

# The Mysterious Mr. Lincoln

Biography by Russell Freedman

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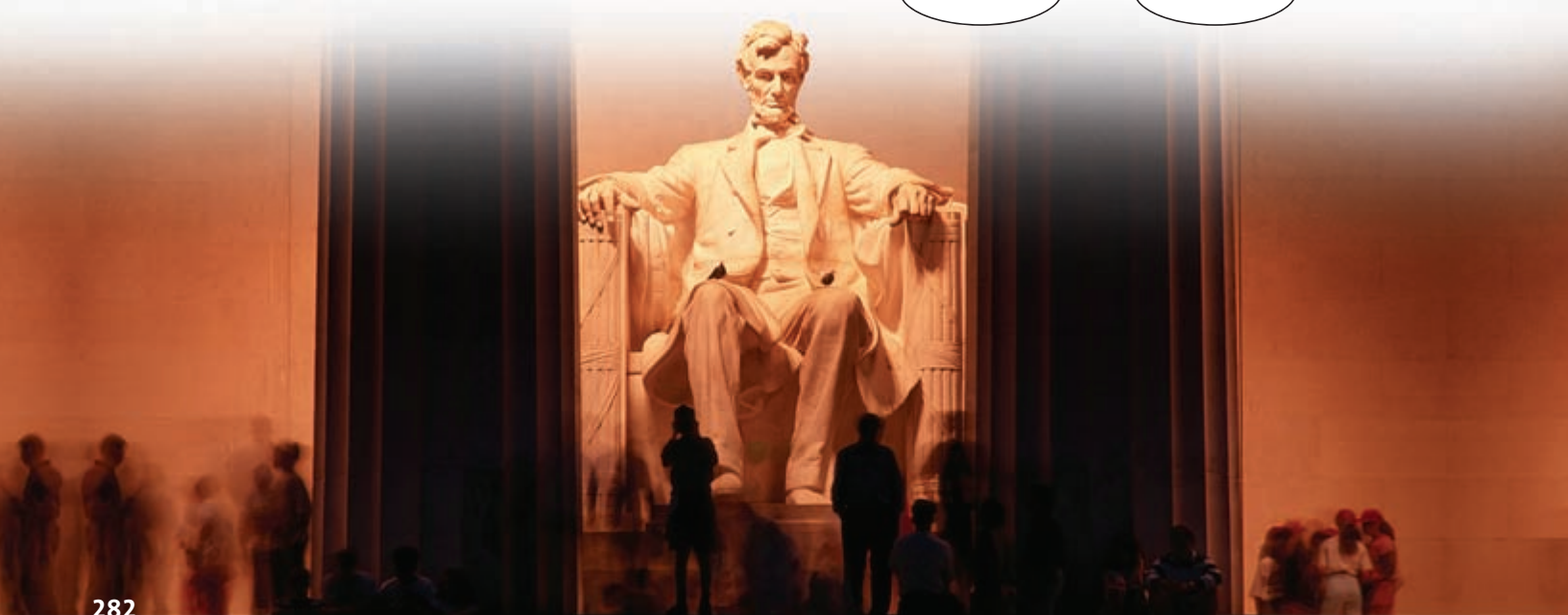
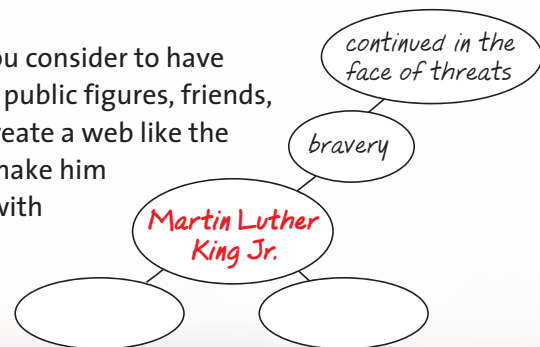
## What are the signs of **GREATNESS?**

### COMMON CORE

**RI 2** Identify a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas. **RI 3** Analyze how a text makes connections between individuals, ideas, or events. **RI 5** Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

People can be noticed for a variety of reasons. A brilliant mind, confident personality, strong work ethic, or generous spirit can make someone shine. When people use these qualities to improve the world and inspire others, they are said to have greatness. The biography you are about to read describes the complicated personality—and extraordinary leadership—of one of the greatest U.S. presidents, Abraham Lincoln.

**WEB IT** Think of two or three people you consider to have qualities of greatness. You can include public figures, friends, or family members. For each person, create a web like the one shown to show the qualities that make him or her great. Then compare your web with your classmates' webs. What qualities come up more than once?



