

Who was Abraham Lincoln?

Overview

Students will participate in a kinesthetic activity in which they review various quotes by and regarding Abraham Lincoln, discussing the various ideas and attitudes exhibited by America's sixteenth president. Students will then read a letter from the mother of a black Union soldier and respond to her as President Lincoln.

Grades

8 - 11

Essential Questions

- What were Lincoln's attitudes towards secession, slavery, war, and other political controversies of the 1860s?
- What did the Emancipation Proclamation set forth?
- What were the positive and negative characteristics exhibited by Lincoln?

Materials

- (optional) Accompanying PPT, "Who Was Abraham Lincoln?," available in the Database of K-12 Resources
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"; upon completion of presentation, hit ESC on your keyboard to exit the file.
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- Colored sticker-dots
- A number continuum for display in the room (i.e., label 10 pieces of paper with the numbers 1-10 and place them across the room, or utilize the accompanying PPT which projects which side of the room is 1 and which is 10)
- Letter from the mother of a black Union soldier to President Lincoln, attached
- A Mother's Letter to Lincoln - NY Times, attached
- *Oh Captain, My Captain!*; poem, questions, and answer key attached

Duration

60 minutes

Student Preparation

Students should have an understanding of the Civil War and basic knowledge of Abraham Lincoln.

Teacher Preparation

Post a sign with the words "very good leader", "good leader", "bad leader", and "very bad leader", in each corner of your room; Post a sign stating "Unsure" on a chair in the center of your room.

Procedure

What Constitutes an Effective Leader?

1. As a warm-up, ask students to brainstorm the characteristics of an effective leader. Compile their thoughts in a list on the board. (This question is available for project on slide 2 of the optional accompanying PPT, available in the Database of K-12 Resources.)

2. Ask students to review the list and consider what they feel are the most important attributes of a good leader. Provide each student with 1-3 colored stickers (plain colored sticker dots can be purchased at any office supply store) and in small groups, allow students to place their sticker(s) beside which attribute(s) they feel are most important for an effective leader to exhibit/encompass. Once all students have voted, discuss which attributes got the most votes and ask students why they think this is.

Who Was Abraham Lincoln?

3. Tell students that in today's lesson, they will be examining the leadership qualities of Abraham Lincoln in today's lesson. Explain to students that they will be responding to various quotes by and about Lincoln.

Explain to the class that you will project and read a quote said by or said about Lincoln. The class will spend a few moments thinking about that quote, then express their opinion regarding whether this quote shows Lincoln to be an effective leader or not by positioning themselves along a number continuum, from 1-10, with 1 being the most poor an ineffective leadership, and 10 being the best. Tell students that they are welcome to change places at any point while the class discusses each quote (in fact, if a classmate convinces them with their argument, they are encouraged to change), but that they should choose a location based on their own views and not those of their classmates.

- **Teacher note:** The accompanying (optional) PPT contains several of the quotes from below for projection; each slide also includes the numbers 1 and 10 at the bottom so that students know which side of the room represents effectiveness v. ineffectiveness. Alternatively, teachers can also label 10 sheets of paper with the numbers 1-10 and display these across the room.
4. While the following quotes do not need to be discussed in this order, nor do all need to be used, it is recommended that teachers start the students off with quote 1, a simple quote, so that they can get used to the activity. (Several of these quotes are also available for projection in the accompanying PPT.)
 - **Quote 1:** "If slavery isn't wrong, then nothing is wrong." *Abraham Lincoln, 1864*
 - Project this quote, read it clearly several times, then ask students to determine (based on this quote alone) if it represents Lincoln as a very good leader, a good leader, a bad leader, or very bad leader. Tell students to move to that area of the room once they have decided. Remind them that if they are unsure they can move to the center of the room. Also remind them that as each quote is discussed, they may change their position as they better understand the quote. Once students are in place, discuss:
 - What is Lincoln expressing in this quote?
 - Why does this make him a very effective leader, an effective leader, an ineffective leader, or very ineffective (terrible) leader? (Fill in the appropriate classification based on where students are standing. For this one, chances are most will be under effective.)
 - **Quote 2:** "That on the 1st day of January, A.D. 1863, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom." *Abraham Lincoln, The Emancipation Proclamation*
 - Again, project this quote, read it clearly several times, then ask students to move to the area of the room that expresses their opinion regarding what type of leader this highlights Lincoln to be. Once students are in place, discuss (reminding them they can switch places if their opinion changes as they better understand the quote):
 - Can someone remind us what the Emancipation Proclamation is?
 - What is Lincoln expressing in this quote from the Emancipation Proclamation?

