

Abraham Lincoln

Read the text *Honest Abe*. Find out what Lincoln's genius lay in. Use a dictionary when necessary.

Honest Abe

Of all the presidents in the history of the United States,

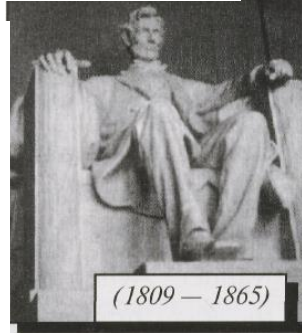
Abraham Lincoln is probably the one that Americans remember the best and with deepest affection. No American president has so touched the imagination of his people as Lincoln. From his birth to nearly illiterate parents in a Kentucky log cabin to his tragic death at the hand of an assassin his life has become an expression of the American nation's life. As a close friend of his once observed, *"He had passed through all the grades of society when he reached the presidency, and he had found common sense a sure reliance and he put it into practice... Lincoln was a great common man."*

The genius of a common man who is also a great man may lie in his ability to recognize the truest aspirations of his people, to understand the problems they must confront together, and to provide leadership toward the future. It was so with Lincoln. He brought a new honesty and integrity to the White House. He would always be remembered as "honest Abe". Most of all, he is associated with the final abolition of slavery. Lincoln became a symbol of the American dream whereby an ordinary person from humble beginnings could reach the pinnacle of society as president of the country.

Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809, in Kentucky, and spent the first seven years of his life there. They were difficult years in which Abe's father tried to make a living as a carpenter and farmer. The Lincolns moved from farm to farm.

Abe and his sister helped with the heavy daily tasks that came with farming. He cleared the woods for farmland with his father, and became very skilled at splitting logs.

IN THIS TEMPLE
AS IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE
FOR WHOM HE SAVED THE UNION
THE MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN
IS ENSHRINED FOREVER



In his entire life, Abe was only able to go to school for a total of one year. This lack of education only made him hungry for more knowledge. His mother influenced him in his search for learning. Although she was completely uneducated and could not read or write, she encouraged her children to study by themselves. Abe's beloved mother died when he was nine years old. The family was greatly saddened, and for a while lived almost in poverty.

Abe's love of reading made him travel to neighboring farms and counties to borrow books. He was often found reading next to a pile of logs that he had been splitting.

When he was older, Abe noticed that people loved to listen to stories. He began telling tall tales in the store where he worked. Customers came and stayed when they knew he was there, just to hear him talk.

His powers of speech soon helped him enter a new arena, that of politics and law. In 1834 he was elected into the House of Representatives and began studying to become a lawyer.

Abraham Lincoln began a long road to become the sixteenth president of the United States. He practiced law all across the state for the next few years, travelling far on horseback to different counties. In 1847 he was elected into Congress, but his opinions did not ensure him a long stay there. He was strongly against slavery and disagreed on some other issues. A few years later, slavery became one of the county's most important problems, and more people were willing to abolish it. Lincoln joined the Republicans, a new political party that was opposed to slavery. The Republicans nominated him for the U. S. Senate in 1858, and in his acceptance speech, he stated:

"A house divided against itself cannot stand... This government cannot endure, permanently half-slave and half-free... I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house

to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided."

Abraham Lincoln's oratorical powers brought him to the attention of the nation. He participated in many debates using the simple language that he used to communicate with people all his life. When Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1860, the country began the process of "dividing against itself. South Carolina and other states formed the Confederate States of America. The North and South were divided, and the Civil War began. The war was not only over the abolition of slavery, but also the rights of individual states to make their own choices on other issues.

Politics and war were so dominant in Lincoln's life that few of his contemporaries noticed his power as a writer. Yet, Lincoln was a President whose writings have a permanent place in American literature. A passionate reader all his life, he carefully studied the best books that came his way, remembered and could quote many passages from the Bible and Shakespeare, reading these and other works aloud in order to hear the rhythms of the sentences, and copying out passages that expressed ideas with special vividness. He taught himself logic and grammar. From this study came a prose style that was precise and controlled, balanced and logical. This style made colloquial language sound like poetry and showed the great qualities of Lincoln's mind.

Lincoln's most famous speech, The Gettysburg Address, was made in 1863 in the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. He expressed his grief for the soldiers killed in the American Civil War, and talked about the principles that they died for, in words that are often remembered by Americans:
"... seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now they are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation can long endure. ... The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living to resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from this earth."

His greatest speeches, which now are read throughout the world, hold to this high standard.

Lincoln was elected to a second term in 1864. The South surrendered, and the Civil War ended on April 9, 1865. The difficult task of national reconstruction and reconciliation lay ahead, but Lincoln would not be the person to lead the country through this difficult period.

On April 14, Lincoln attended a play at the Ford's Theatre in Washington, D. C. A few minutes past ten o'clock, an actor who disagreed with Lincoln's political opinions stepped into the Presidential box and shot the President. Lincoln died the following morning.

Lincoln, who had struggled through the Civil War to preserve the Union, lived long enough to see it maintained but not long enough to help in healing the wounds left by the war. He saw the troubling times his Nation passed through, and made the preservation of the Union — "the world's best hope", as he called it — the main principle of his life. The Americans remember the aspirations, the hopes and the ideals that Lincoln held for the United States.

Exercise 1. *Say what ideals Abraham Lincoln devoted his life to. Try and explain why Americans remember Abraham Lincoln the best and with deepest affection. Speak about Abraham Lincoln as a great personality.*

Exercise 2. *Say in what way this is true:*

When we get acquainted with the culture, literature and history of another country, we begin to understand its people, their way of life and their views better.