

Abraham Lincoln Unit
Grade 4

The Early Indiana Years

Overview

Submitted by

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Abraham Lincoln – The Early Indiana Years

My name is Chuck Masterson and I am the fourth grade Social Studies teacher at Holy Spirit School in Evansville, Indiana. After attending the First Lincoln Institute in July of 2004, I decided to create an Abraham Lincoln teaching unit for my fourth grade Social Studies class. Because the amount of Lincoln information in our Indiana History textbooks is limited, I thought this would be a good way to add to our Social Studies curriculum and also coordinate the unit to the teaching of state standards. I have created this teaching unit to present to my students for the fall semester in November with parts to be used for presentation at our school's Pioneer Day celebration in the spring. This unit stresses the importance of the early Indiana years of Abraham Lincoln in our history.

Since this teaching unit deals with Abraham Lincoln and his years in Indiana, I share with my students information about his genealogy and family life, his first year in Indiana, his early education, his personal tragedies, and his ambitions. Together, we try to look at Abraham Lincoln not only as a great leader and president, but as someone who began his Indiana life in a very simple way. He tried to do his best even though his life at times was very difficult. Even Abraham Lincoln himself once said, "I grew up in pretty pinching times."(Bial, 1998, 9) However, I also try to add that during his Indiana years there were many good things that Abraham Lincoln experienced in his life here. These include love of family, his desire to read and learn about different things, his story telling and poetry writing, and his practical jokes and the desire make people laugh.

To introduce this unit, the first thing I stress is that personal achievement or success is earned through direction, dedication, and hard work. And, Mr. Lincoln would be a good example of this effort. From a very young age he did not aspire to be a lawyer, or a politician, or even a President of the United States. He simply tried to do his best and work hard, whether it was doing his chores or using his axe to cut down trees. However, at times he admitted that he was a bit lazy when writing his humorous poems.(Bial, 12)

I want to begin my unit with a pretest to see where the students are in terms of background knowledge of Abraham Lincoln. This test, with a few changes on my part, comes from a website by Tammy Payton of the Loogootee Community Schools. This test is used to determine where the students are in terms of background knowledge of

Abraham Lincoln and to generate interest in his early life.

After they take this test, we grade and briefly discuss each of the questions. I can now continue on with my unit

knowing that most of the students are basically at the same information level. When the unit is finished there will be a posttest to see how well they listened and absorbed all the information presented to them.

I now continue my Abraham Lincoln unit by handing out to my students their writing journals. I explain to them that they will be using the journals for a variety of purposes.

They will use the journals to record information presented in class. They will also use the journals to write down comments and questions they may have about our class time discussions. And lastly, they can use the information

they recorded for study purposes when we have our posttest evaluation at the end of the unit.

To begin working on the unit I talk about and assign my students two separate projects to work on. The first project is about the genealogy of Abraham Lincoln. We will work on that as we go along with our unit. With this project I give my students a website, “Abraham Lincoln Links”, where together we can go to trace and record Abraham Lincoln’s ancestry. Using a genealogy tree supplied by the people at Willard Library, we chart four generations of Abraham Lincoln’s ancestry. When we complete this assignment I then give my students a second genealogy tree to use to chart their own family tree through four generations, if possible. They are encouraged to use any means available to fill out the tree, including talking to

family members, family Bible trees, or any other source that they may have available. Each student will present his or her own genealogy tree to their classmates at the end of the unit.

It is my hope that by having my students do a genealogy tree they can see that the ancestry of Abraham Lincoln is probably not much different than their own family tree.

Success and how much you achieve in your life is not necessarily a result of who your ancestors were, but rather the amount of dedication and effort you are willing to give to reach for your goals.

The second project deals with the types of shelters and homes the Lincoln family or any other pioneer family might have built and used during that time period. We

begin this project by looking at pictures from two books available in our library. I use the Raymond Bial book, "Where Lincoln Walked," and a book by Bill Harris, "Homes of the Presidents." I explain to my students that when Thomas Lincoln and his family arrived in Indiana in December of 1816, they first built a three-sided shelter called a half shelter or half-camp. It was made of sticks and logs to shelter the Lincoln family from the wind and cold. They were warmed only by a campfire. Later on, possibly by February in the following year, an eighteen square foot log cabin with a dirt floor and a stone fireplace was built. (Hargrove, 1988, 21) To give them some understanding of the construction process for a cabin, I read to them from a book by Louis A. Warren, "Lincoln's Youth." Here, they get a description of what is involved in the building of a log cabin, and also building the furniture for it.