- **Quote 3:** “Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation did not free a single slave. The stereotyped picture of the emancipator suddenly striking the shackles from millions of slaves by a stroke of the presidential pen is altogether inaccurate.” *James Randall & David Donald, “The Civil War and Reconstruction”*
 - Follow the same process as outlined above, then discuss:
 - Many of you just said that the Emancipation Proclamation showed great leadership. Yet, why do some historians say it didn’t actually free a single slave?
 - If the Emancipation Proclamation didn’t literally free anyone, what was its purpose?

(*Discuss with students that two years into fighting the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln issued the **Emancipation Proclamation** (to emancipate means to free from slavery). This document stated that as of Jan. 1, 1863, all enslaved persons in the Confederate states would be freed. Lincoln purposefully didn’t include the slave-holding Union states for fear they would leave the Union and join the southern Confederacy if he did. Since the Union had no control over the Confederate states, the Emancipation proclamation had little effect on slavery there. However, it did have three important effects. First, it gave new heart to many Union soldiers and supporters. For many, abolishing slavery was a more sympathetic goal than preserving the Union. Second, African-American soldiers were now allowed into the Union army. Third, it gained European support, particularly from the British, who had abolished slavery in the 1830’s.) Remember to allow students to change their positions throughout the discussion.

- **Quote 4:** “I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which, in my judgment, will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality...I am in favor of the race to which I belong, having the superior position. I have never said anything to the contrary.” *Abraham Lincoln, 1858 debate in Illinois*
 - Follow the same process as outlined above, then discuss:
 - What is Lincoln expressing in this quote? What attitude does he seem to hold regarding race?
 - Does this surprise you, or contradict your previous opinion of Lincoln in any way? Explain.
 - Why do you think Lincoln expressed this view?

- **Quote 5:** “In life Abraham Lincoln wrestled with the race question more openly than any other president except perhaps Thomas Jefferson, and, unlike Jefferson, Lincoln’s actions sometimes matched his words. We must understand that speakers modify their ideas to appease and appeal to different audiences, so we cannot simply take their statements literally.” *James Lowen, “Lies My Teacher Told Me”*

- Follow the same process as outlined above, then discuss:
 - First off, why does Lowen refer to Jefferson? What do you think he means by saying that Jefferson’s actions did not match his words? (discuss how though Jefferson wrote the words “all men are created equal” he owned hundreds of slaves)
 - What does Lowen mean when he says that speakers modify their ideas to appease and appeal to different audiences...? (discuss the fact that above all else, Lincoln was a politician, and many politicians spin statements to gain votes and/or support, regardless of their personal beliefs)
 - Does the fact that Lincoln openly wrestles with the race question make him a good leader or a bad leader? (Ask students in opposite corners from one another to respond).
 - Considering the historical perspective of the 1860s, how would you characterize Lincoln’s views on race?

