



Will the Real Abraham Lincoln Please Stand Up?



★ Characters ★

Host	Panelist 1
Biographer 1	Panelist 2
Biographer 2	Panelist 3
Lincoln 1	Panelist 4
Lincoln 2	Panelist 5
Lincoln 3	

Host: Welcome to *To Tell the Truth!* Today's guest is "Honest Abe" Lincoln, president of the United States during the Civil War. Of course, only one of our three guests is the real Abraham Lincoln. The other two are impostors. Listen carefully to what each one says. Then it's up to you to figure out who's telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Let's begin by meeting our guests.

Lincoln 1: Hello. My name is Abraham Lincoln. It is an honor to be here today.

Lincoln 2: Honest Abe, that's me. I was the sixteenth president of the United States. Glad to meet you.

Lincoln 3: Greetings, students. I am President Abraham Lincoln.

Biographer 1: Before we start, the real Abraham Lincoln has asked us to read this letter of introduction to you:

Dear Students: I, Abraham Lincoln, was born in 1809 to a poor family in western Kentucky. While I was still a boy, we moved to Indiana, and then to Illinois. Later, I served as the nation's sixteenth president during a terrible time in our history—the Civil War. When I took the oath of office, I promised to "preserve, protect, and defend" the country. I greatly opposed slavery. But I was even more worried that the war over slavery was tearing our country apart.



Biographer 2: *(continues reading the letter)*

Even so, in 1863, with the war still raging, I officially freed all slaves with a document known as the Emancipation Proclamation. Later that year, in the Gettysburg Address, I pronounced that “government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.” On April 9, 1865, the Civil War ended. Five days later, I became the first U.S. president to be assassinated. I was fifty-six years old. Signed, Abraham Lincoln.

Host: Let’s begin the questioning with Panelist 1.

Panelist 1: From the day you learned to read, you were an avid bookworm. This frustrated your father, who didn’t believe that reading was as important as working in the fields. Then your mother died when you were only nine years old. Life must have been pretty lonely then. What else can you tell us about your childhood?

Lincoln 1: After my mother died, my twelve-year-old sister, Sarah, took on the cooking and cleaning. I guess she even helped raise me a bit. About a year later, my father was remarried to a widow named Sarah Bush Johnson. I loved my new stepmother. And even though she couldn’t read herself, she always encouraged me to continue my education.

Lincoln 2: My stepmother used to tease me by saying that, since I was so tall, I’d better keep my hair clean. She didn’t want me to dirty up her ceiling. So as a joke, I had a young child step in mud. Then I held him upside down so he could track footprints on the ceiling. My stepmother laughed at that. But I still had to clean up the mess!

Lincoln 3: “My best friend is the man who’ll give me a book I haven’t read,” I used to say. I would walk for miles to borrow one. Once I borrowed a book about George Washington that I really liked. But when I carelessly left it out in the rain, it was ruined. I put in three days of work to pay off the owner for that book. When I was done, he told me to keep it.

Panelist 2: You were born and raised in a one-room log cabin, and you attended a one-room log cabin school. It was called a “blab” school because you were supposed to read your lessons out loud to prove that you were studying. Students who didn’t were thought to be lazy and were punished. What else do you remember about school?

Lincoln 1: I guess you could say I “learned by littles.” That is, I only went to school when I wasn’t needed to do chores. Usually that was just for a few months each winter. My sister and I would walk two miles to get to school, then two miles back. If you totaled up all the days I ever spent there, it would probably add up to about one year.



Lincoln 2:

Since paper was expensive, I would practice my writing and spelling in snow, dirt, or dust. Anything! I didn't care! On Fridays at school there was always a spelling bee. The winner was allowed to take a book home for the weekend. So I always tried to win—except once. That day, I helped a girl that I liked spell a word correctly. When the teacher wasn't looking, I pointed to my eye to hint that the next letter in the word was “i.” That week, I was happy when the two of us tied for first place!

Lincoln 3:

Once I saw some mean kids at school abuse a turtle by placing hot coals on its back. That led me to write a school composition about cruelty to animals. In it I said, “All living things have a right to be treated fairly.” I believed that so strongly that sometimes I'd stand up on a tree stump and give talks on the topic.

Panelist 3:

You really seemed to earn the nickname “Honest Abe.” Once, you walked ten miles to give a woman an item that she had accidentally left at a store where you were working. Another time, after a customer was overcharged by accident, you walked three miles to return the money. That's a lot of walking! Did you do any other traveling as a young man?

Lincoln 1:

At nineteen, I was hired to take a flatbed boat down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans. It was my first trip away from home. I'll never forget the slave auctions that I saw on that trip. It was horrible watching people chained up and beaten. I earned \$25 for doing that job. But, as was the custom, I had to turn all my earnings over to my father. I resented this, though, as he and I didn't get along well.

Lincoln 2:

In 1832, a Native American chief named Black Hawk led one thousand warriors to Illinois to fight the militia and U.S. soldiers. I enlisted to help crush the rebellion. I served a total of eighty days, and for that I was paid \$95. But in that time, I also learned a good deal about the life that volunteer soldiers led.

