

A STEVEN SPIELBERG FILM  
DANIEL DAY-LEWIS  
**LINCOLN**



The following Screening Guide can be used to add academic context to your screening event. Depending on the amount of time you have allotted and the physical space you're using, you may wish to implement the pre-viewing discussions in classes prior to the event. Similarly, you can use the post-viewing prompts as follow-up activities during subsequent class periods. Please note the optional extension activities that follow the agenda, which may be implemented during class time or assigned as homework, independent study, or extra credit, and which provide opportunities for extended learning around the themes and topics presented in the film *Lincoln*.

**10 minutes**

*Arrival, Welcome, Introduction*

**Allow** ample time for students to file in and take their seats. **Begin** with a quick introduction to the program. **Explain** that your school has been chosen as one of only 15 high schools from around the country to participate in the *Stand Tall: Live Like Lincoln High School Screening Campaign*. **Explain** that this is an unprecedented opportunity to view this Oscar® winning film and to begin to consider the importance of leadership and how each of us can incorporate these principals into our own lives. Then, **offer** a guiding question:

***What sort of leader was Abraham Lincoln? What makes a great leader?***

**Ask** the students to consider this guiding question as they watch the film. Optionally, you may wish to **distribute** index cards and instruct students to write their leadership terms on their index card while they watch.

Next, **introduce** the film:

*Lincoln* is an award-winning film starring Daniel Day-Lewis and directed by Steven Spielberg. The film chronicles our nation's 16th president, Abraham Lincoln, during his final months in office. During these tumultuous months, the country is plagued by war and division. Lincoln not only has the task of uniting the sharply contrasted North and South, but he also refuses to accept the morally repugnant institution of slavery.

**Explain** that this film is not necessarily action-packed, but is a thoughtful depiction of how President Lincoln fought tirelessly to abolish slavery and save the union. Lastly, **tell** the students that before the film, you will be screening a

	<p>special message recorded specifically for them, from one of the film’s stars.</p> <p><b>Play</b> the Joseph Gordon Levitt <b>special message</b>, followed directly by the film <i>Lincoln</i>.</p>
<p><b>2.5 Hours</b> Screen <i>Lincoln</i></p>	<p>Total Running Time: 150 minutes</p>
<p><b>45 minutes</b> Post-Viewing Discussion</p>	<p>If time permits, <b>lead</b> a brief post-viewing discussion about the film and its content. Alternatively, teachers may <b>choose</b> to debrief in subsequent class periods. Discussion questions will vary, but could include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider all of the leaders depicted in the film: Lincoln, Thaddeus Stevens, Edwin Stanton, William Seward, Ulysses S. Grant, and others. What sorts of leadership styles do they portray? What persuasive tactics did each character in the film use in order to further their own cause? Which leadership style was the most effective, and why?</li> <li>2. Steven Spielberg is known for action packed films such as <i>War of the Worlds</i>, <i>Indiana Jones</i>, and <i>Jaws</i>. With <i>Lincoln</i>, Spielberg chose to focus on high concept and dialogue rather than action. Why do you think Spielberg made this choice? How does this add to the meaning and message of the film?</li> <li>3. What scene from the film did you find the most powerful? Why did this scene impact you so strongly?</li> <li>4. What was the filmmaker trying to tell us with this movie? How did he use music, tone, lighting and other film techniques to communicate his message?</li> <li>5. Lincoln had to choose between morality (ending slavery) and popularity (allowing slavery to continue). Have you ever been faced with a similar moral or ethical dilemma? How did you resolve this dilemma? Explain.</li> <li>6. How does this film compare with other primary and secondary sources on the time period, such as documentaries, photographs, newspapers, works of fiction, or nonfiction texts? How might you use this film to supplement your traditional study of American history?</li> </ol>