I then separate the students into groups of four and have them cooperatively work on designing and building their own model display of a shelter and a log cabin using any materials of their choice. I ask them as they plan their models to think about any problems or concerns about the construction that Thomas Lincoln might have encountered. The displays are to be finished by the end of the unit for viewing and discussion. All the projects, the shelter and log cabin models and the genealogy tree, not only will be displayed in the classroom at the end of the unit and also in the spring for our school's Pioneer Day.

From this project, my students should realize and understand that survival was not an easy task for Abraham Lincoln and his family. They had to deal with and overcome all the problems of clearing the land and building

a home by themselves. There were those rare times when they did receive help from their neighbors, especially during the winter construction of their cabin. To succeed everyone in the Lincoln family had to work hard and work together to survive those first years in Indiana. The same is true for my students. For their group effort they too must work hard and work together to succeed.

Before we begin our classroom reading about Abraham Lincoln, I bring in all the Lincoln books from our own school library to use as an interest and reference library. I also give them a list of books on Abraham Lincoln from the Newburgh and McCollough libraries that they can check out and use for their own reading needs. Our unit on Abraham Lincoln then begins with the reading of passages from books by Cheryl Harness, “Young Abe Lincoln,

Frontier Days, 1809 – 1837”, and Raymond Bial, “Where Lincoln Walked”. Through these books my students hear about the Abraham Lincoln who was born to meager and humble beginnings in Kentucky and about his parents, Tom and Nancy Lincoln, who encountered problems with land titles that forced the Lincoln family to give up their land in Kentucky and move to Indiana.(Warren, 1959, 13)

Abraham Lincoln later in life recalled that trip as “one of the hardest experiences in his life.”(Harris, 1987, 72)

My students hear about the difficult and trying times the Lincoln family endured to set up their new Indiana home. It was hard work for the Lincoln family during the first two years in Indiana. While clearing the land for a home and future spring planting, time initially was spent first building a shelter and then a cabin during the winter time period.

better. I explain to them that Thomas Lincoln was not thrilled with his son's desire to go to school, but wanted him to help as much as possible on the farm. It was Abraham Lincoln's stepmother Sarah, also known as Sally, who encouraged him to read and learn as much as possible. She was the one who saw that Abraham went to school, even over his father's objections. I tell them that in total, Abraham Lincoln had less than one year of formal education. However, because he loved to read and was interested in learning about things, his education was not lacking. It was once said that Abraham Lincoln tried to "read every book to be found within fifty miles of his home."(Bial, 13)

Many times when we have an interest, a goal or a dream, there may be certain obstacles or roadblocks in our way. It must have been a shock to young Abraham when his father returned from Kentucky after her mother's death and introduced Sarah Bush Johnston to him by saying, "Here's your new mammy." (Hargrove, 22) Then, he finds out that Sarah had three children of her own. This must have in my mind scared him at first. I want my students to see that Abraham Lincoln did not let life's obstacles or roadblocks stop him. Seeing his family suddenly increase to eight people surely didn't. He made the most of it. His interest in reading and getting an education still continued onward. With encouragement from his mother and now his new stepmother, and his own dedication and hard work, Abraham Lincoln was able to overcome many problems and succeed in basically educating himself. This theme of

dedication and hard work becomes more and more evident as Abraham Lincoln's life proceeds.

I then point out to the students that Abraham Lincoln was extremely fortunate to have not one but two mothers who loved him dearly. Both Nancy Hanks Lincoln and Sarah Bush Lincoln encouraged young Abraham do his best at all times. And in return, Abraham Lincoln was very loving and close to both of these women. Whatever he achieved later on in life was a reflection of the love, encouragement, and support he received from these two women. Both seemed to be positive influences on his life, especially his stepmother, Sarah, who continually supported Abraham Lincoln's desire to better himself through extensive reading and self education.(Warren, 25)

On the other hand, I also explain to the children that this was not always the case with his father, Thomas Lincoln. Thomas Lincoln did not approve of the time Abraham was spending on reading and wanting to be educated. He felt that this time could be better used in helping do the huge amount of work to be done on the farm. It was hinted that because of this conflict between the two of them Abraham Lincoln did not get along very well with his father.(Bial, 12)

I want my students to see that with encouragement and support from their families and friends they too can succeed in achieving their goals. As for Thomas Lincoln, it could be said that his negative feelings about Abraham Lincoln's education could have made Abraham more determined to succeed. We can again refer back to the idea

of obstacles and roadblocks. Quite possibly the negative feelings Thomas Lincoln expressed towards his son's education probably motivated Abraham Lincoln to try even harder. The more difficult the road is, the harder we work at fixing it. And, if we fail we keep on trying until we succeed.