### ● TEXT ANALYSIS: BIOGRAPHY

Real people often inspire fascinating pieces of writing. A true account of a person's life that's written by someone else is called a **biography**. Writers of biographies

- use the third-person point of view
- present facts and opinions from a variety of sources
- provide an interpretation of a person's character

As you read this biography, watch for ways Russell Freedman highlights President Lincoln's strengths and weaknesses.

### ● READING SKILL: IDENTIFY MAIN IDEAS AND DETAILS

Nonfiction writing is usually organized around **main ideas**, which are the most important ideas a writer wants to convey about a topic. The writer develops the main ideas through **supporting details**, which can include

- **facts**: statements that can be proven
- **anecdotes**: brief stories that reveal important points
- **quotations**: direct statements from relevant people

Sometimes writers state their main ideas clearly, often at the beginning or end of paragraphs. Other times, you must **infer** the main ideas from the details provided. As you read, note the main ideas and details on a rough outline like the one shown.

I. Lincoln had a distinctive, changing appearance.  
A. Tall with long legs  
B.  
II.

### ▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The following phrases could have been headlines at the time Abraham Lincoln lived. Replace each boldfaced term with a word or words that means something similar.

1. Southern States **Denounce** the War
2. A **Melancholy** Nation Faces Civil War
3. Soldiers **Defy** the Odds
4. Lincoln to **Patronize** Local Business
5. Exhausted Generals Grow **Listless** as War Rages On
6. Senators **Meddle** in Lincoln's War Plans



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

## Russell Freedman

born 1929

### The Art of Nonfiction

Russell Freedman's father worked for a publishing company and often brought authors home to have dinner with the family. "I wanted to be like them," Freedman says. To improve his writing skills, he got a job as a news reporter. His interest in writing biographies started when he learned about a blind 16-year-old boy who had invented a Braille typewriter. Fascinated by the boy's story, Freedman wrote his first book, *Teenagers Who Made History* (1961). When asked why he specializes in writing nonfiction for young readers, Freedman says he enjoys the challenge of conveying "the spirit and essence of a life."

### BACKGROUND TO THE BIOGRAPHY

#### Abraham Lincoln

Despite being born into a poor family with few opportunities, Abraham Lincoln managed to educate himself. He became a successful lawyer and state politician, but he had even greater ambitions. In 1860, he achieved them; he won the presidency. He steered the country through the long and bloody Civil War (1861–1865), which resulted in an end to slavery in the United States. In April 1865, Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, a southerner who wanted slavery to continue. Lincoln has held an enduring fascination for historians who often find new facets of his personality to examine. As Russell Freedman has pointed out, "Every ten years Lincoln changes character dramatically."

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# The Mysterious Mr. Lincoln

Russell Freedman

*“If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said, I am, in height, six feet, four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on average, one hundred and eighty pounds dark complexion, with coarse black hair and grey eyes—no other marks or brands recollected.”*

## Analyze Visuals ▶

Look at this photograph of Lincoln. How would you **describe** the expression on his face?

**A**braham Lincoln wasn't the sort of man who could lose himself in a crowd. After all, he stood six feet four inches tall, and to top it off, he wore a high silk hat.

His height was mostly in his long bony legs. When he sat in a chair, he seemed no taller than anyone else. It was only when he stood up that he towered above other men.

At first glance, most people thought he was homely. Lincoln thought so too, referring once to his “poor, lean, lank face.” As a young man he was sensitive about his gawky looks, but in time, he learned to laugh at himself. When a rival called him “two-faced” during a political debate, Lincoln replied: “I leave  
10 it to my audience. If I had another face, do you think I'd wear this one?” **A**

According to those who knew him, Lincoln was a man of many faces. In repose,<sup>1</sup> he often seemed sad and gloomy. But when he began to speak, his expression changed. “The dull, **listless** features dropped like a mask,” said a Chicago newspaperman. “The eyes began to sparkle, the mouth to smile, the whole countenance<sup>2</sup> was wreathed in animation, so that a stranger would have said ‘Why, this man, so angular and solemn a moment ago, is really handsome!’” **B**

## **A** MAIN IDEAS AND DETAILS

Reread lines 7–11.

What type of detail does the author use to help convey Lincoln's appearance? Add this to your outline.

**listless** (lĭst'lĭs) *adj.*  
lacking energy

## **B** BIOGRAPHY

Who thinks Lincoln is “a man of many faces”? Tell how you know this.

1. **repose** (rĭ-pōz'): the act of resting.

2. **countenance** (koun'tē-nəns): the face; expression of the face.



