

Abraham Lincoln's Crossroads: "Lincoln: The Constitution & the Civil War"

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About this Lesson

Abraham Lincoln's Crossroads is a classroom activity designed to support the National Constitution Center's online game of the same name and the nationally touring exhibition "Lincoln: The Constitution and the Civil War." The online game is intended for advanced middle- and high-school students. It invites them to learn about Lincoln's leadership by exploring the political choices he made. An animated Lincoln introduces a situation, asks for advice, and prompts players to decide the issue for themselves before learning the actual outcome. Using this resource, students will work collaboratively to compile results and ultimately be assessed on their findings.

There are two variations on this activity. The first is designed to have students experience and use the Lincoln's Crossroads online activity to gather and synthesize information. The second is to use the Lincoln's Crossroads online activity as an introduction to the museum exhibit "Lincoln: The Constitution and the Civil War," currently on national tour.

Grade(s) Level

7-12

Classroom Time

One 50 minute classroom period

Handouts

Student Analysis Worksheet

Constitution Connections

Articles

I, II, III, V

Amendments

13

Historic Background

On the eve of his presidency, Abraham Lincoln faced the greatest test to the nation's framework of government since its formation. Lincoln's long political career in Illinois began by running for the state's House of Representatives in 1832 and included one term serving in the U.S. House of Representatives and a lost bid for senator against Stephen Douglas in 1858. During this time, he considered and debated many constitutional issues, including slavery and states' rights, that he would later have to tackle after being elected president in November 1860.

Seven southern states seceded from the Union before Lincoln's inauguration in March 1861. After the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, four more states joined them and the Civil War officially began. Lincoln made a number of tough decisions during the course of the war that were significant turning points. What was the extent of presidential war powers? How do you deal with the issue of slavery and prevent the secession of the Border States? Where do you draw the line regarding civil liberties during war time? All of these issues and more were at the heart of a conflict that cost 620,000 lives and ended with the reunification of the country under the federal Constitution.

Objectives

Students will:

- Understand the difficult political decisions Abraham Lincoln was faced with prior to and during his time in the White House.
- Examine the political and constitutional issues that faced President Lincoln.
- Analyze the rationale Lincoln used in making critical decisions.
- Compare the outcomes of Lincoln's decisions with other possible outcomes.

Activity

In-Class Activity

1. Explain to students that they will be playing an online game that examines Lincoln's decision-making process during his political career. Use the following to introduce the activity:
 - Abraham Lincoln became president during one of the most turbulent times in our nation's history.
 - States had been struggling for decades over the interpretation of our federal Constitution regarding slavery, individual liberties, and states' rights.
 - Between Lincoln's election in November 1860 and his inauguration in March 1861, seven states seceded to form the Confederate States of America and a civil war was at hand.
 - Lincoln, who was an experienced politician in Illinois but whose only experience in national politics was one term in the U.S. House of Representatives, was tasked with dealing with this crisis after having been elected president by less than half of the country.
2. Distribute copies of the "Lincoln's Crossroads: Student Analysis Worksheet." Explain to students that they will be using the sheet to create a compilation of each of Lincoln's political decisions.
3. Options for experiencing "Lincoln's Crossroads: Online Game"
 - School Computer Lab
 - Divide students into groups of 2-3 students and assign each group one of Lincoln's crossroads. Using the "Student Analysis" worksheet, students should take notes on just the assigned portion, completing only the sections: **Point of View #1, Point of View #2, and Lincoln's Decision.**
 - Once each group has analyzed and collected information on their assigned section, the students should share the findings with the class as whole and complete the rest of the worksheet with information collected from the other groups.
 - Classroom Digital Projector and speaker system
 - Ask a student to operate the class workstation. The class as a whole should gather information and complete the "Student Analysis" worksheet. Together the class will experience all sections of the game and should come to a consensus before making a choice in each chapter. Encourage students to present why they support their choice and believe Lincoln chose one side or the other, completing

only the sections: **Point of View #1**, **Point of View #2**, and **Lincoln's Decision**.

4. Discuss as a class the completed worksheet. Use the following questions for discussion:
 - Did Lincoln remain consistent in his decision-making process?
 - Did Lincoln always make the correct decision?
 - Which decision would you consider his most important?
5. Distribute copies of the United States Constitution to the each student. Working either in groups or as individuals, have students complete the final column on the "Student Analysis Worksheet."

Exhibit Connection

Lincoln's Crossroads online activity can be used as an introduction to the museum exhibit "Lincoln: The Constitution and the Civil War" currently on national tour from the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

- Students should complete the above activity prior to visiting the exhibit. While touring the exhibit, encourage students to identify the events and decisions they worked with in the pre-visit activity above.
- Ask students to collect detailed examples of what evidence they see in the exhibit of why Lincoln made the decisions he did.

Assessment

Options

- Choose one of Lincoln's Crossroads and write an expository essay arguing in favor or against the decision Lincoln made.
- Create a timeline of Lincoln's Crossroads, placing the decision in the context of events of American History.
- Assume the role of a person living in the time of Lincoln and write a letter to President Lincoln supporting or disagreeing with the decision he made.
- Write a journal entry from the point of view of Lincoln, creating some thoughts he may have had when deciding which decision to make.

Name: _____

Lincoln's Crossroads: Student Analysis Worksheet

Crossroad	Point of View #1	Point of View #2	Lincoln's Decision	Constitutional Connection
Kansas-Nebraska Bill				
President-Elect				
Fort Sumter				
War Powers				
Merryman Case				
Fremont Proclamation				

Preliminary Emancipation	Black Troops	Final Emancipation	Vallandigham Case	Draft Riots	13 th Amendment	Peace Talks