5. Depending on the amount of time available for this activity, other quotes for use in this activity include:

- **Quote 6:** “I should like to know if taking this old Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men are equal upon principal, and making exceptions to it-where will it stop? If one man says it does not mean a Negro, why does not another say it does not mean some other man? If that Declaration is not...true, let us tear it out! [cries of No! No!] Let us stick to it then, let us stand firmly by it then!” *Abraham Lincoln, Chicago debate*

- **Quote 7:** “As President, Lincoln understood the importance of symbolic leadership in improving race relations. For the first time the United States exchanged diplomats with Haiti and Liberia. In 1863 Lincoln desegregated the White House staff, which initiated a desegregation of the federal government that lasted until Woodrow Wilson’s presidency. Lincoln opened the White House to black visitors, notably Frederick Douglass. He also continued to wrestle with his own racism, asking aides to investigate the possibility of deporting (“colonizing”) African Americans to Africa or Liberia.”
James Lowen, “Lies My Teacher Told Me
- **Quote 8:** “If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race I do because I believe it helps to save this Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union...I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty, and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men, everywhere could be free”. *Abraham Lincoln, 1862*
- **Quote 9:** “Why didn’t Lincoln do what much of the rest of the world did in the nineteenth century and end slavery peacefully through compensated emancipation? Between 1800 and 1860, dozens of countries, including the entire British Empire, ended slavery peacefully; only in the United States was a war involved...It was not to end slavery that Lincoln initiated an invasion of the South. He stated over and over again that his main purpose was to ‘save the Union’, which is another way of saying he wanted to abolish states’ rights once and for all. He could have ended slavery just as dozens of other countries in the world did during the first sixty years of the nineteenth century, through compensated emancipation, but he never seriously attempted to do so.” *Thomas DiLorenzo, “The Real Lincoln”*

6. After finishing the quotes you have chosen to share, instruct students to take their seats and respond (either in writing or as a class discussion) to the following questions (also available for projection via [slide 11](#)):

- Did Lincoln exhibit the attributes we listed during our warm-up of an effective leader? In what ways? Did he represent those that we voted to be most important?
- Based on all of the information we have discussed regarding Abraham Lincoln, characterize his leadership.
- What is your final, overall opinion of our nation’s sixteenth president based on these quotes and our discussion?
 - Relatedly, also discuss with students whether it is fair to, or if we even can, form an opinion based on only quotes. Similar to today’s “soundbite politics,” is forming an opinion of comments taken out of context trustworthy?

Further Exploring Lincoln with a Letter from the Mother of a Black Union Soldier

7. Have students read the letter from the mother of a black Union soldier to Lincoln, found at <http://www.history.umd.edu/Freedmen/hjohnsn.htm> and also attached. (This can be read individually, in partners, or out loud as a class.) Before students begin reading, tell them to think about what strikes them about the letter as they read. What do they find interesting, moving, or curious? After reading, allow students to respond to this question as a class, then further discuss:

- Who is Hannah Johnson? What has she experienced in her life, based on what she directly says in the letter or your inferences based on what she shares about her life?
- Hannah says (in paragraph 1) “the colored people have as much to fight for as any.” To what do you think she is referring?
- Hannah notes several things that she “knows.” What does Hannah “know?” Did most people “know” this in 1863? Explain.
- Hannah notes (paragraph 1) that “a colored man ought to run no greater risques than a white.” Why is she saying this to President Lincoln? In fact, why did black soldiers face much more risk than whites?
- What does Hannah want from the President? What techniques is she using to try and get what she wants? Note specific lines as evidence. For example:
 - ...“a just man must do hard things sometimes, that shew him to be a great man”

- “They tell me some do you will take back the Proclamation, don't do it. When you are dead and in Heaven, in a thousand years that action of yours will make the Angels sing your praises I know it.”
 - If you had to pick one line from this letter that best exhibits Hannah’s strength, or that is most poignant (affecting), which line would you pick and why?
 - Overall, how would you describe Hannah based on this letter and why?
8. Share additional information with students about Hannah and the letter from the NY Times article available at <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/01/a-mothers-letter-to-lincoln/> and attached. The article does an excellent job of breaking down the rich points and historical realities present throughout the letter. (If time permits, teachers can assign the article for additional reading. Otherwise, provide this information and additional points of thought to the class verbally.)
9. As a culminating assignment, tell students to reconsider everything they have learned and discussed about Lincoln throughout the lesson and to write a letter back to the mother as Abraham Lincoln. Their letter should be from the leadership persona they have attributed to Lincoln based on the lesson, and not merely what they hope or wish Lincoln would have said.