Lincoln was the most photographed man of his time, but his friends insisted that no photo ever did him justice. It's no wonder. Back then, cameras required long exposures. The person being photographed had to "freeze" as the seconds ticked by. If he blinked an eye, the picture would be blurred. That's why Lincoln looks so stiff and formal in his photos. We never see him laughing or joking.

Artists and writers tried to capture the "real" Lincoln that the camera missed, but something about the man always escaped them. His changeable features, his tones, gestures, and expressions, seemed to **defy** description.

Today it's hard to imagine Lincoln as he really was. And he never cared to reveal much about himself. In company he was witty and talkative, but he rarely betrayed his inner feelings. According to William Herndon, his law partner, he was "the most secretive—reticent—shut-mouthed man that ever lived."

In his own time, Lincoln was never fully understood even by his closest friends. Since then, his life story has been told and retold so many times, he has become as much a legend as a flesh-and-blood human being. While the legend is based on truth, it is only partly true. And it hides the man behind it like a disguise. **C**

The legendary Lincoln is known as Honest Abe, a humble man of the people who rose from a log cabin to the White House. There's no doubt that Lincoln was a poor boy who made good. And it's true that he carried his folksy manners and homespun speech to the White House with him. He said "howdy" to visitors and invited them to "stay a spell." He greeted diplomats while wearing carpet slippers, called his wife "mother" at receptions, and told bawdy<sup>3</sup> jokes at cabinet meetings.

Lincoln may have seemed like a common man, but he wasn't. His friends agreed that he was one of the most ambitious people they had ever known. Lincoln struggled hard to rise above his log-cabin origins, and he was proud of his achievements. By the time he ran for president he was a wealthy man, earning a large income from his law practice and his many investments. As for the nickname Abe, he hated it. No one who knew him well ever called him Abe to his face. They addressed him as Lincoln or Mr. Lincoln.

Lincoln is often described as a sloppy dresser, careless about his appearance. In fact, he **patronized** the best tailor in Springfield, Illinois, buying two suits a year. That was at a time when many men lived, died, and were buried in the same suit.

It's true that Lincoln had little formal "education," as he would have pronounced it. Almost everything he "larned" he taught himself. All his life he said "thar" for *there*, "git" for *get*, "kin" for *can*. Even so, he became an eloquent public speaker who could hold a vast audience spellbound, and a great writer whose finest phrases still ring in our ears. He was known to sit up late into the night, discussing Shakespeare's plays with White House visitors. **D**

He was certainly a humorous man, famous for his rollicking stories. But he was also moody and **melancholy**, tormented by long and frequent bouts of depression. Humor was his therapy. He relied on his yarns,<sup>4</sup> a friend observed, to "whistle down sadness."

## Language Coach

**Idioms** An idiom is a phrase that has a meaning different from its individual words. The phrase "do justice to" means "treat fairly or with full appreciation." What is the author suggesting with this idiom in line 20?

**defy** (dĭ-fī') *v.* to boldly oppose or resist

### **C** MAIN IDEAS AND DETAILS

What is the main idea in this paragraph? Add it to your outline.

**patronize** (pā'trə-nīz') *v.* to go to as a customer

### **D** MAIN IDEAS AND DETAILS

Note the details about Lincoln's words and actions. What main idea do they support?

**melancholy** (mĕl'ən-kōl'ē) *adj.* sad; depressed

3. **bawdy** (bō'dē): vulgar.

4. **yarn**: an entertaining tale.

He had a cool, logical mind, trained in the courtroom, and a practical, commonsense approach to problems. Yet he was deeply superstitious, a believer in dreams, omens, and visions. **E**

We admire Lincoln today as an American folk hero. During the Civil War, however, he was the most unpopular president the nation had ever known. His critics called him a tyrant, a hick, a stupid baboon who was unfit for his office. As commander in chief of the armed forces, he was **denounced** as a bungling amateur who **meddled** in military affairs he knew nothing about. But he also had his supporters. They praised him as a farsighted statesman, a military mastermind who engineered the Union victory.

Lincoln is best known as the Great Emancipator, the man who freed the slaves. Yet he did not enter the war with that idea in mind. “My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union,” he said in 1862, “and is *not* either to save or destroy slavery.” As the war continued, Lincoln’s attitude changed. Eventually he came to regard the conflict as a moral crusade to wipe out the sin of slavery.

No black leader was more critical of Lincoln than the fiery abolitionist<sup>5</sup> writer and editor Frederick Douglass. Douglass had grown up as a slave.