I then discuss the tragedies that Abraham Lincoln faced during the early periods of his life. I explain to my students that the deaths of a brother, a mother, and a sister had an affect on Abraham Lincoln. When Abraham was about two years old his mother, Nancy, gave birth to a boy named Thomas. However, early in his infancy Thomas became ill and died.(Warren, 10) Leaving him in Kentucky must have been difficult for the family.(Warren, 18) Nancy grieved for her lost child and kept his memory alive in the minds of

both Abraham and his sister, Sarah. I then talk about the death of his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, of milk sickness. Her last comment to Abraham and his sister Sarah was to “Be good and kind to your father, and to one another and the world.” (Bial, 10) A brokenhearted young Abraham helped his father with the making of his mother’s coffin.(Bial, 10) Then, at age eighteen, Abraham Lincoln lost his sister, Sarah, during childbirth. I explain to my students that this last death greatly saddened Abraham Lincoln for quite some time. In this time of grief he worked harder than ever. This is probably why Abraham Lincoln agreed to take a flatboat trip to New Orleans for James Gentry. It was an effort to ease the pain of losing the two women he loved.(Bial, 14)

For my students there is always the feeling of sadness and pain after a tragedy. For them death is an even more difficult subject to deal with. With Abraham Lincoln losing family members so early on in his life, it is understandable that the grief and sadness he experienced was so terrifying. However, I think he knew that he could not just give up. In the darkest of moments he worked harder. That is what I wanted to pass on to my students. I gave them a little phrase that was passed on to me a long time ago seems to say it all, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”

In presenting this unit to my students, I feel that there is an immediate message, a common thought, they can pick up on and see almost immediately. This message is that the desire to succeed at anything, to reach your goal no matter

how big or small is dependent on encouragement, dedication, and hard work. Abraham Lincoln experienced many different things in his early Indiana years that could have drastically changed his life and his future. Through it all he kept his sight on his immediate goal to learn to read and to receive an education. It is this determination that laid the groundwork for his future aspirations and accomplishments. I firmly believe that encouragement, dedication, and hard work are what enabled Abraham Lincoln to achieve what he did. I hope that my students come to the same conclusion. If not, all is not lost. Quite possibly, they may have come to some different conclusions that are equally acceptable. And, this too is okay.

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Lesson Plans

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Lesson Plans – Charles Masterson

Day One

Direction: Who was Abraham Lincoln?

- Present this question to the students. Write down their answers on the board as they are given.
- Using a simple time line for Abraham Lincoln's life, help the students to fit their answers to the correct time period.
- When finished, ask the students to decide what period of his life the students as grouped know the most.
- Have them offer explanations for their answers.

Direction: How much do we know about Abraham Lincoln?

- Using the website test viewed on the television monitor, ask the students to record their answers on a sheet of paper.
- After the test, go back to the beginning and discuss each of the questions, asking each student to correct each answer they have missed.
- Collect their papers for referral at the end of the unit.

Direction: Review day's work.

- Summarize the work done for today.
- Ask what new information you learned about Abraham Lincoln.

(2)

Day Two

Direction: The student writing journals

- Hand out journals to each of the students.
- Explain to the students that as we move along in the unit they will use the journals to record information, write down questions or comments they may have, and use the information they have for study purposes when they have the posttest.
- Suggest to the students that the journal could also be used as a daily diary to write their observations of each day's work.
- Stress to the students that the journal entries should be done neatly and legibly.

Direction: The genealogy study – part one

- Explain to the students the meaning of genealogy.
- Explain the difference between ancestry and descendents. Then explain to them that we are only going to look at Lincoln's ancestry.
- View with the students the Abraham Lincoln Research website for the Lincoln family history.
- Pass out to the students the genealogy tree from Willard Library. Explain to them how the tree is used and filled in properly.
- Guide them as they fill in the tree back to Abraham Lincoln's great-grandparents. Make sure all students have written in the names correctly.

(3)

- Have the students keep the finished Lincoln tree in their journal.
- In their journal ask the students to write comments or questions about anything done for today or otherwise.

Day Three

Direction: Comments and questions

- Discuss any comments or questions from the journals of the students from the Day Two activities.
- Remind the students to write their notes for the day in their journals.

