

Teacher Tool 233: The Impact of Lincoln's Election Study Guide

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HEC-TV Live! Presents
The Civil War: The Impact of Lincoln's Election

Original Air Date: February 10, 2011

Grade Levels: 6-12

Program Description:

Without a doubt, the Presidential election of 1860 was an historic one. America was living in turbulent times. The debate over slavery was constant and heated. The issue of states rights loomed large. Americans had a number of choices in this historic election, and the candidate that prevailed was Abraham Lincoln. Who were the candidates of the election and how did people view them? What made Lincoln a galvanizing figure in such different ways for those in the North and those in the South? Why did southern and border states move so quickly to debate secession after his election? What would it have been like to be at those meetings, to hear the debates, to read the headlines daily? Explore these questions and more as you view this archived program.

This program focuses on the use of primary sources to explore the impact of Abraham Lincoln's election as President on the start of America's Civil War. What are the strengths and limitations of such sources? How do they shed a light on history that is different from secondary sources? What stories of people and institutions do they tell? Students had the opportunity to interact with the experts involved in the program as well as share ideas and ask questions of each other. Through the course of the program discussion we explored numerous primary source documents that took students back in time to the people, places and perspectives of Americans in the winter of 1860-1861. A highlighted focus of the program is given to documents demonstrating Missouri as a microcosm of the explosive conversation being held all across the country.

Program Objectives:

1. The participant will explore the causes of America's Civil War and evaluate the impact of Lincoln's election on the eruption of the war.
2. The participant will interact with primary source documents and interpret how they impact his/her understanding of a particular historic subject.
3. The participant will engage in a discussion about different groups' perspectives related to the causes of the Civil War and express their ideas and questions as they interact with historic experts and primary source artifacts.

Program Format:

- 1. Welcome and Introduction**—Student groups and experts are introduced and welcomed to the program.
- 2. The Context: Hopes and Fears of Lincoln’s Election**—In this segment we use primary source documents to explore different people’s and group’s points of view concerning the possible election of Abraham Lincoln. We look at the political platforms of the candidates involved in the election and the view from both slave holding states and non-slave holding states.
- 3. The Reaction to Lincoln’s Election**—This segment focuses on the national response to Lincoln’s election. What states did what? How quickly did they do it? Why did they do it? More primary source documents highlighting these events will be included.
- 4. Missouri as a Microcosm for the National Reaction**—We utilize primary source documents from the Missouri State Convention held to determine whether or not Missouri would choose to secede from the Union. The debates and discussions in Missouri serve as a microcosm for the same debates and discussions happening in many other states. We also explore some unique characteristics of Missouri’s makeup and decision making process.
- 5. Closing Segment**--Including summary of topics discussed and final questions from students.

Program-Related Activity Suggestions:

1. Familiarize students with basic information about the election of 1860. Who were the candidates? What were their positions on the issues? How did different groups respond to Lincoln’s election? A wide variety of web resources are available, and a few are highlighted below if you do not have resources of your own to refer to.

<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h92.html> Here you’ll find a short article on election of 1860, candidates involved, electoral college and popular vote results

<http://history1800s.about.com/od/presidentialcampaigns/a/1860election.htm> More on the election, background of Lincoln’s rise to prominence via the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858, and his campaign to get the Republican nomination.

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=83 Find out more details about the election of 1860 then click on the pages that come after to read how different states began debating secession and the results of those debates.

Based on their reading and discussion, have students list what they perceive as the important issues in the election and why they think certain states ended up taking the positions they did. Have them share their ideas with each other, in journal entries, written reports, campaign posters, or other methods of your choosing.

2. Have students compare their previous understanding of the impact of Lincoln's election on the start of the Civil War with their current understanding since the program. How has that understanding changed as a result of talking with experts and reading the documents? Have students cite specific examples of changed perceptions or understandings and what particular items or experiences helped foster that change.
3. Have students create a primary source "window" into their own lives for future generations to study. What documents would they include? What artifacts? What photographs? Why would they choose these items? Have students limit their choices to no more than 10 items total. What do they hope people in the future would understand about their life today if they came across this treasure trove of material?
4. Have students go back to the winter of 1860-61 and debate the issue of secession themselves. Have each student develop two to three arguments in favor of secession and also two to three arguments opposed to secession. Have the students cite information learned from today's program and other related primary source documents which leads them to choose the arguments they do. Have them include quotes from people debating the issue at the time and their own take on arguments developed by those individuals.
5. Have students go back to the winter of 1860-61 and take on the guise of an individual of the time writing a letter to a friend declaring their response to Lincoln's election as President. Are they a southern plantation owner, a northern businessman, an abolitionist, a politician, or perhaps a mom worried for her sons in the oncoming threat of war? What other guise could they choose to take? In that person's voice, have students write a letter to a specific friend outlining their reactions, hopes, fears, worries, concerns, expectations, etc. in light of Lincoln's election.

Supplemental Resources:

Learn more about Abraham Lincoln and his life both before and during his Presidency at the official website of Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library, <http://www.alplm.org/>.

Learn more about what the National Park Service is doing to commemorate the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Civil War at <http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/civwar150.html>. Numerous resources from all states involved in the Civil War are available for teachers and students.

Featured National Standards (History):

Grades 5-12:

Historical Thinking Standards

1. Chronological Thinking

B. Identify the temporal structure of a historical narrative or story: its beginning, middle, and end (the latter defined as the outcome of a particular beginning).

E. Interpret data presented in time lines and create timelines by designating appropriate

equidistant intervals of time and recording events according to the temporal order in which they occurred.

2. Historical Comprehension

- A. Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative and assess its credibility.
- B. Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage by identifying who was involved, what happened, where it happened, what events led to these developments, and what consequences or outcomes followed.
- C. Identify the central question(s) the historical narrative addresses and the purpose, perspective, or point of view from which it has been constructed.
- D. Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations but acknowledge that the two are related; that the facts the historian reports are selected and reflect therefore the historian's judgment of what is most significant about the past.
- E. Read historical narratives imaginatively, taking into account what the narrative reveals of the humanity of the individuals and groups involved--their probable values, outlook, motives, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.
- F. Appreciate historical perspectives--(a) describing the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there, as revealed through their literature, diaries, letters, debates, arts, artifacts, and the like; (b) considering the historical context in which the event unfolded--the values, outlook, options, and contingencies of that time and place; and (c) avoiding "present-mindedness," judging the past solely in terms of present-day norms and values.

4. Historical Research Capabilities

- A. Formulate historical questions from encounters with historical documents, eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos, historical sites, art, architecture, and other records from the past.
- B. Obtain historical data from a variety of sources, including: library and museum collections, historic sites, historical photos, journals, diaries, eyewitness accounts, newspapers, and the like; documentary films, oral testimony from living witnesses, censuses, tax records, city directories, statistical compilations, and economic indicators.
- C. Interrogate historical data by uncovering the social, political, and economic context in which it was created; testing the data source for its credibility, authority, authenticity, internal consistency and completeness; and detecting and evaluating bias, distortion, and propaganda by omission, suppression, or invention of facts.
- F. Support interpretations with historical evidence in order to construct closely reasoned arguments rather than facile opinions.

5. Historical Issues—Analysis and Decision-Making

- A. Identify issues and problems in the past and analyze the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those involved in the situation.