



## Teacher Guide: “Trial of the Conspirators” on Fords.org

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Webpage: <https://www.fords.org/lincolns-assassination/investigating-the-assassination/trial-of-the-conspirators/>

### Overview of webpage

Step inside the room where the trial of the conspirators took place. Meet the Army officers who would decide the guilt or innocence of the defendants. Hear testimony and learn the fate of the defendants.

### Structure of page

- The menu just below the main image navigates to [Lincoln’s Death](#), to [Investigating the Assassination](#) and to [Impact on a Nation](#).
- This page begins with an image of the trial of the Lincoln assassination conspirators, then provides a brief overview of the topic. The guiding question is, “why a military trial?”
- This opening section also asks the following questions (questions that could provide the basis for activities):
  - What did the witnesses say?
  - What was the verdict?
  - Consider the debate between civil and military trials then and now.
  - As you look at each testimony, consider:
    - How does this evidence match—or not—with other evidence?
    - Who gave the testimony? What might the person’s motives be for saying what they did?
    - When did this person give the testimony? Was it soon after the event? Much later? How might that affect what they said?

### Testimony for and Against Each Conspirator

- This section contains six boxes with images of different conspirators. Each provides a brief introduction when the cursor rolls over the image. Click on the image to access a gallery of six witnesses and excerpts of their testimony, along with links to the full testimony (should students want to do additional research). The conspirators listed are:
  - Dr. Samuel Mudd
  - Mary Surratt
  - David Herold
  - Lewis Powell
  - George Atzerodt
  - Other Conspirators (Samuel Arnold, Edman Spangler, Michael O’Laughlen)

### Images of the Trial

An image gallery provides nine images, along with a short description of each:

- Courtroom scene from Old Arsenal Penitentiary
- Courtroom scene
- Armed soldiers outside the Penitentiary Building
- Hooded Lewis Powell in cell
- Layout of the courtroom

- Prisoners being taken to the courthouse
- Conspirators going to the scaffold
- Military commission members
- Courtroom today

## Verdicts

- Nine boxes with a portrait of each defendant is provided, along with the charge(s), finding of the court and sentence.
  - David Herold
  - Lewis Powell
  - George Atzerodt
  - Mary Surratt
  - Dr. Samuel Mudd
  - Edman “Ned” Spangler
  - Michael O’Laughlin
  - Samuel Arnold
  - John Surratt

## Suggested Activities

1. Stage a mock trial.

Assign a student to play the role of each of the eight conspirators and twelve members of the military tribunal. The rest of the class can be defense attorneys and court reporters. Evaluate the evidence against each defendant and have the prosecuting and defense attorneys argue their sides. After all of the evidence and testimonies have been collected, have the tribunal cast their votes and explain why they voted the way they did.

2. Write a newspaper article

Use this page to gather source material for writing a newspaper account of the assassination. Include primary source accounts in your article describing what happened. Are your sources credible? Why or why not. Start with a headline and develop the angle of your story.

3. Create an exhibit

It’s your turn to be the curator. Create an exhibit on the story of the Lincoln assassination. Use primary source accounts from witnesses, photographs, images of artifacts and anything else that will help you tell a story with your exhibit. Your exhibit can be a series of drawings, a poster board, a series of Instagram posts, a power point, a play, a song – whatever you’d like to use to tell your story.