Alternative/Optional Activities

- **“O Captain! My Captain!”** - Tell students they will continue their exploration of Abraham Lincoln by reading the poem *O Captain! My Captain!* by Walt Whitman. Divide students into small groups or partners and pass out the attached poem and questions. Instruct students to read the poem aloud at least two times, then discuss and answer the questions that follow. Once groups are finished, come back together and read the poem aloud one more time. Have students report their answers and discuss as a class.

As a way of allowing students to compile their lingering thoughts on Lincoln, tell students they will be creating a “bio-poem” on the sixteenth president. Explain that a bio-poem has a specific format, and represents biographical information in a creative way. Show and give examples of the following format:

Bio-Poem Format

- Line 1: Abraham
- Line 2: Four characteristics about Abraham Lincoln
- Line 3: Describe his role in the nation
- Line 4: Who loved...
- Line 5: Who felt...
- Line 6: Who feared...
- Line 7: Who gave...
- Line 8: Who envisioned...
- Line 9: Leaving a legacy of...
- Line 10: Lincoln

Lincoln Bio-Poem Example

- Abraham...
- Conflicted visionary, Political leader
- President of the United States
- Who loved America
- Who felt passion for the Union
- Who feared secession
- Who gave all he had
- Who envisioned a world without slavery
- Leaving a legacy of democracy
- ...Lincoln

Tell students that they may use their discretion in terms of whether the poem rhymes or not, how punctuation and capitalization is used, and how to decorate the poem. Students may also use symbolic or literal wording in their poems. If time permits, allow students to begin brainstorming their bio-poems in class, completing them for homework.

- Have students examine Francis Carpenter's famous painting of Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Emancipation_proclamation.jpg), then create their own art work based on a moment of Lincoln's life they feel should be remembered.

Letter from the mother of a black Union soldier to President Lincoln

Buffalo [N.Y.] July 31 1863

Excellent Sir

My good friend says I must write to you and she will send it My son went in the 54th regiment. I am a colored woman and my son was strong and able as any to fight for his country and the colored people have as much to fight for as any. My father was a Slave and escaped from Louisiana before I was born morn forty years agoe I have but poor edication but I never went to schol, but I know just as well as any what is right between man and man. Now I know it is right that a colored man should go and fight for his country, and so ought to a white man. I know that a colored man ought to run no greater risques than a white, his pay is no greater his obligation to fight is the same. So why should not our enemies be compelled to treat him the same, Made to do it.

My son fought at Fort Wagoner but thank God he was not taken prisoner, as many were I thought of this thing before I let my boy go but then they said Mr. Lincoln will never let them sell our colored soldiers for slaves, if they do he will get them back quck he will rettallyate and stop it. Now Mr Lincoln dont you think you oght to stop this thing and make them do the same by the colored men they have lived in idleness all their lives on stolen labor and made savages of the colored people, but they now are so furious because they are proving themselves to be men, such as have come away and got some edication. It must not be so. You must put the rebels to work in State prisons to making shoes and things, if they sell our colored soldiers, till they let them all go. And give their wounded the same treatment. it would seem cruel, but their no other way, and a just man must do hard things sometimes, that shew him to be a great man. They tell me some do you will take back the Proclamation, don't do it. When you are dead and in Heaven, in a thousand years that action of yours will make the Angels sing your praises I know it. Ought one man to own another, law for or not, who made the law, surely the poor slave did not. so it is wicked, and a horrible Outrage, there is no sense in it, because a man has lived by robbing all his life and his father before him, should he complain because the stolen things found on him are taken. Robbing the colored people of their labor is but a small part of the robbery their souls are almost taken, they are made bruits of often. You know all about this

Will you see that the colored men fighting now, are fairly treated. You ought to do this, and do it at once, Not let the thing run along meet it quickly and manfully, and stop this, mean cowardly cruelty. We poor oppressed ones, appeal to you, and ask fair play.

