



The Assassination of President Lincoln

Ryan Kelly
Quaker Valley Middle School
8th Grade/ One Day

Introduction:

In this lesson, students will learn about President Lincoln's assassination through an investigation into curated resources and artifacts from the Ford's Theatre website. Students will develop the historical thinking skills of perspective taking, making connections and creating/supporting historical arguments through analysis of primary source documents and accounts from the night of the assassination.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will discuss and describe the events of the night of the assassination of President Lincoln and immediate investigation thereafter.
- Students will analyze images, material and physical evidence and eyewitness testimonies relating to the assassination of President Lincoln.
- Students will use the information from their analysis as evidence in a written response to the four questions on the Assassination page of the Ford's website. Students will use the evidence and class discussion to make connections about the impact of the assassination to present day.

Guiding Questions:

From the [Assassination page](#) on Ford's Theatre website:

1. How could such a thing have taken place—and in Washington, the fortified capital of the nation?
2. How did John Wilkes Booth gain such access to the theatre? Why didn't Lincoln's security people stop Booth?
3. Was Booth's action a lone act or part of a larger conspiracy?
4. When all was said and done, what was the outcome—for those involved in the crime, for their victims, for the nation and even for Ford's Theatre?

Additional Guiding Questions:

- Why are there differing eyewitness accounts from that night?
- In what ways, if any, are the statements from 1865 different from those made years later? Why might the statements differ?
- What can the physical evidence help us to understand or know about the assassination?

- How does analyzing the historical images, physical artifacts and primary source accounts help us to understand the Lincoln assassination and make connections to the present day?
- What does the Lincoln assassination help us to understand about our country in 1865 and now?

Common Core Standards:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1](#)-Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2](#)-Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3](#)-Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5](#)-Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6](#)-Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7](#)-Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8](#)-Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Materials:

- Internet access
- [Lincoln's Assassination](#) page on the Ford's Theatre website
- The Assassination of President Lincoln Handout (Please see PDF attachment)
- Graphic Organizer for evidence analysis (Please see PDF attachment)

Lesson Activities:

- **Lesson Activity One: Events of April 14, 1865**
 - With the classroom teacher, students review the background information for the assassination as well as four initial questions from the Ford's Theatre assassination page on the Ford's Theatre website.
- **Lesson Activity Two: Eyewitness Testimonies**
 - Students will explore testimony from various eyewitness as they follow the events of the night of April 14, 1865. Students will record findings on a graphic organizer.

- **Lesson Activity Three: Material Evidence**
 - Students will examine material evidence from the night of April 14, 1865, at Ford’s Theatre. Students will record findings on a graphic organizer.
- **Lesson Activity Four: Conclusions from the Investigation and Connecting to Present Day**
 - Students will return to the initial four questions to determine how the pieces of evidence and/or the various testimonies assisted the investigation into the Lincoln assassination. Students will use their analysis of the evidence to craft a written response to the Ford’s Theatre questions. In their written response, students will consider the impact and connections of the assassination to present day.

Lesson Activity One: Events of April 14, 1865

Review the background information about the Lincoln assassination. Ask the students what they know about the assassination and what questions they have about the event. Explain that as a class you will examine the evidence and primary source artifacts from the night of the assassination to better understand the event itself and how it connects to present day. Introduce the guiding questions, including the four questions from the Ford’s Theatre assassination webpage:

- How could such a thing have taken place—and in Washington, the fortified capital of the nation?
- How did John Wilkes Booth gain such access to the theatre? Why didn’t Lincoln’s security people stop him?
- Was Booth’s action a lone act or part of a larger conspiracy?
- And, when all was said and done, what was the outcome—for those involved in the crime, for their victims, for the nation and even for Ford’s Theatre?

Lesson Activity Two: Eyewitness Testimonies

Individually or in pairs, students will explore testimony from various eyewitness as they follow the events of the night of April 14, 1865, when John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln at Ford’s Theatre. A photo of Ford’s Theatre with chronological annotations documents the location of the action within the theatre and includes the specific eyewitness testimony for each event. Students will fill in a graphic organizer to capture their findings.

Next, prompt students to consider the evidence. Individually, or in pairs, ask the students to write responses to the following questions on their graphic organizer:

“How do statements from different witnesses match up?”

“How could there be different versions of the same event by eyewitnesses?”

In what ways, if any, do the statements from the witnesses in 1865 differ from those made many years later? Why might that be?” If needed, provide students with the sentence starter so they can make predictions as they complete their graphic organizer, “I predict that witness statements recorded decades after the assassination will be _____ than those record immediately after because _____.”

What can we learn about the event from analyzing the physical evidence? What are your findings?

As a class, lead a discussion about students' findings. If needed, talk with the students about how memories may fade and change with time, but explain that people may have strong memories of traumatic events that they believe to be accurate. What does this tell us about our understanding of historic events? What does this tell us about the Lincoln assassination specifically?

Lesson Activity Three: Examine the Evidence

Individually or in pairs, students will move from these testimonies to an examination of clues from the night of April 14, 1865, at Ford's Theatre through material evidence, which includes the items Booth was wearing and carrying as well as President Lincoln's clothing that evening. Students will use their graphic organizer to record their findings.

Lesson Activity Four: Conclusions from the Investigation and Connecting to Present Day

Individually or in pairs, students will consider and write responses to the four questions on the handout provided. As a class, students will discuss their responses. Students will discuss the guiding questions below as part of their discussion:

- What can the physical evidence help us to understand or know about the assassination?
- How does analyzing the historical images, physical artifacts and primary source accounts help us to understand the Lincoln assassination and make connections to present day?
- What does the Lincoln assassination help us to understand about our country, then in 1865 and now?

Individually, students will write responses to the four questions. Students should use at least three eyewitness accounts and two of the physical artifacts to evidence for their response.

Students will complete a "3, 2, 1 Exit" ticket describing three facts they learned about the assassination night, two things about the event that surprised them and one idea about why the assassination is important to our history,

Assessment:

- Completed graphic organizers
- The written responses to the four questions from Ford's assassination page website.
- Class discussion participation
- A completed 3, 2, 1 Exit Slip



Investigating the Lincoln Assassination Evidence Analysis

Artifact	Where it was found	Importance to investigation	Thoughts/Connections

What can we learn from analyzing the physical evidence?

How does analyzing the historical images, physical artifacts and primary source accounts help us to understand the Lincoln assassination and make connections to present day?



Investigating the Lincoln Assassination Eyewitness Testimonies

Witness Name	Where they were	What they said	Thoughts/Connections

How are the statements from different witnesses the same? How are they different?

Sometimes eyewitnesses have different versions of what they saw. Why do you think this is?



3-2-1 Exit Slip

Investigating the Lincoln Assassination

3	Facts I learned about Abraham Lincoln's assassination <ul style="list-style-type: none">•••
2	Things that surprised me about the Lincoln assassination <ul style="list-style-type: none">••
1	Idea I have about why the assassination is important to our history <ul style="list-style-type: none">•