

**I Knew Lincoln: Personal Connections and Their Affect on History**  
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**Abstract:**

In this lesson, students will explore the idea that national historical memory is affected by everyday people. Students will think critically about how historical memory is produced; whether historical knowledge may indeed come from everyday people as well as those who specifically study history.

**Essential questions/enduring understandings:**

- How do we decide what is a collective memory?
- How is historical memory produced?
- Are personal emotions relevant to history?
- Who decides whose memories are told?

**Assessment:**

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

**Setting the Purpose:**

Students will fine tune their skills analyzing primary sources from Central Illinois that focus on stories related by people who met or knew Lincoln. They will interview people today in regards to what they know about Lincoln in order to postulate how historical memory is formed-through individuals, academia, or both.

**Duration:**

2 class periods

**Procedure:**

**Part 1**

*In this section, students will compare the memories of those who actually knew Lincoln to the memories people have of Lincoln today.*

- Start the session by asking the question, “Imagine you are a grown up and I am sharing stories of working with you as a student. Imagine first that you have a regular job and then imagine you have become famous for some reason. How might my story about my time with you change depending on your fame?” You could

- also start class by asking a similar question, but replacing the student with someone famous, like Elvis.
- Explain that the way you are remembered by your friends, family, and acquaintances can affect the way you are remembered forever, even by those who never met you. Ask students: “How can the way people portray you after your gone change what you actually did in the minds of people who never met you?”
  - Ask the class why they feel Lincoln is remembered the way he is today. Remember, the region of the country you live in could also affect the answers to this question.
  - Distribute the [Remembering Lincoln Worksheet](#) to each student. If you want students to do a deeper investigation, you may also use the [Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet](#). Explain to students that they will be comparing how friends remembered Lincoln to how people remember Lincoln today.
  - For the first job on the worksheet (analyzing primary sources) you may either view these documents electronically in the computer lab, in the classroom through LCD projector as a group, or print the documents out for students to examine: [Captain Riley Remembers](#), [First Billiards Game](#), [Personal Ad](#), [Cunningham Circuit Memory](#), [Asa Gere Remembers](#), [Cunningham 1908](#), [Cunningham Speech 1907](#).
  - Once students have examined the sources, explain that students will have homework. Each student must interview 4 people (at least 2 adults) on what each remembers about Lincoln and how each feels about the man. Fill in Job 2 as they interview their four people.
  - When students return with Job 2 complete, have the students compare the memories and feelings of Lincoln from the people who knew him, and the everyday American citizen today.
  - Discuss their findings as a group. Were there commonalities? How much do they feel the stories of those who knew him affect the way we see him today? Does it play a role at all, or are our perceptions of the man based solely on historical research from people who study history? Is there a way to prove our suppositions? Why?

## Part 2

*In this section, students will compare the memories of Lincoln from people that knew him to Lincoln’s own words, looking for commonalities and differences.*

- Have students again look at the primary sources examined in Part 1: [Captain Riley Remembers](#), [First Billiards Game](#), [Personal Ad](#),

[Cunningham Circuit Memory](#), [Asa Gere Remembers](#), [Cunningham 1908](#), [Cunningham Speech 1907](#).

- Now, compare it to actual writing from Lincoln: [Stolen Letter Copy](#), [Letter From Lincoln](#) from local resources, and you may want to accentuate with national online resources, such as Lincoln's [Letter to Joshua Speed](#), Letter by [Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley](#), or browse the [Abraham Lincoln Papers](#) collection from the Library of Congress.
- Use [Learning Lincoln Primary Sources Comparison Chart](#) to compare the information provided from local oral histories and words of Lincoln himself. Students should review the comparisons they have made to draw conclusions regarding the relative value of each type of source in knowing who Lincoln was and constructing their personal history of the man.
- Close session with a discussion of how there are countless histories of Lincoln, because every individual's histories are personal; they take the information they know to construct their own perceptions of a bigger history. Depending on how much you know, or the sources you've looked at, your history might be different than your neighbor's view. You might use the comparison of how the Northerners who supported Lincoln might be similar or different to the slaves in the south's view, which might be different than the South who supported secession's view.

#### **Analysis of local primary sources:**

Students will use the following to guide their analysis:

- Remembering Lincoln Worksheet
- Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet

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

While no national primary sources are used in this lesson, all Lincoln documents tie to the national history. Teachers may choose to utilize some national primary sources that document memories of people who knew Lincoln during his time at the White House as well.

#### **Attachments:**

- [Remembering Lincoln Worksheet](#)
- [Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet](#)
- [Learning Lincoln Primary Sources Comparison Chart](#)

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