Yours for Christs sake
Hannah Johnson.

[In another handwriting] Hon. Mr. Lincoln The above speaks for itself Carrie Coburn

By Tera W. Hunter | August 1, 2013

Source: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/01/a-mothers-letter-to-lincoln/?_r=0

"I am a colored woman and my son was strong and able to fight for his country and the colored people have as much to fight for as any," declared Hannah Johnson, from Buffalo, N.Y., in a July 31, 1863, letter to President Abraham Lincoln.

What business did a black woman assume to have with the president? Johnson's son was a soldier in the famed 54th Massachusetts Infantry of the United States Colored Troops, which was by then two weeks into a successful campaign at Fort Wagner, S.C. Knowing that her son was likely facing mortal danger and might well die in battle, Johnson was deeply concerned that he, and thousands of other black men fighting for their country, would be treated unjustly despite their service.

It was a courageous letter: Johnson claimed the right and duty of personal petition to the highest official in the land, despite that, as an African-American woman, her status as a citizen was still contested. The letter offers a glimpse of the way African-Americans viewed the war, their place in it and their relationship to the man who would come to be known as the Great Emancipator.

Johnson was a freeborn daughter of a slave man who escaped from Louisiana and fled to the North. This legacy, along with her pride as a mother of a Union soldier, shaped how she understood the opportunities and costs of the Civil War. They framed her assertion of claims to citizenship — and those of other black women, slave and free.

She noted in the letter that she lacked a formal education. But the eloquence of her expression underlines how lapses in grammar and spelling are no bar to intelligence or political acumen. "Now I know it is right that a colored man should go and fight for his country, and so ought to a white man," she wrote. "I know that a colored man ought to run no greater risques than a white, his pay is no greater his obligation to fight is the same."

Close to 180,000 black men served in the Union Army by war's end. Most of them were slaves who had fled from the Confederate states. Three-fourths of all black Northern men volunteered, virtually everyone who was eligible. But they were segregated in units initially led by white officers and were often assigned the most arduous jobs and the most dangerous combat roles. To add insult to injury, they were denied equal pay. This imposed a double burden to fight against enemy forces and to protest against the "friendly fire" of racial prejudice. These inequities kept at least some men from joining the Army, but more often than not, they eagerly enrolled with a strong commitment to serve their country and rescue their people from bondage.

But there were other unique obstacles in their way, which Johnson turned to the president to address. She made clear to Lincoln that she had weighed the pros and cons of her son's enlistment beforehand. She even considered the horror that he might be taken prisoner. Confederates identified black soldiers as slave insurrectionists, regardless of their antebellum status. They released their wrath on captives in the form of summary executions and re-enslavement, as if they had engaged in high treason against the Southern nation-state. This was a clear violation of the Lieber Code of conduct in war, which mandated humane treatment of prisoners of war regardless of race.

Johnson initially felt certain that Lincoln "will never let them sell our colored soldiers for slaves, if they do he will g[et] them back quck [...] he will retallyate and stop it." Her own son survived Fort Wagner and was not captured, but many others weren't so lucky. Yet the president and other officials did not respond swiftly enough to protect them. If black soldiers suffered equal risks of losing their lives, Johnson asked the president, "So why should not our enemies be compelled to treat him the same, Made to do it."

This soldier's mother encouraged the president to contemplate the larger issues that undergirded her call for justice. Of the Confederates she argued, "they have lived in idleness all their lives on stolen labor and made savages of the colored people, but they now are so furious because they are proving themselves to be men." The idea that slavery constituted a theft of the fruits of one's labor was a core principle of Lincoln's own anti-slavery views.