	<p>7. Spielberg cast some well-known actors in the film: Daniel Day Lewis, Tommy Lee Jones, Sally Field, and Joseph Gordon Levitt. How did the casting add or subtract to the impact of the film? If you cast this film, what actors would you have chosen for each role, and why?</p> <p>8. If Lincoln had waited to abolish slavery, how would our country be different? What are some of the major issues of civil rights and constitutional freedoms that our government is debating today? How might the outcomes of these debates affect our country's future?</p> <p>9. If you were a teacher, how might you use <i>Lincoln</i> to teach a class? What type of class would it be? What aspects of the movie would you focus on? What lessons do you think your students would learn from this film?</p> <p>10. What characteristics of Abraham Lincoln did the movie best portray? Are there any politicians/leaders today that embody these characteristics?</p> <p>11. What compromises were made in this film? Why were these compromises made? When have you compromised in order to promote something you believe in?</p>
<p><b>5 minutes</b> <i>Conclusion</i></p>	<p>Please extend sincerest thanks to all of your students, faculty and staff from Participant Media, Dreamworks, SKG and the Walt Disney Company, the producers of the film <i>Lincoln</i>, and the sponsors of the <i>Stand Tall: Live Like Lincoln High School Screening Campaign</i>.</p>

## Project Prompts and Extensions

### Where Do You Stand?

At one time our country was divided over slavery. Similarly, today our country is divided just as drastically over many social issues. One of these issues is gun control. In the 1860's there were conservatives who believed slavery should continue forever, moderates who believed it should be limited or phased out over time, and radicals who believed the institution should end completely and immediately. Likewise, today we see conservatives, moderates and radicals engaging in the debate over gun control. While conservatives believe all Americans should have the right to own guns, moderates believe in gun control laws, and radicals believe guns should be outright prohibited. The following activity allows

students to engage in a discussion about gun control, presenting the various arguments from every side, ultimately helping them decide where they themselves stand on the issue.

1. Create 3 separately delineated physical spaces in the class. On the left, post a sign or label that says "RADICAL." In the center, "MODERATE." On the right, "CONSERVATIVE."
2. Divide the class into 5 groups. Assign each group one stakeholder in the gun control debate: police officer, urban citizen, rural citizen, parent whose child died due to gun violence, and gun lobbyist.
3. Instruct each group to work together to decide what their stakeholder's position is, and then prepare an argument for their position. Each group should also select one member to serve as a speaker.
4. Allow 15-20 minutes for students to work in small groups to prepare a case. When ready, ask the elected speaker from each group to come forward and present their group's arguments.
5. Explain to the class that after each speaker concludes, they will be asked to decide where they "stand," by walking to the section of the room that represents their own personal opinion on the topic of gun control. Tell the class that they may move from one place to another at any time during presentations, if an argument sways their opinion or causes them to shift their own thinking.
6. Once all the speakers have presented and everyone in the room is standing in a designated section, allow for a brief whole-class debate, allowing volunteers to share their thoughts on the topic of gun control as well as on the arguments presented by each group.
7. Conclude the activity with a quick discussion that ties the exercise to the film *Lincoln*. Questions might include, but are not limited to:
  - During the debate scenes in the film, how did the conservatives and radicals try to persuade their opponents to join their side? How often were they successful?
  - How did Lincoln and his cabinet try to persuade members of Congress to vote for the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment?
  - Why is it important for democracy that all opinions are stated and debated – in society and in government?

## What Would They Tweet?

In the film *Lincoln*, politics were communicated through writing, speeches, or face-to-face discussions, such as the many that were depicted in the film as the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was debated and ratified. Today, political movements are started on the news, or through viral social media campaigns on Facebook or Twitter. The following activity allows students to explore the benefits and limitations of using contemporary technology to communicate complex issues.

1. Break students into 5 groups, and assign each group one of the following characters from the film *Lincoln*: Abraham Lincoln, Thaddeus Stevens, Mary Todd Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, and Alexander Stephens.
2. Allow 15-20 minutes for each group to discuss the issues the character cares about and what their stance was on each issue.
3. Then, instruct each group to compose 5 tweets that they think their character would post if they could have used social media to sway citizens to support their political position
4. Remind each group that they are limited to 140 characters or less for each tweet. Characters include letters, spaces, and symbols.
5. After the groups have composed their tweets, ask for volunteers to write the groups' favorites on the white board.
6. Allow time for a large group discussion, using some or all of the following questions as a guide:
  - How are contemporary communications more effective than those of the 1860's? How are contemporary communications less effective than those of the 1860's?
  - What surprised you about how President Lincoln communicated with other politicians and regular citizens in the film? How is this different than the way the President interacts with people today? To what do you attribute this change?
  - Why did Spielberg choose to include the scene where Mr. and Mrs. Jolly from Jefferson City, MO come to the White House to ask the president about a local tollbooth? What did this scene communicate to the audience?
  - Discuss the scene in the opening of the film when President Lincoln sat in a tent in the rain on a Civil War battlefield, speaking to soldiers. How did Spielberg depict the impact and importance of Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg on the everyman? How did this scene affect you as a viewer?

