



Becoming Lincoln: A Dramatization of the Telegrams

DEVELOPED BY CARSON FORD

THE LINCOLN TELEGRAM COLLABORATIVE – APRIL 2013

War at the best, is terrible, and this war of ours, in its magnitude and in its duration, is one of the most terrible.

Abraham Lincoln, June 16, 1864 speech in Philadelphia

Summary

In this activity, students are asked to use the information from the Lincoln Telegrams Project and other online sources to create a short skit dramatizing some aspect of Lincoln's life. The activity requires that students read telegrams closely and apply their knowledge in a creative way.

LESSON OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND

Working in pairs, students should analyze a small collection of telegrams from 1864. This year should be of particular interest to students because the war was still quite active, with the violent campaigns of Grant and Sherman occurring in the Southern states. Student pairs should use the following telegrams found on the Wiki website of the Lincoln Telegrams Project at <http://wiki.lincolntelegrams.com/>

- March 10, 1864
- April 27, 1864
- May 27, 1864
- June 24, 1864 (1)
- July 18, 1864
- August 14, 1864
- September 3, 1864
- October 17, 1864
- November 21, 1864
- December 1, 1864 (1)

This collection of 10 telegrams is not focused on a specific theme. Instead, each telegram has a different recipient and different topic (covering a wide variety of issues), which will allow students to gain a more personal perspective on the president.

OBJECTIVE:

- Students will develop an understanding of the Lincoln on a personal and intimate level. Students will interpret how Lincoln's personal life impacted his role as president of the United States.

MATERIALS:

- Internet access
- Video recording devices and video hosting service (e.g. Edmodo or Youtube)

PROCEDURE

This first part of the activity involves students reading the Lincoln Telegrams and other online material, so it should be carried out in a computer lab or using classroom laptops. In this activity, students should be creative so they should be prepared to interact in an energetic environment.

Students should be divided up in pairs and asked to read all 10 of the Lincoln telegrams listed above. They should focus closely on one telegram, paying attention to the analysis and interpretation information provided on the wiki page, but also noting the recipients of Lincoln telegrams. The goal is

for students to gain a better understanding of Lincoln personality and how his beliefs and attitudes affected his role as president. Students should note the telegram recipient and try to determine the historical significance of this person in relation to President Lincoln. After students gather factual information, they will begin their analysis and creative work.

To support their analysis, students should consider the questions.

- What does Lincoln's tone of voice tell you about the nature of the message?
- How do you think Lincoln conveyed emotion through the telegram message?
- Why is the telegram recipient to be historically significant?
- What was the relationship between Lincoln and the telegram recipient?
- Does the telegram allude to any of Lincoln's wartime powers?
- Do you sense that Lincoln was struggling with any moral dilemmas?

After students read over their telegram and consider the questions above, they should research the telegram recipient in more depth. Students should search online to find information about the telegram recipient (sources could include any government run archive, library websites, etc.). Students should gather as much information as possible about the recipient in terms of their relationship with Lincoln, their occupation during the Civil War, and their political positions on issues of the day that would have affected their overall view of the war.

The second part of the activity involves dramatic reenactments or original dramatic sketches written by the students. Students should use the interpretations, analysis, and additional information they found about the telegram recipient to create a short and active storytelling performance. Students should write a dramatic reenactment of the telegram, with one student as Lincoln and the other student as the recipient. In this dramatization, students should locate or write a response to Lincoln and then act out the exchange in the telegram messages.

Students should use the information from the telegram and the additional evidence they researched online about the telegram recipient to invent a creative performance on what they learned.

In addition to writing the dramatic reenactment, students might also perform their work or videotape a performance. Students should watch the videos for homework and, if posted to a video-sharing site, post comments and additional questions. After reviewing the videos, posing additional questions, and answering their own questions from other students, students should prepare a summary of what they learned in order to present it to class on the following day.