

**Flashbulb Memories: The Lincoln Assassination**  
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**Abstract:**

In this lesson, the concept of flashbulb memory, a memory which is so tragic and of national importance that it is remembered in detail (with a photographic mental images often accompanying them), is explored, as well as how these memories might affect the American consciousness and how we write our history, years after the event occurred. Specifically, flashbulb memories and their lasting effects are explored by examining Lincoln's assassination.

**Essential questions/enduring understandings:**

- How do traumatic events change the way we see the history that preceded it and the events succeeding it?
- How do we decide what is a collective memory?
- Why do we make some people "larger than life"?
- Are personal emotions relevant to history?

**Assessment:**

The teacher will utilize feedback from class discussion and answers on worksheets to analyze student progress.

**Setting the Purpose:**

Students will define a "flashbulb" memory"-an event of such great significance that it instantly becomes a collective memory with personal attachment. Students will brainstorm flashbulb moments in history. Lincoln's assassination will be examined as a flashbulb memory of the American people and students will explore how flashbulb memories might have looked in an era with limited and delayed communication methods. Finally, students will postulate how flashbulb memories affect what we remember and how we document the event.

**Duration:**

1 to 2 class periods

## Procedure:

### Part 1

*In this section, students will explore what a flashbulb memory is and an example of a flashbulb moment in U.S. History.*

- Before the teacher starts class, review what a flashbulb memory is by visiting: [http://cbest.web.wesleyan.edu/pia2\\_spring2000\\_004.htm](http://cbest.web.wesleyan.edu/pia2_spring2000_004.htm) or [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flashbulb\\_memory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flashbulb_memory)
- Start class by reviewing a 20<sup>th</sup> century flashbulb memory. The first that comes to mind of course is the JFK assassination. The teacher may want to show video clips, like the ones found from History.com. First review what happened by viewing: [History Features: Kennedy Assassinated](#).
- Next, view different people's memories of that day: [Arthur Ashe: Kennedy Assassination](#), [Dick Clark: Kennedy Assassination](#), or [Peter Jennings: JFK Assassination](#).
- If you don't have projection capabilities, you might read a few memories to the class found at: [On this day from BBC 1963: 'Stunned Into Silence' by JFK's Death](#).
- Another option would be to review the MLK assassination: [King: Jesse Jackson](#), [Harry Belafonte: Finding out about the MLK assassination](#)
- As a class, review what a flashbulb memory is by completing the first page of the [Flashbulb Memory Handout](#). Discuss answers as a class. Why did they choose the events that they did? Some answers might include: 9/11, the dropping of the atomic bomb, Pearl Harbor, Reagan shot, Pope Paul II Shot, Columbine, The Challenger Explosion, etc.

### Part 2

*In this section, students will study primary sources to establish Lincoln's assassination as a flashbulb memory in the American mind.*

- Introduce the flashbulb memory of moment of Lincoln's assassination. Again, a good way to do this is with a short film clip. This one is from History.com: [Lincoln Shot](#). Explore why this might be another flashbulb moment in our history by finishing the [Flashbulb Memory Handout](#).
- Now that you've discussed how people might have felt at the time of Lincoln's death, either display on overhead or distribute [H.C. Bear's Letter](#) and read it together as a class. (This is a letter from an injured Union soldier from Penfield, Il. regarding the end of the war and the assassination of President Lincoln.)

- You may choose to have the students analyze this document using [Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet](#), or may discuss this document as a class. What evidence does this document give us about this moment in history? Does it illustrate a flashbulb memory forming? Why do you think so?
- Another question would be the authenticity of the document. This was found at the Champaign County Archives. How can we prove this is a soldier from Champaign County, and not a letter that someone from Champaign came into possession of? What do we not know about H.C. Bear that would be helpful to know? Brainstorm answers.
- Optional: Explain to students that one way to prove someone lived in a location is to do a search of newspaper obituaries. Display the [obituary for H.C. Bear](#). You may also want to display [his picture](#).
- Now, distribute copies of the [Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet](#) and printed copies or project on overhead the [Mourning Ribbon](#), [Lincoln's Death Drawing](#), [Springfield Funeral Address](#), and [Lincoln Obituary](#).
- You may also want to include some other resources, such as ones from the Library of Congress: [James S. Knox to Knox, Saturday, April 15, 1865 \(Eyewitness account of Lincoln's assassination\)](#), [Washington, D.C. President Lincoln's funeral procession on Pennsylvania Avenue](#) or from the Gilder Lehrman Institute on American History: [From Henry Pierce to Selina Pierce Regarding Lincoln's Assassination](#), [Lincoln Assassination Reward Poster](#), [The President is Dead Broadside](#), or any of the many sermons given after his assassination by visiting [The Martyred President](#) from Emory University.
- What information do these sources give us about this incident being a flashbulb memory? Remind students that the document itself may not reveal this, but the act of keeping the artifact might. What other evidence do we need to show this is a flashbulb memory? Brainstorm a list of possibilities, including how he was memorialized, especially in the places where people knew him personally.
- Discuss the differences in how a flashbulb memory might be constructed in an age without television, compared with one where vast audiences saw the event happen again and again.
- Wrap up this session with students developing ideas around these questions: Why do people hold onto flashbulb memories? How do they hold on to them?

- The teacher could develop this lesson a bit more by having the students debate this question: “Do flashbulb memories change the way we see history and the people involved in the flashbulb memory?” The teacher could set this up as informal debate, or set students upon research and conduct a formal debate.

**Analysis of local primary sources:**

Students will use the following to guide their analysis:

- Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet

**Ties to National primary source or sources:**

Students explore the effects of Abraham’s death on the nation. Resources from the Library of Congress, Emory University and The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History can be used to accentuate the documents in the Central Illinois collection.

**Attachments:**

- [Flashbulb Memory Handout](#)
- [Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet](#)

**[Ties to Illinois State Learning Standards](#)**