### **Discuss and Debate.**

Lincoln took a huge risk by choosing to take a stand against a popular but immoral institution. The following activity asks students to explore risk taking in politics – today and throughout history.

1. Divide the classroom into two groups.
2. Instruct Group A to prepare an argument that answers “yes” to the following question: *Do political leaders today take such big risks in the name of principles, or do their political aspirations dictate their choices?* Instruct Group B to prepare an argument that answers “no.”
3. Allow 15-20 minutes for each side to outline an argument, anticipate the other side’s argument, and outline a rebuttal for that argument. Instruct each group to use at least 4 specific examples from the film *Lincoln*, as well as from current events, to support their arguments.
4. Using a coin toss, choose a side to begin and allow 5-7 minutes for the group to present their argument. Then, allow 5-7 minutes for the opposing team to present.
5. Return to the starting team and allow 3-5 minutes for a rebuttal. Repeat for the opposing team.
6. Once each team has completed their rebuttals, conduct a large-group discussion using some or all of the following questions as a guide:
  - Do you believe politics and ethics are mutually exclusive? Explain.
  - Have the nature of politicians changed since the times depicted in the film *Lincoln*? Give examples to support your opinion.
  - How did the film *Lincoln* change the way you view politics?
  - Have you ever made a choice that was ethical but unpopular? Explain.
  - We elect our officials to represent us and protect our best interests, and yet oftentimes public opinion gets in the way of their ability to do just that. Why is this the case?
  - Based on the depiction in *Lincoln*, do you think President Lincoln was a good president? Why do you feel this way?

### **Team Change.**

President Lincoln is known for many things, including: being down-to-earth, having a good sense of humor, making tough moral choices, surrounding himself with people who often disagreed with his views, and leading our country back from the brink of collapse. Lincoln

addressed many tough, polarizing issues straight on, creating unlikely yet effective collaborations along the way. The following activity asks students to consider how they might solve a problem in their own lives by implementing some of the leadership qualities they saw depicted in the film *Lincoln*.

1. Break students into 5 groups. Ask each group to spend 5-10 minutes brainstorming an issue they think is negatively affecting the community in their neighborhood or at school.
2. Explain that each group will choose one issue and will work together to draft a creative and inclusive solution to that issue, and an implementation plan, keeping the leadership spirit of Abraham Lincoln in mind.
3. Groups should begin by answering the following questions:
  - What is the issue you will be addressing?
  - What evidence is there to show that this issue is negatively affecting your neighborhood or school community?
  - What is the solution you are proposing?
  - What are the steps needed to implement this solution?
  - How can different stakeholders in the community (neighborhood or school) be mobilized to support and invest in the solution (these may include, but are not limited to: teachers, parents, administrators, community leaders and even various cliques or social groups among students)?
  - What existing community organizations exist to address this issue, and how can you collaborate with them to be mutually beneficial?
  - Is funding needed to implement the solution? If so, how might funding be secured?
  - How much time is needed to implement entire solution? How much time is needed to implement each component of the solution?
  - How does your solution mirror the leadership qualities that Abraham Lincoln was famous for?
4. Once groups have identified an issue and outlined a proposed solution, they may try to implement their solution as a long term project or independent study for extra credit.

### **That Reminds Me of a Funny Story....**

Throughout the film *Lincoln*, President Lincoln often relies on anecdotes, stories, jokes and even dreams to tease apart complicated problems, begin a conversation around a

particular issue, communicate specific morals or lessons, or simply to break the tension and entertain the people around him. The following activity encourages students to channel their inner Lincoln by asking them to utilize similar literary techniques to convey lessons from the movie.