He had won his freedom by escaping to the North. Early in the war, impatient with Lincoln’s cautious leadership, Douglass called him “preeminently the white man’s president, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men.” Later, Douglass changed his mind and came to admire Lincoln. Several years after the war, he said this about the sixteenth president:

“His greatest mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and, second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. . . . taking him for all in all, measuring the tremendous magnitude of the work before him, considering the necessary means to ends, and surveying the end from the beginning, infinite wisdom has seldom sent any man into the world better fitted for his mission than Abraham Lincoln.”

5. **abolitionist** (ăb'ə-līsh'ə-nīst): one who advocated the end of slavery.

## **E** BIOGRAPHY

Which of the qualities described would you expect a great leader to have, and which would you not?

**denounce** (dĕ-nouns') v.  
to condemn; to criticize

**meddle** (mĕd'l) v.  
to intrude or interfere

Allan Pinkerton, President Abraham Lincoln, and Major General John A. McClernand at Antietam Battle Site, Maryland. October 3, 1862.



## Comprehension

- Recall** According to the author, why does Abraham Lincoln look “so stiff and formal” in photographs?
- Recall** What was Lincoln’s original reason for entering into the Civil War?
- Clarify** What caused Frederick Douglass to change his opinion of Lincoln?

## Text Analysis

- Identify Main Ideas and Details** Review the outline you filled in as you read. Based on the main ideas and details you noted, what do you think is the overall main idea of the selection?
- Analyze Characterization** One method of characterization is to present the way a person talks. Review the quotations from Lincoln that Freedman includes in this biography. In what way do Lincoln’s words add to your understanding of his character? Cite one or two specific quotations to support your answer.
- Make Judgments** What signs of greatness did Lincoln exhibit in his life? Support your response with evidence from the text.

- Evaluate Biography** List the strengths and weaknesses of Lincoln in a chart like the one shown. In your opinion, does the author provide a balanced portrait of his subject? Explain.

Strengths	Weaknesses
sense of humor	

## COMMON CORE

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## Extension and Challenge

- Readers’ Circle** People often say that Abraham Lincoln would have a difficult time winning an election today. Why do you think they say that? Discuss the question with your group. Then decide whether or not you agree. Support your opinion with examples from the biography.
- SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION** In 1922, President Harding dedicated the Lincoln Memorial, a magnificent structure built in Washington D.C. to honor Abraham Lincoln. Research the memorial to find out what is included within it and what it stands for.



Lincoln Memorial

### What are the signs of GREATNESS?

Review your response to the activity on page 282. What qualities did Lincoln have in common with the people you consider to be great?

## Vocabulary in Context

### ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

For each sentence, choose the vocabulary word that has a similar meaning to the boldfaced word or phrase.

1. It's easy now, after the fact, to say that you **condemn** the awful crime.
2. I **shop regularly at** the corner grocery.
3. Why must you always **interfere** in things that are not your business?
4. He thought it was wrong to **oppose** his parents.
5. That particular music made them feel **sad**.
6. Because he felt so **tired**, he began taking vitamins.

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

• appropriate • assess • intelligence • motive • role

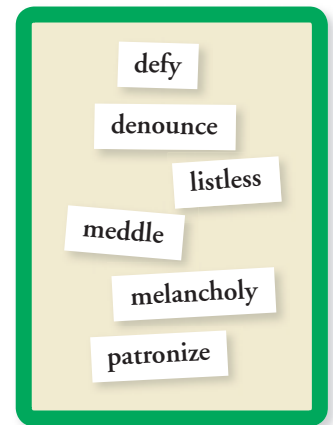
How **appropriate** is Frederick Douglass's remark that "infinite wisdom has seldom sent any man into the world better fitted for his mission than Abraham Lincoln"? Use at least one of the Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

### VOCABULARY STRATEGY: MULTIPLE-MEANING WORDS

Many English words have more than one meaning. The vocabulary word *patronize* is one of these words. In the selection, *patronize* means "to visit as a customer," but another definition is "to treat in a condescending manner." You can usually figure out which meaning the writer intended by looking at the **context** in which the word appears.

**PRACTICE** Each boldfaced word below has multiple meanings. Read the sentence and figure out the meaning of the boldfaced word based on context clues. Use a dictionary to check your answer. Then find another meaning for the word and use the word in a new sentence.

1. My grandmother knit a sweater using yellow **yarn**.
2. I can **sink** the basketball in the net even when I'm nervous.
3. The **pipe** below the sink was rusty from age.
4. When I am hungry, I **gorge** myself on pancakes and eggs.



### COMMON CORE

**L 4a** Use context (e.g., a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word. **L 6** Acquire and use accurately academic words; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word important to comprehension and expression.

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central

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