

In the Spotlight

Grades
3-5

by | Sharron L. McElmeel

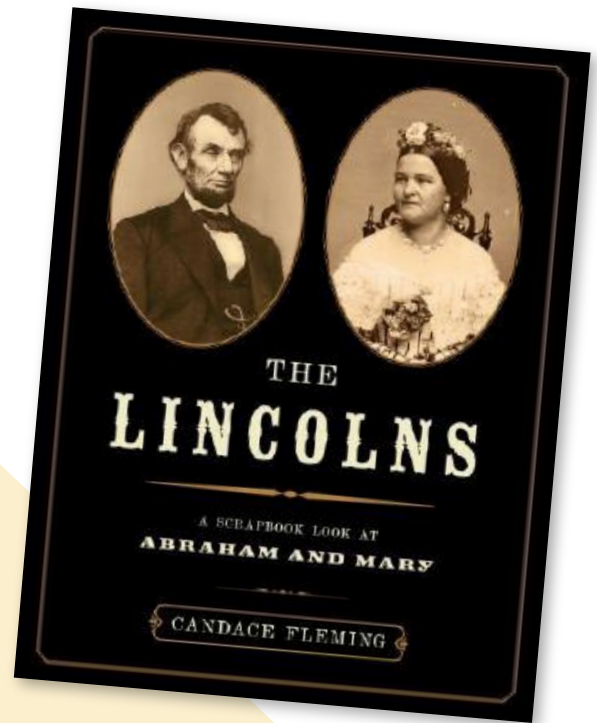
The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary
by Candace Fleming. Schwartz & Wade Books, 2008.

Abraham Lincoln – Bicentennial 1809-2009

Books to Celebrate

There is much to learn about the Lincolns in Candace Fleming's *The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary*. For instance, did you know that Abraham Lincoln preferred to be called Abraham, and that according to Mary Todd's brother-in-law, Lincoln was "utterly classless"? Lincoln was considered by many to be one of the plainest men in Springfield, Illinois, while Mary Todd was thought to be among the "town's richest, most fascinating young women." She was knowledgeable about fashions, religion, and had a "zest for political gossip." The seemingly unlikely pair married on November 4, 1842. Lincoln was a successful Illinois lawyer and politician, but was relatively unknown—even when he became the Republican nominee for president. He was not much more familiar when he was sworn in as the 16th president on March 4, 1861.

When Lincoln's family arrived in Washington, D.C. and the new president took office, he immediately focused on the stability of the nation, while Mary Todd Lincoln set out to spend the \$20,000 routinely given to presidents to refurbish the White House. She ordered the White House painted and cleaned, and she bought new carpets, curtains, furniture, and china. In the end, she overspent by \$7,000, and a reluctant President Lincoln asked Congress to pass a bill to authorize the remaining cost of the restoration. Mary Todd Lincoln became the first President's spouse to be referred to as



"First Lady," and much later, she became the first U.S. Presidential widow to be awarded a pension by Congress.

Fleming's scrapbook includes a recipe for a white cake flavored with almond and vanilla "from the kitchen of Mrs. Lincoln," as well as a story about the Lincoln sons, Willie and Tad, playing in the White House with the sons of Mrs. Horatio Taft, Bud and Holly. One episode describes the boys singing a popular song that poked fun at the president, much to the chagrin of the Taft boys' older sister, Julia, who cautioned them not to sing so loudly. But the boys continued singing "Old Abe Lincoln came out of the wilderness...."

Candace Fleming provides this information and much more in *The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary*. The presentation style is similar to Fleming's *Our Eleanor: A Scrapbook Look at Eleanor Roosevelt's Remarkable Life*. The book is an interesting read from cover to cover, but

equally engaging if readers wish to only dip into certain parts or themes of the Lincolns' lives (childhood, war years, etc.). No matter how the book is approached, it is all-around compelling.

