president, try to force a proclamation that would directly affect the slaves.</p> <p><i>“President Lincoln has been waited on by several Senators and members of the House. He will be visited by large delegation to-day, to urge him to issue a proclamation... requiring the Generals commanding the various departments to accept the services of all persons coming within our lines.”</i></p>	<p>August 1862</p>	<p>If the war had been going in North’s favor, there would have been no necessity of calling out more men.</p> <p><i>“I have decided to call into the service an additional force of 300,000 men.”</i></p>
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April 1865	General Lee surrenders ending the Civil War. "General Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia this afternoon."	April 15, 1865	Lincoln Assassinated

List of applicable Language Arts Standards

Grade 8

- CCSS.ELA.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.6-8.1 Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.6-8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.6-8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.6-8.5 With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.6-8.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.6-8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.6-8.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.6-8.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.6-8.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Grade 9-10

- CCSS.ELA.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- CCSS.ELA.RH.9-10.3 Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.
- CCSS.ELA.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
- CCSS.ELA.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.9-10.1 Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

- CCSS.ELA.WHST.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.9-10.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.9-10.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.9-10.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Grade 11-12

- CCSS.ELA.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- CCSS.ELA.RH.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in *Federalist No. 10*).
- CCSS.ELA.RH.11-12.6 Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.
- CCSS.ELA.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.
- CCSS.ELA.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.11-12.1 Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

- CCSS.ELA.WHST.11-12.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.11-12.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.11-12.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.11-12.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- CCSS.ELA.WHST.11-12.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Continued list of applicable Social Studies Standards

Grade 8

- Historical Thinking 8.7. Analyze evidence from multiple sources including those with conflicting accounts about specific events in U.S. History.
- Historical Thinking 8.8. Evaluate information from a variety of sources and perspectives.
- Historical Thinking 8.9. Construct or evaluate a written historical argument demonstrating an understanding of primary and secondary sources.
- Government 8.14. Explain rights and responsibilities of citizens.
- Government 8.15. Contrast the impact of the Articles of Confederation as a form of government to the U.S. Constitution.
- Government 8.18. Examine and analyze important United States documents, including (but not limited to) the Constitution, Bill of Rights, 13th-15th Amendments.
- Government 8.20. Analyze the changing definition of citizenship and the expansion of rights.
- Government 8.21. Analyze important political and ethical values such as freedom, democracy equality, and justice embodied in documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.
- Social Science Analysis 8.25. Critique data for point of view, historical context, distortion, or propaganda and relevance.
- Social Science Analysis 8.26. Examine a controversial event, issue, or problem from more than one perspective.
- Social Science Analysis 8.27. Examine the various characteristics, causes, and effects of an event, issue, or problem.

Grades 9-12

- Historical Knowledge HS.5. Examine and evaluate the origins of fundamental political debates and how conflict, compromise, and cooperation have shaped national unity and diversity in world, U.S., and Oregon history.
- Historical Knowledge HS.6. Analyze ideas critical to the understanding of history, including, but not limited to: populism, progressivism, isolationism, imperialism, communism, environmentalism, liberalism, fundamentalism, racism, ageism, classism, conservatism, cultural diversity, feminism, and sustainability
- Historical Thinking HS.10. Evaluate an historical source for point of view and historical context.
- Historical Thinking HS.11. Gather and analyze historical information, including contradictory data, from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including sources located on the Internet, to support or reject hypotheses.
- Historical Thinking HS.12. Construct and defend a written historical argument using relevant primary and secondary sources as evidence.
- Historical Thinking HS.13. Differentiate between facts and historical interpretations, recognizing that a historian's narrative reflects his or her judgment about the significance of particular facts.
- Government HS.24. Analyze and critique the impact of constitutional amendments.
- Government HS.32. Examine and evaluate documents and decisions related to the Constitution and Supreme Court decisions (e.g., Federalist Papers, Constitution, *Marbury v. Madison*, Bill of Rights, Constitutional amendments, Declaration of Independence).
- Social Science Analysis HS.57. Define, research, and explain an event, issue, problem, or phenomenon and its significance to society.
- Social Science Analysis HS.60. Analyze an event, issue, problem, or phenomenon from varied or opposing perspectives or points of view.
- Social Science Analysis HS.62. Propose, compare, and judge multiple responses, alternatives, or solutions to issues or problems; then reach an informed, defensible, supported conclusion.
- Social Science Analysis HS.63. Engage in informed and respectful deliberation and discussion of issues, events, and ideas.