Lincoln 3:

In 1836, I opened a law office in Springfield, Illinois. In those days, lawyers like myself would sometimes have to travel around the state to try cases. I usually accompanied Judge David Davis. And sometimes, if he wasn't feeling well, I would act as the judge in his place!

Panelist 4:

In 1858, as a candidate for a seat in the Senate, you took part in a series of debates with your opponent Stephen Douglas. In the debates, you told the nation that you thought slavery was wrong. Though you lost that election, you beat Douglas two years later in the race for president. But that led many Southern states that didn't like your anti-slavery beliefs to secede from the Union. By April 1861, about a month after you were sworn into office, the Civil War began. Tell us more about your presidency and the war.



- Lincoln 1:** The South had a great general named Robert E. Lee. For a while, it looked like the North didn't stand a chance against him. But then I decided to use my height to my advantage. I joined the Union Army as a soldier. Since I could see over just about everybody's heads, I was able to warn my soldiers when the Confederates were approaching. Before long, the North had won!
- Lincoln 2:** The bloodiest battle of the war took place in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Within three days over twenty thousand men had been killed or wounded on each side. A few months later, I participated in a ceremony to dedicate the area as a national cemetery. Soldiers from both the North and the South who had fought one another to the death, would now be buried here together, forever. That's where I gave my famous speech, the Gettysburg Address.
- Lincoln 3:** As you probably know, CNN did a really fantastic job of reporting the war. Every day, there were on-the-spot interviews at all the major battlefields. These began on April 12, 1860, the day the Confederates first opened fire at Fort Sumter. And they continued until Robert E. Lee surrendered at the Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865.
- Panelist 5:** Shortly before your assassination, you reported having a very disturbing dream. In it you saw people in the White House crying over a body on a platform with soldiers standing guard. It was your body. In reality you were shot on April 14, 1865, and you died the next morning. What exactly happened, Mr. President?
- Lincoln 1:** I had always loved acting, and had agreed to appear in the play at Ford's Theater. John Wilkes Booth, a fellow actor, was mad that he hadn't gotten the part. He was sitting in the audience that night and, when he saw me in the role, he pulled out a gun and shot me on the stage.
- Lincoln 2:** I was sitting in the balcony of Ford's Theater with my wife, Mary, and some of our friends, when John Wilkes Booth snuck in and shot me from behind. He was a Southerner who hated me for my position on slavery. After shooting me, he jumped on the stage to make his get-away. But he didn't get far. While jumping, he injured his leg. Later he was found dead in a barn with a gun. No one knows to this day whether he shot himself or not.
- Lincoln 3:** John Wilkes Booth was both an actor in the play and a Confederate sympathizer who hated that the North had won the war. In the play, there was a scene where he had to shoot off a gun. So he loaded a real gun with bullets and shot me from the stage. Then he ran off and disappeared. He was never seen or heard from again.
- Host:** Okay, everyone. It is now time to decide who you think is the real Abraham Lincoln. With a show of hands, how many think it is Lincoln 1? *(pause)* Lincoln 2? *(pause)* Lincoln 3? *(pause)* Now that everyone has voted, let's have the real Abraham Lincoln please stand up.





ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1802-1865)

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☆ Teacher's Page ☆

Who Is the Real Abraham Lincoln?

Once all the votes have been cast, establish that Lincoln 2 is the real Abraham Lincoln. Then review the play, making sure that students can distinguish all of these true and false statements:

Panelists 1, 2, and 3: All responses to the questions are true.

Panelist 4: The answers that Lincoln 1 and 3 give here are both silly. Aside from the fact that it is rare for the leader of a nation to go into battle, Lincoln's height would only be of limited help on the battlefields. And, obviously, CNN (much less, television) was not yet invented. (However, the Civil War was the first war ever photographed and was quite well covered, journalistically.) Thus, Lincoln 1 and 3 cannot be the real "Honest Abe."

Panelist 5: John Wilkes Booth was indeed both an actor and a Confederate sympathizer. He shot Lincoln, attacking him from behind. Again, Lincoln 2 is the only one telling the whole truth here.

Questions for Discussion

1. Compare the school that Abraham Lincoln attended with the one that you go to. Which one sounds like more fun to you?
2. "Honest Abe" walked many miles to return things that didn't belong to him. What would you have done if you were in his shoes?
3. In some ways, Abraham Lincoln both started the Civil War and ended it. Give specific examples showing how he did each.
4. Why do you think Abraham Lincoln did not wish to punish the South after the war ended? If you were a Northerner, would you have agreed with him on this? Why or why not?

Activities

1. Write a "what if" story about what life might have been like today, if the Confederate Army had won the Civil War.
2. Write a "what if" story about what might have happened if Abraham Lincoln had lived to serve out his second term in office.
3. The Civil War was the first time that photography was used to capture battle scenes in action. Using photographs from newspapers and magazines, create a poster collage about how terrible war can be.