A Plethora of Books About Abraham Lincoln

A birthday gala

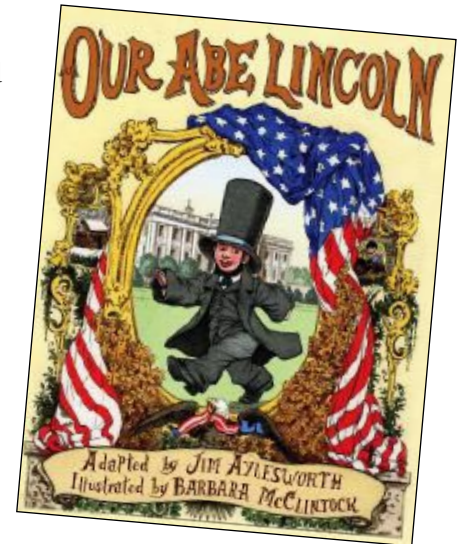
On February 2, 2009, the nation will mark the opening of The Lincoln Bicentennial year. Popular and patriotic nineteenth century music will be performed by military bands at the nation's capital, and that concert will be the first of many events planned in 2009 to honor the legacy of our sixteenth president. The celebration's official website is www.lincolnbicentennial.gov which includes a timeline of Lincoln's life, a calendar of events, and other related information.

Many other publishers are releasing Lincoln-related books at this time. Fleming's biography, *The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary*, is a birth-to-death biography; other writers have focused on telling stories from specific periods and events of Lincoln's life. Barry Deneberg's *Lincoln Shot: A President's Life Remembered* provides a good deal of information about the war, Lincoln's presidency, and details about Lincoln's assassination. The design of the book accurately mimics a newspaper from the 1866 era. Written for an older audience, the format makes the book appropriate for upper elementary readers.

In the early reading chapter book, *Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek: A Tall Thin Tale Introducing His Forgotten Frontier Friend*, author Deborah Hopkinson tells the fictionalized account of an event that took place when Lincoln was just seven years old and wandering the fields and streams near his home with his best friend, Austin. On this day, Knob Creek looked especially dark and scary, but the boys decided to cross the stream anyway—with near-disastrous results. If not for Austin, Abraham might not have survived to become president of the United States.

Primary readers and older readers alike will delight in singing the 1860s song, "Old Abe Lincoln Came Out of the Wilderness," hollered by the Taft brothers and young Willie and Tad Lincoln. The song, mentioned in Fleming's book, is at the center of an adaptation by Jim Aylesworth in *Our Abe Lincoln*. When Aylesworth's editor asked him to think about writing a Lincoln

book for the bicentennial, he mulled over the task and began some research into Lincoln's life. Like Fleming, Aylesworth eventually came across references to Julia Taft's account of her brothers' and Willie and Tad Lincoln's White House rendition of a song used during the Lincoln campaign era. Aylesworth called upon his knowledge of young children's tastes and abilities to adapt



the song to tell a rhythmic story of Lincoln's life, from his childhood in the Kentucky and Indiana wilderness to his famous achievements as president of the United States. The song is sung to the tune of *The Old Grey Mare*. Barbara McClintock's illustrations visually set the verse as part of a theater production invoking the 1860s era.

The tune begins:

*Old Abe Lincoln came out of the wilderness,
Out of the wilderness,
Out of the wilderness,
Old Abe Lincoln came out of the wilderness,
Many long years ago.*

Chorus:

*Many long years ago,
Many long years ago,
Old Abe Lincoln came out of the wilderness,
Many long years ago.*

Both Fleming and Aylesworth acknowledge the popularity of Mary Todd Lincoln's "white cake" by including recipes for it in their books (Fleming in chapter 3, Aylesworth on the back). Fleming tells us that Mary often made this cake for Abraham, and while she sometimes served it with strawberries, she never frosted it. It's not difficult to imagine that she served it on the occasion of his presidential nomination and other special events.

In the Spotlight

Celebrating with the Nation

The bicentennial is a great opportunity to introduce our sixteenth president to readers. Depending on the age and maturity of your students, incorporate the titles already mentioned with as many of the following titles as possible (most are 2008 or 2009 titles):

- *Abe Lincoln Loved Animals* by Ellen Jackson
- *Abe's Honest Words: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* by Doreen Rappoport
- *Abraham Lincoln* (Rookie Biography) by Wil Mara
- *Abraham Lincoln* by Tanya Lee Stone
- *Abraham Lincoln Comes Home* by Robert Burleigh
- *Abraham Lincoln for Kids: His Life and Times with 21 Activities (For Kids series)* by Janis Herbert
- *Chasing Lincoln's Killer* by James L. Swanson
- *Lincoln and Douglass: An American Friendship* by Nikki Giovanni
- *Lincoln Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Shaped an Extraordinary Life* by Martin W. Sandler.
- *Lincoln: A Photobiography* by Russell Freedman (the 1990 Newberry Award Winner)
- *Mr. Lincoln's Boys: Being the Mostly True Adventures of Abraham Lincoln's Trouble-Making Sons, Tad and Willie* by Staton Rubin
- *Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker: The Unlikely Friendship of Elizabeth Keckley and Mary Todd Lincoln* by Lynda Jones
- *My Brother Abe: Sally Lincoln's Story* by Harry Mazer
- *What Lincoln Said* by Sarah L. Thompson