Johnson urged the president to act on this belief and punish errant Confederates who violated it: "You must put the rebels to work in State prisons to making shoes and things, if they sell our colored soldiers, till they let them all go. And give their wounded the same treatment, it would seem cruel, but their [is] no other way."

She also called forth a long tradition of African-American struggles against unjust laws that had buttressed the entire edifice of slavery. "Ought one man to own another, law for or not, who made the law, surely the poor slave did not, so it is wicked, and a horrible Outrage, there is no sense in it," she stated and queried, all at once. Crimes against humanity over centuries could not be justified or made right by the perverse logic of slaveholders who were self-styled victims of their own creation.

It is important to remember that for all the trials that black soldiers faced, they gained much. The mere sight of black men in blue uniforms broadcast the humiliation of Confederates who had failed to win their loyalty. Black men who took up arms against former masters proved their valor and manliness on the battlefield. Their sense of dignity and self-respect were emboldened. They were rewarded with reverence in the eyes of their families, communities and in the nation at large.

In the process a new path to citizenship was opened — but one that only men could achieve. So what about women like Hannah Johnson, and those who lived in the direct line of fire in the South? By what route could they advance their standing in the republic?

Johnson's letter is important because it reminds us that black men were not the only ones fighting for full recognition of their rights, either as slaves escaping from the South or free men in the North. Women like Johnson were increasingly leading themselves, their children and elderly kin out of bondage as men's enlistment accelerated. They poured into contraband camps or set up makeshift shantytowns close to federal lines when they were not welcomed within them. They faced hostile Union soldiers who defied orders by sending them back to slave owners. They encountered slave patrols and rebel soldiers who sought to re-enslave them.

Women were also disproportionately represented among slaves left behind on the home front still forced into plantation labor. Those who were related to soldiers and could not be rescued by them were especially vulnerable to reprisals.

When Martha Glover's husband escaped to join the Army, she was left in Mexico, Mo., to contend with her brutal masters. "I have had nothing but trouble sin[c]e you left," she wrote him. "They abuse me because you went & say that they will not take care of our children & do nothing but quarrel with me all the time and beat me scandalously." Her husband's departure was bittersweet no matter how gallant the cause: "You ought not to left me in the fix I am in & all these little helpless children to take care of." She wished he had waited until she could follow him: "for I do nothing but grieve all the time about you," she stated in palpable agony.

Many other women found ways of contributing to the war effort wherever they were. Susie King Taylor, a fugitive slave, served as cook, nurse, teacher and laundress for a South Carolina regiment. "There were 'loyal women' as well as men, in those days, who did not fear shell or shot, who cared for the sick and dying: women who camped and fared as the boys did," she recalled in her postwar memoir. "They were hundreds of them who assisted the Union soldiers by hiding them and helping them to escape. Many were punished for taking food to prison stockades for the prisoners."

Taylor informed her readers that “many lives were lost — not men alone but noble women as well.” And yet she knew that their nobility was often denied and ignored. She insisted that the memory of black women’s wartime deeds be preserved: “These things should be kept in history before the people.” Black women were often perceived to be nuisances, beggars and thorns in the side of their allies, far afield from the respect heralded in verse and song for white Union and Confederate women.

If Lincoln responded to Johnson, that letter has been lost in time. But in other places he shared his thoughts about other black women who came under his auspices. When advising an officer who complained about fugitive women being a “weight and encumbrance,” Lincoln made a clear distinction between “able bodied male contrabands [who] are already employed by the Army” and “the rest [who] are in confusion and destitution.” Clearly, to the president, women, as well as children and the elderly, fell into the latter category. “They better be set to digging their subsistence out of the ground,” he urged. He had little patience or interest in these women, whom he perceived to be nonessential dependents and consumers of precious resources.

African-American women’s own perceptions contrasted sharply with Lincoln’s. Destitute, yes, but they were not confused about their objectives for inserting themselves in the war for liberation. Lucy Chase, a white volunteer at a contraband camp in Virginia, noted the arrival of women and children with fathers and “husbands [who] are with the army, they know not where.” She stated that “they are alone, with no one to comfort them,” and yet they claimed their own contributions and sacrifices, as though they too had “entered the army.”