1. Divide the class into 5 groups.
2. Allow 10 minutes for each group to identify one of the themes, scenes, or messages they saw depicted in the film *Lincoln*. Examples may include, but are not limited to "All people are equal under the law," "No more corpses," "The president has been shot," "Morality over popularity," or "Stand up for your beliefs."
3. Allow 15-20 minutes for each group to work together to come up with an idea for a story, poem, anecdote, or parable that embodies their chosen scene, theme, or message.
4. Groups should prepare a presentation in the form of a poem, short story, song, rap, or skit. If possible, allot a subsequent class period for each group to perform their presentations for the class.
5. At the end of the activity, debrief as a large group using some or all of the following questions as a guide:
  - How was Lincoln's use of anecdotes and stories more useful than direct communication might have been?
  - At one point while Lincoln is waiting for news in the telegraph office, one of his advisors gets angry with him for telling stories. Why do you think this happened?
  - What was the importance of Lincoln's dream, and his retelling of it to his wife?
  - How did Lincoln's habit of telling stories and jokes make him more likeable?
  - What was your favorite story that Lincoln told in the film?
  - Was every audience as receptive to his stories? Give examples.
  - How did your message change when you tried to communicate it through story rather than directly?
  - How difficult or easy was it to retell your message through a creative lens? Explain.



*These extension activities align with a number of national educational subject area and Common Core standards, including, but not limited to, the following:*

## **McCrel Content Knowledge Standards**

### Theatre

- Standard 5 Understands how informal and formal theatre, film, television and electronic media productions create and communicate meaning

### Civics

- Standard 1 Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government
- Standard 2 Understands the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited governments
- Standard 3 Understands the sources, purposes, and functions of law, and the importance of the rule of law for the protection of individual rights and the common good
- Standard 4 Understands the concept of a constitution, the various purposes that constitutions serve, and the conditions that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government
- Standard 8 Understands the central ideas of American constitutional government and how this form of government has shaped the character of American society
- Standard 9 Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs, and principles of American constitutional democracy
- Standard 14 Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life
- Standard 15 Understands how the United States Constitution grants and distributes power and responsibilities to national and state government and how it seeks to prevent the abuse of power
- Standard 18 Understands the role and importance of law in the American constitutional system and issues regarding the judicial protection of individual rights
- Standard 19 Understands what is meant by "the public agenda," how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media
- Standard 25 Understands issues regarding personal, political, and economic rights
- Standard 26 Understands issues regarding the proper scope and limits of rights and the relationships among personal, political, and economic rights

### US History

- Standard 14 Understands the course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people

## Language Arts

- Standard 1 Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
- Standard 2 Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
- Standard 3 Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
- Standard 4 Gathers and uses information for research purposes
- Standard 5 Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
- Standard 7 Uses skills and strategies to read a variety of informational texts
- Standard 8 Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes
- Standard 9 Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media
- Standard 10 Understands the characteristics and components of the media

## Thinking and Reasoning

- Standard 1 Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument
- Standard 2 Understands and applies basic principles of logic and reasoning
- Standard 3 Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences
- Standard 4 Understands and applies basic principles of hypothesis testing and scientific inquiry
- Standard 5 Applies basic trouble-shooting and problem-solving techniques
- Standard 6 Applies decision-making techniques

## Working with Others

- Standard 1 Contributes to the overall effort of a group
- Standard 2 Uses conflict-resolution techniques
- Standard 3 Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations
- Standard 4 Displays effective interpersonal communication skills
- Standard 5 Demonstrates leadership skills

## Arts and Communication

- Standard 3 Uses critical and creative thinking in various arts and communication settings
- Standard 4 Understands ways in which the human experience is transmitted and reflected in the arts and communication

## Historical Understanding

- Standard 2 Understands the historical perspective

## **Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards**

### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading, Grades 6-12

#### Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

#### Craft and Structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text relate to each other and the whole

#### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches authors take.

### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing, Grades 6-12

#### Text Types and Purposes

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

#### Production and Distribution of Writing

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### Research to Build and Present Knowledge

7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
9. Draw evidence form literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

#### Range of Writing

10. Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.