D'Aulaire's Classic title: *Abraham Lincoln*

In 1940, Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire won the coveted Caldecott Award with their illustrated biography of Abraham Lincoln. The original 1939 title was initially illustrated with stone lithographs. Later, the mechanics of lithograph reproduction changed, and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire was asked to recreate the illustrations on metal lithography plates. The 1957 edition has subtle changes in the illustrations

— a great source for a visual hunt if both editions are available.

The D'Aulaires' book ends with an illustration of Lincoln sitting in a rocking chair with his son by his side, giving the impression that his presidency ended that way. Of course, his presidency ended with his assassination, a fact the D'Aulaires felt was too much for young readers to know. That omission of fact could well be the subject of a discussion regarding honesty in writing, changes in standards for biographies, and how the omission of information can change a perspective.

Connecting with Information about Abraham Lincoln

Not every grade level will have a curriculum unit that specifically focuses on Abraham Lincoln or the presidency. But this bicentennial is especially important, and Lincoln-related activities may easily be incorporated into other areas of the curriculum. For instance: American/African-American history (civil war, slavery), mathematics (timelines, recipes), biography-historical fiction (how does it differ from biography-nonfiction), language arts (dramatic interpretation), elections (how do procedures differ today from procedures in the 1800s?), and research (compare facts in the various books to evaluate the facts as we now know them). Engage in wide-reading and choose one or more of these activities:

1. Visit the Apples 4 the Teacher site at www.apples4theteacher.com/holidays/presidents-day/abraham-lincoln/ and explore the Lincoln activities and games.
2. Visit Southern Indiana Education Center's site at www.siec.k12.in.us/west/proj/lincoln/ and take the quiz. Create your own quiz using information from Fleming's book about the Lincolns.
3. Make a timeline showing significant dates in Abraham Lincoln's (blue ink) and Mary Todd Lincoln's (red ink) lives, and political dates (green ink), such as specific milestones in the Civil War.
4. Engage in a debate: Should states have the right to secede from the Union?

5. Make a book titled “Ten Things I Know About Abraham Lincoln” and “Ten Things I Know About Mary Todd Lincoln.”
 6. Compare the recipes for Mary Todd Lincoln’s cake recipe from *The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary* and the recipe on the back jacket cover of *Our Abe Lincoln*. Which cake will be sweeter? Lighter? Tastier? Create a grading chart and bake a cake using each recipe. Conduct research to determine the differences in results.
 7. Present one interesting fact about either of the Lincolns to your classmates.
 8. After reading stories and anecdotes about the Lincolns’ lives, select an interesting, sad, happy, humorous, or political episode and create a dramatic interpretation of the event. Practice the play and perform for your classmates.
 9. Write a bio poem about either of the Lincolns. Share it with your classmates.
 10. Make a family tree for Robert Lincoln. Include his parents (Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln), and 3 generations beyond them.
 11. Create a timeline for Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln’s family. On the timeline put both of their birth and death dates, their marriage date, and the birth and death dates of each of their four sons.
 12. Memorize Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Recite the address for classmates.
- Culminate the focus on Abraham Lincoln and his 16th presidency with a party – serve Mary Todd Lincoln’s almond vanilla cake and have a great read-in session.
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- *Bibliography on page 6.



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URL: <http://www.siec.k12.in.us/west/proj/lincoln/>

Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial. The son of a Kentucky frontiersman, Abraham Lincoln had to struggle to live and learn. Five months before receiving his party's nomination for President, he sketched his life: "I was born Feb. 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families" second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks. Abraham Lincoln National Railsplitting Contest Lincoln, IL. Lincoln-Douglas Debate Weekend - Jonesboro, IL Jonesboro, IL. 9/13/2008. Greenville Lincoln 150 Years Celebration Greenville, IL. 9/15/2008. My family's experience in the civil rights movement, which Lincoln so inspired, has shaped my thinking and guided my work as a member of Congress. Likewise, my belief that history "and in particular, Abraham Lincoln" holds relevance to our lives has played a significant part in my development as a person. I believe Lincoln's leadership as president, his wisdom, and his belief in the bedrock American principles of freedom and democracy are all guideposts we can continue to follow today in building a more perfect Union.