

With Charity for All: Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and Respect

- **Compelling Question**
 - Why is respect an essential trait for civil society?
- **Virtue:** Respect
- **Definition** – Respect is civility flowing from personal humility.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, students will review Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, delivered as Union troops were within sight of ultimate victory in the Civil War. They will analyze how he demonstrated respect in his approach to his second term of office and plans for restoring the Union. They will achieve the following objectives.
- **Objectives**
 - Students will analyze Abraham Lincoln's character as a leader, and his commitment to respecting people who had fought against the Union during the Civil War.
 - Students will examine Lincoln's understanding of respect as a practical virtue.
 - Students will understand why cultivating respect affects the future of the United States.
 - Students will demonstrate respect in their own lives to protect freedom.
- **Background**
 - In November, 1864, Republican and incumbent president, Abraham Lincoln, defeated his Democratic Party rival, General George McClellan, in the presidential election. In the coming months, Union armies would defeat the Confederate armies as General William Sherman had cut a swath of destruction through the South, and General Ulysses Grant chased and finally defeated General Robert E. Lee. With the ghastly war that had killed more than 600,000 Americans winding down, President Lincoln and Congress fought over how the nation would be brought together again and the Union reconstructed. In his Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln offered a message of reconciliation and respect for the vanquished foe. It was one of his last speeches since Lincoln was assassinated five weeks later.
- **Vocabulary**
 - Incumbent
 - Torrential
 - Melancholy
 - Inauspicious
 - Depot
 - Diabolical
 - Azure
 - Vengeance
 - Magnanimously
 - Reconciliation
 - Deprecated
 - Obliquely
 - Unrequited
 - Malice
- **Introduce Text**
 - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the "Walk-In-The-Shoes" question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.
- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
 - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?

- **Observation Questions**
 - In what ways did Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address demonstrate respect in order to enhance life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for himself and others?
 - What was Abraham Lincoln’s identity during the Civil War? To what extent do you see emphasis on the virtue of respect in his words and actions?
 - As the Civil War drew to a close and he began his second term as president, how did Lincoln see his purpose as president?
- **Discussion Questions**
 - Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
- **Additional Resources**
 - Desmond, Mary. “White Analyzes Christian Ethic within Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address.” *The Chautauquan Daily* <http://chqdaily.com/2012/08/21/white-analyzes-christian-ethic-within-lincolns-second-inaugural-address/>
 - Shenk, Joshua Wolf. *Lincoln’s Melancholy*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005.
 - White, Jr., Ronald C. *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln’s Words*. New York: Random House, 2005
 - Wills , Garry. “Lincoln’s Greatest Speech,” *The Atlantic* <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/09/lincolns-greatest-speech/306551>

Handout A: With Charity for All: Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address & Respect

Background

In November, 1864, Republican and incumbent president, Abraham Lincoln, defeated his Democratic Party rival, General George McClellan, in the presidential election. In the coming months, Union armies would defeat the Confederate armies as General William Sherman had cut a swath of destruction through the South, and General Ulysses Grant chased and finally defeated General Robert E. Lee. With the ghastly war that had killed more than 600,000 Americans winding down, President Lincoln and Congress fought over how the nation would be brought together again and the Union reconstructed. In his Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln offered a message of reconciliation and respect for the vanquished foe. It was one of his last speeches since Lincoln was assassinated five weeks later.

Narrative

The morning of March 4, 1865 was dreary and dismal in the nation's capital. Torrential rains flooded the city, and the largely unpaved streets were clogged with several inches of mud. The city was encased in a gloomy, thick fog that for a while refused to lift. Howling winds started to whip through the streets with enough force to rip down tree limbs. The overwhelming military presence of federal soldiers roamed the city and monitored every major thoroughfare to dissuade a rumored Confederate plan to assassinate the president. Unseen sharpshooters stationed themselves on the roofs and in the windows around the Capitol building. It was a melancholy and inauspicious start for President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural.

The dull weather did nothing to keep tens of thousands of spectators away from the event. The Baltimore & Ohio railroad depot was even more flooded with arriving passengers than during the course of the busy previous week. People emerged from overcrowded hotel lobbies or firehouses where they had appreciatively slept on cots or the floor. Hundreds of wounded amputee soldiers slowly hobbled through the mud toward the Capitol on their crutches. One man, a young actor named John Wilkes Booth, who was hatching a plan to abduct the president and hold him hostage for the Confederacy, walked to the Capitol with secret diabolical thoughts running through his head. He eventually pushed his way through the throng to within thirty feet of the president.