Hannah Johnson’s letter pays tribute to these women who entered the Army on their own terms. She dared to claim the rights of citizenship despite the fact that her standing in the republic was at once vital and undervalued. She addressed the commander in chief directly, appealing to his highest instincts to take hold. Of course, she said, “You know all about this.” But she refused to leave it to chance, and used her letter to educate him on the war’s most pressing concerns. Even his own place in history, she correctly predicted, was at stake: “A just man must do hard things sometimes, that shew him to be a great man.”

She closed with a combined plea and a final demand: “Will you see that the colored men fighting now, are fairly treated. You ought to do this, and do it at once, Not let the thing run along meet it quickly and manfully, and stop this, mean cowardly cruelty. We poor oppressed ones, appeal to you, and ask fair play.”

Until such time, and until the killing of black mothers’ sons matter as much as the killing of white mothers sons, the Hannah Johnsons would assert their right to speak, protest and petition all the way up the chain of command. That struggle continues.

Source: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/01/a-mothers-letter-to-lincoln/?_r=0

O Captain! My Captain!

By Walt Whitman

1

O CAPTAIN! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:

But O heart! heart! heart!

O the bleeding drops of red,

Where on the deck my Captain lies,

Fallen cold and dead.

5

2

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;

Here Captain! dear father!

This arm beneath your head;

It is some dream that on the deck,

You've fallen cold and dead.

10

15

3

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;

Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!

But I, with mournful tread,

Walk the deck my Captain lies,

Fallen cold and dead.

20

Name: _____

Questions for "Oh Captain! My Captain"

1. How does this poem make you feel while reading it? What is its mood? At what point and in what way does the mood shift?
2. In this poem, "Captain" refers to whom?
3. What does the following symbolize:
 - a) fearful trip
 - b) the "prize" which we have won
 - c) the "port" which is near
4. Why are all the "swaying mass" waving flags and sounding bugles?
5. Why is the author telling the "Captain" to "rise up" when he knows the "Captain" is dead?
6. What does the author mean when he says, "the ship is anchor'd safe and sound"?
7. Why is the author walking with "mournful tread"?
8. As you imagine and visualize this poem, what sounds do you hear? What images do you see?
9. Who might the narrator symbolize?
10. What can this poem teach us about leadership?

Questions for "Oh Captain! My Captain"-ANSWER KEY

1. How does this poem make you feel while reading it? What is its mood? **Answers will vary**
2. In this poem, "Captain" refers to whom? **Abraham Lincoln**
3. What does the following symbolize:
 - a) fearful trip- **the process of secession and fighting the Civil War**
 - b) the "prize" which we have won- **winning the Civil War, reuniting and preserving the United States**
 - c) the "port" which is near- **refers to the end of the Civil War and reconstruction of the south**
4. Why are all the "swaying mass" waving flags and sounding bugles?
Americans (Northerners) are happy that the war is over and that the north was successful. They are praising President Lincoln for his leadership.
5. Why is the author telling the "Captain" to "rise up" when he knows the "Captain" is dead?
He can not believe that his great leader is dead. His words are words of disbelief. As people often do when hearing of a death, he does not want to believe that it is possible that the President could be dead.
6. What does the author mean when he says, "the ship is anchor'd safe and sound"?
United States is safe; we have won the war
7. Why is the author walking with "mournful tread"?
Although the United States can rejoice at the war ending, the joy has been lessened by the tragedy of Lincoln's assassination.
8. As you imagine and visualize this poem, what sounds do you hear? What images do you see?
Answers will vary
9. Who might the narrator symbolize?
Answers will vary, but may include a soldier, a patriotic citizen, a Northerner, a supporter of Lincoln, etc.
11. What can this poem teach us about leadership?
Answers will vary