Direction: Genealogy study – part two

- Pass out another blank genealogy tree and briefly review the directions for filling in the genealogy tree.
- Explain to them that the second tree is for their family ancestry. They are to chart, if possible, their own family through four generations, just like they did for Abraham Lincoln.
- The information for their tree can come from family members, family Bible trees, or any other source they may have available to them.
- Explain to the students that their family trees will be due for display and explanation at the end of the unit. They are due on Day Seven (give date).

Direction: Abraham Lincoln's early life

(4)

- Display the books about Abraham Lincoln from our library and tell them that they can be checked out for their own use at any time.
- Pass out to the students a listing for books about Abraham Lincoln from our school library and also the McCollough and Newburgh libraries. Also included for them in the listing are websites for information on Abraham Lincoln.
- Read to them excerpts from two books by Cheryl Harness and Raymond Bial on the early life of Abraham Lincoln.
- Review with the students about Thomas Lincoln's reasons for coming to Indiana.
- Review with the students the difficulties the Lincoln family had setting up their Indiana home.
- Ask the students to record their comments or questions in their journals about today's discussions and activities.

Day Four

Direction: Comments and questions

- Discuss any comments or questions from the student's journals about the Day Three activities.
- Remind the students to write their notes for the day in their journals.

Direction: Shelter and cabin activity

(5)

- Use the Raymond Bial, Jim Hargrove, and Bill Harris books to show pictures to the students the types of cabins that Abraham Lincoln would have lived in Kentucky and Indiana.
- Explain to them what types of temporary shelters were used before a cabin was built. Discuss with them both two sided and three sided shelters (half shelters and half camps).
- Discuss with the students the advantages and disadvantages of these structures.
- Read to the students excerpts of the Louis A. Warren book about the probable construction of a log cabin.
- Ask for comments and questions about log cabins.

Direction: The shelter and log cabin project

- Explain to the students they will be doing a cooperative project on designing and building their own model display of a shelter and a log cabin.
- Each group will build one model of a shelter and one model of a log cabin. They may use any materials of their choice.
- The project will be done at home. Students for each group must work out their own scheduling to meet, plan, and build their project.
- The finished projects can be brought to school as soon as they are finished for display purposes. However, they must be done by the last day of the unit presentation. They are due on Day Eight (give date).

(6)

- The projects will also be saved and displayed at Pioneer Day in the spring.
- Separate the students into their groups and give them time to discuss their project.
- Ask for comments or questions from the students.
- Ask the students to record their comments and questions in their journals about today's discussions and activities.

Day Five

Direction: Comments and questions

- Discuss any comments or questions from the student's journals about the Day Four activities.
- Remind the students to write their notes for the day in their journals.

Direction: Abraham Lincoln and his early family life

- Discuss with the students the early life of Abraham Lincoln from Kentucky to Indiana. Stress the difficult trip it must have been.
- Discuss the early schooling Abraham Lincoln had in Kentucky. Mention the "blab" school.
- Discuss the schooling in Indiana. Stress that Abraham Lincoln's total formal schooling probably amounted to less than one year.

(7)

- Explain that Abraham Lincoln's interest in reading and books helped make up for his lack of formal schooling.
- Explain and discuss the importance of his "two" mothers and the roles they played in his education.
- Discuss the role of Thomas Lincoln in Abraham Lincoln's early life.
- Discuss the tragedies that confronted Abraham Lincoln in his early life, including the death of a younger brother, his mother, Nancy, and later on his sister Sarah.
- Ask for comments or questions from the students.
- Ask the students to record their comments and questions in their journals about today's discussions.
- Remind the students about finishing their personal genealogy tree and ask if there are any questions. They are due on Day Seven (give date).
- Remind the students about finishing their shelter and log cabin projects and ask if there are any questions. They are due on Day Eight (give date)

Day Six

Direction: Comments and questions

- Discuss any comments or questions from the Student's journals about the Day Five activities.
- Remind the students to write their notes for the day in their journal.

(8)

Direction: Abraham Lincoln's greatness

- Ask the students to give reasons why they think Abraham Lincoln achieved greatness in his lifetime. Ask them to explain their responses.
- List these comments on the board.
- Ask the students to look for common ideas and thoughts. List them separately.
- Look at their listings and try to dwell on the following: encouragement, dedication, and hard work. Hopefully they are on the list. If not, stress the importance of the student comments and also bring the above ideas into the commentary.
- Ask the students to record their comments and questions in their journals about today's discussions.
- Remind the students that their genealogy trees are due tomorrow (give date).
- Remind the students that their shelter and log cabin projects are due on Day Eight (give date).