A late-morning inaugural parade down Pennsylvania Avenue lifted the depressed atmosphere somewhat. Before he took the oath of office early in the day, Vice President Andrew Johnson embarrassed himself with a drunken speech to a small crowd within the confines of the Senate chamber, prompting President Lincoln to say, "Do not let Johnson speak outside." The outdoor festivities continued as planned because the rain had stopped and to accommodate the massive crowd who wished to hear the president speak.

At the appointed time, the gaunt, six-foot-four Lincoln rose, put on his steel-rimmed glasses, and stepped up to a small iron table with a short speech in his left hand. At that moment, the clouds parted to reveal an azure sky and sunlight. Everyone's mood instantly lifted as Lincoln began his speech, though as observer, ex-slave and abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, noted, the mood was still "quiet, earnest, and solemn" because of the nature of Lincoln's speech, which "sounded more like a sermon" than an Inaugural Address.

Lincoln was the first president to be re-elected for a second term since Andrew Jackson, and a Union victory spelling the end of the tragic war was nearly within grasp. He could have triumphantly lorded over the Confederacy and trampled the South into the dust with vengeance. Lincoln's address, however, magnanimously offered reconciliation and respect for the defeated enemy.

Many people in the huge audience for his speech expected the president to cast blame on the South for the Civil War. However, Lincoln began the speech surveying the start of the war and asserted that "All dreaded it – all sought to avert it . . . Both parties deprecated war." He did not blame the South for the great calamity that had claimed more than 600,000 American lives. Rather, he only obliquely referred to any southern responsibility for starting the war when he stated that, "one of them would make war, rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came." Neither side, he continued, anticipated the magnitude or long duration of the war, and neither side could be blamed that it was so destructive.

Lincoln squarely declared that slavery was the cause of the war. Nevertheless, although slaveholding in 1865 was restricted almost entirely to the South, he actually called slavery a national sin, not a sectional one. Lincoln saw the war as God's punishment on both sides for the great moral wrong and shared sin of slavery. "If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come . . . He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war." The war was a dreadful payment for "the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil . . . and every drop of blood drawn with the lash."

Lincoln's conciliatory language included noting the shared religious outlook of northerners and southerners. Both sides were primarily composed of Christians who "read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other." But, Lincoln cautioned northerners not to think that the impending victory was a signal of divine favor. Both suffered in the tragedy, and "The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes." Lincoln invoked the biblical Sermon on the Mount, a passage rooted in mercy and grace, as he counseled all Americans, "Let us judge not that we be not judged." His message was fundamentally one of forgiveness and respect.

Lincoln concluded with a final appeal for magnanimity as the war came to a close and the nation sought to renew the bonds of union. "With malice toward none; with charity for all," he offered as both sides began the work "to bind up the nation's wounds." He called on all Americans to "cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations." With those final words, Lincoln completed his 703-word speech. The address had only lasted some six minutes but had profoundly communicated the virtue of respect. Many in the audience were disappointed that the address did not outline a path of punishment for the South. However, Lincoln's wisdom in striving for a course of forgiveness and unity has stood the test of time, and the address remains one of the greatest speeches in American history.

At a White House reception, Frederick Douglass barely made it through the front door and the immense crowd because of the color of his skin. Lincoln saw the former slave approach and said, "Here comes my friend Douglass. I am glad to see you. I saw you in the crowd today, listening to my inaugural address; how did you like it?" After a silent moment to consider, Douglass replied, "Mr. Lincoln, that was a sacred effort." When Douglass later honored Lincoln after his death, he praised Lincoln for the speech, stating the president "was willing to let justice have its course." It was a humane and respectful justice.

Handout B: Journaling

Answer the following questions in your journal, as you prepare to voluntarily share some of your responses in a class discussion.

1. In what situations in your own life have you had opportunity to demonstrate respect, perhaps under very difficult circumstances? To what extent have you done so?
2. To what extent are you currently cultivating respect for others to achieve your purpose?
3. To what extent and in what ways does your performance align with your identity and purpose? What are you doing this very day to cultivate skills and interests that will connect today's purposes with your long-term opportunity to enhance and protect the life and liberty of others?
4. How can genuine respect for others contribute to freedom for yourself and others?