



Social Studies Exemplary Text Student Handout

Lincoln was shaken by the presidency. Back in Springfield, politics had been a sort of exhilarating game; but in the White House, politics was power, and power was responsibility. Never before had Lincoln held executive office. In public life he had always been an insignificant legislator whose votes were cast in concert with others and whose decisions in themselves had neither finality nor importance. As President he might consult with others, but innumerable grave decisions were in the end his own, and with them came a burden of responsibility terrifying in its dimensions.

Lincoln's rage for personal success, his external and worldly ambition, was quieted when he entered the White House, and he was at last left alone to reckon with himself. To be confronted with the fruits of his victory only to find that it meant choosing between life and death for others was immensely sobering. That Lincoln should have shouldered the moral burden of the war was characteristic of the high seriousness into which he had grown since 1854; and it may be true, as Professor Charles W. Ramsdell suggested, that he was stricken by an awareness of his own part in whipping up the crisis. This would go far to explain the desperation with which he issued pardons and the charity that he wanted to extend to the conquered South at the war's close. In one of his rare moments of self-revelation he is reported to have said: "Now I don't know what the soul is, but whatever it is, I know that it can humble itself." The great prose of the presidential years came from a soul that had been humbled. Lincoln's utter lack of personal malice during these years, his humane detachment, his tragic sense of life, have no parallel in political history.

Hofstadter, R. (1948). Abraham Lincoln and the Self-Made Myth. *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It*. New York: Vintage, 1974.

This is an example of exemplary text found in *Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Appendix B Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks*. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf

Social Studies Exemplary Text Teacher Resource

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EFL 6
Word Count 298

Teacher introduces the text with minimal commentary and students read it independently. Teacher then reads passage aloud. Give a brief definition to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in text). Teacher guides the students through a series of text-dependent questions. Complete the performance task as a cumulative evaluation of the close-reading.

Text-Dependent Questions

1. How did politics feel different in Washington from Springfield?
2. How was his decision making power different as president?
3. Explain three other ways things changed for President Lincoln when he became president.
4. What reason(s) does the author give to explain Lincoln's desperation to treat the south fairly after the war?
5. How does Lincoln differ from other presidents throughout political history? Are these positive differences? Why or why not?
6. Hofstadter's biggest criticism about Lincoln is that "he was a follower and not a leader of public opinion." Site this criticism with quotes from the text.

Performance Tasks for Informational Texts

Students determine Richard Hofstadter's purpose and point of view in his *Abraham Lincoln and the Self-Made Myth*, analyzing how both Hofstadter's style and content contribute to the eloquent and powerful contrast he draws between the younger, ambitious Lincoln and the sober, more reflective man of the presidential years. [RI.11–12.6]

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