Day Seven

Direction: Comments and questions

- Discuss any comments or questions from the student's journal about the Day Six activities.
- Remind the students to write their notes for the day in their journal.

Direction: Personal genealogy tree

(9)

- Collect and display the genealogy tree for each student.
- Ask the students to get out their Abraham Lincoln genealogy tree.
- Ask the students to walk around the room and look at each one briefly. Ask them to compare their trees to the Lincoln tree.
- When they look to be finished have them return to their seats.
- Ask the students if they saw any similarities and differences and record them on the board.
- Whatever their responses comment favorably on their choices.
- Explain to them that aside from the difference in time periods, Abraham Lincoln's tree is probably very similar to the students.
- Emphasize to the students that whatever they hope to achieve in their lives comes from within, not necessarily your ancestry. The same is probably true of Abraham Lincoln.
- Remind the students about the previous discussion of encouragement, dedication, and hard work.
- Ask for comments or questions from the students.
- Ask the students to record their comments and questions in their journals about today's discussion.
- Remind the students that their shelter and log cabin project is due tomorrow (give date).

(10)

Direction: Journals and the posttest.

- Explain to the students that before viewing the displays tomorrow a short posttest will be given to them. It will include what we have discussed in class these past seven class days.
- The students will be able to use their journals for the posttest.
- After the posttest the journals and tests will be collected for grading.

Day Eight

Direction: Posttest and Journal

- Ask the students to have their pencil and journal out so that they may take the posttest.
- Pass out the test. Give them about fifteen minutes for the test.
- Collect the tests and the journals.
- Explain that both the posttest and the journal will be graded and then given back to them at a later date.

Direction: Shelter and log cabin project.

- Have each group come forward to explain their shelter and log cabin. An additional class period may be needed if they do not finish their presentations.
- After the presentations, explain to the students that a grade will be given to their group for this project at a later date.

Day Nine

Direction: Wrap up of the unit

- Finish any project presentations from yesterday.
- Answer any questions about the shelter and log cabin presentations.
- Hand out and discuss the posttest questions. Answer any questions about the posttest the students may have.
- Hand out the journals. Answer any questions about journal the students may have.
- Remind the students that the genealogy trees and the shelter and log cabin displays will be kept at school for display on Pioneer day in the spring.
- Ask the students to do one more writing entry in their journals. Explain to them that you want them to briefly write about and evaluate the Abraham Lincoln Unit just presented. Tell them that you would appreciate any comments, good or bad, they would like to share.
- Collect their journals when finished.

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Teaching Resources

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History 500.401 – Teaching Resources

Printed Materials

Elementary

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History 500.401 – Teaching Resources

Video Materials

Elementary

“Abraham Lincoln”, Atlas Video, 1997, Grade: 04-12, Time: 035

“American History: The Early Years to 1877”, Glencoe, McGraw-Hill,
1997, Grade: 04-08, Time: 010

“Civil War”, Glencoe, McGraw-Hill, 1997, Grade: 04-08, Time: 010

“Lincoln – The Kentucky Years”, Holding Company, Inc., 1993, Grade:
04-12, Time: 018

“Portraits of American Presidents: Abraham Lincoln”, Questar Video, Inc.,
1998, Grade: 04-12, Time: 010

History 500.401 – Teaching Resources

Websites

Elementary

<http://home.att.net/~rjnorton/Lincoln80.html>

Many websites to Abraham Lincoln topics can be found here, including Lincoln-related lesson plans, information about Lincoln homes, his legal career, famous quotes, and family history.

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/webquest/ushist/uslinc.htm>

This is a Scholastic Books website with information about Abraham Lincoln, including background information, lesson plans, and teaching strategies. This site is good for primary teachers.

<http://members.aol.com/RVSNorton/Lincoln2.html>

This website includes a biography, photographs, and lots of information about Abraham Lincoln and his complete family.

<http://siec.k12.in.us/~west/proj/lincoln>

Here's a web-based activity about Abraham Lincoln for primary aged children. This includes a quiz about Abraham Lincoln, student's pictures, and information about his early life.

<http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Venue/5217/lincoln.html>

This website contains information about Abraham Lincoln's life and family. There are pictures, educational links, and fun facts.

<http://www.historyplace.com/lincoln>

This website contains a chronology of Abraham Lincoln's life. It includes short articles, pictures, and facts about Lincoln and his entire family.

— lincolnbicentennial.gov

Also: Library of Congress
Northern Illinois Univ. Digitalization
Project
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library