

DAR MUSEUM

Lessons from the American Home
Object Lesson: The Lincoln Family
Suitable for 4th-12th grades

Summary:

Students will “close read” an art piece and try to capture and describe as many of its physical properties as possible. Then they will determine its audience and argument and compare it to other works like it. After trying to reason out this work through observable data alone, they will be given secondary sources that reveal the history and context of the piece. They will then re-evaluate their observations and reflect on the relationship between secondary and primary sources, while evaluating the benefits of material/art history. Can be written or discussed.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will practice observation and descriptive language as applied to visual art
- Students will understand the relationship between art and documentary sources
- Students will be familiar with issues around reliability of historic images and commemoration of Abraham Lincoln

Time: <15 minutes Required Materials: All required materials are included in this packet.

Curriculum Timing Suggestion: This work is primarily concerned with Lincoln and the Civil War. However, it’s primary objective concerning sources could be beneficial during any discussion of sources or during Unit 0.

Skills, Sources, and Concepts	Examples
Compelling and Supporting Questions	How do historic images help us understand the past? Are historic images reliable as primary sources? How do secondary sources help us understand art works?
Sources/Evidence	Historic prints, secondary sources, museum databases, newspapers, government education websites
Key Concepts	Art interpretation, American culture, historic memory
Key Strategies and Skills	Critical reading and thinking, close reading art, evaluating primary and secondary sources, synthesizing information between primary materials and secondary sources
Evidence-Backed Interpretations	Using secondary sources to contextualize art history, using secondary sources to make claims and arguments about historical art, using primary materials to make arguments about secondary sources
Action and Communication	Students will become informed and critical consumers of historical crafts, students will hone strong descriptive language, students will practice analysis and exercise reasoned reflection, students will have a more nuanced understanding of Lincoln’s legacy

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Art Lesson: The Lincoln Family (*Student Copy begins on page 9*)

Close Reading: Look at the art below. Write down words or phrases to describe it completely to someone who has not seen it. Do not just label it. What shape is it? What are the shapes contained within it? What colors does it have and where are they? Describe any images or words you see – what do they depict, what font and color does it use? What characters do you see? How are they dressed, what are they doing? Do you recognize them, and if so, who are they? What materials do you think it is made of? What size is it? What techniques produced the image? What's in the background? How old do you think it is? Try not to stop writing until time timer is up.



Observe:

[It's clearly labeled Lincoln Family, but how would you know it was the Lincoln Family if the label were not there? What building is in the background? What building does it seem like the Lincolns would be in? (The White House did not have a view of the Capitol during the war – there were trees and buildings in the way). Can you remember the names of Lincoln's family members? How are they dressed differently? Mary Lincoln, and oldest to youngest: Robert, Willie, and Tad/Thomas. What is on the table? Can you make out the words on the document? It says: Proclamation Freedom. What could that be referring to? When do you think it was made?]

Reasoning – Audience and Argument: What is this art used for? Who was it created for, and what are they trying to communicate? Do you know or do you think it is used for that purpose? Make sure to distinguish between *assumed knowledge*, *reasoned conclusions*, and *evidenced knowledge*. What specific elements help you determine the audience or the message? Where would this piece have hung?

[Where would this art hang? Think outside of museums. What about schools? Government buildings? Would someone want to hang this in their home? Would this image be useful in a textbook? A newspaper? How would this image be used if it was made when he was alive? After he died? Does this painting have other information or use outside of the Lincoln family specifically? Does it tell us anything else about the era or the location? Is this a primary or secondary source? Don't give them a hard answer for this. Let them decide after reading the sources.]

Reasoning – Comparison: Compare this to other art pieces like it. How is it different? How is it the same? Are they making the same argument or using the same imagery? Were they made for the same audience? What elements would you add or subtract to better communicate its message? Are these original elements, or would you borrow from other examples? How are children depicted in art today? Why would a museum value a piece like this?

[Think about other famous depictions of Lincoln: the Lincoln Memorial, the five-dollar bill, the penny. How are those images different from this one? What message do those images convey that this doesn't, or vice versa? What does it signify to put Lincoln on currency? What does the memorial say about him? When we make images of famous people, do they resemble this one? How does this compare to paintings of famous people?]

Synthesis, Part 1 - Read: Read the secondary source(s) below.

Source 1: DAR Museum Catalogue Record #2017.20.1

Artist/Maker: Thomas Kelly Date Made: 1866 Materials: Print (paper) Place Made: New York City

Source 2: “The Death of the President’s Son,” *Brooklyn Evening Star* (Brooklyn, New York), 22 February 1862, page 2.

Amid the general joy excited by the successes of the Union cause, a black shadow has fallen upon the Presidential mansion, and all who were personally acquainted with the family of the President shared in the deep grief occasioned by the death of little Willie Lincoln. He was a boy of such promise...

Source 2: “Completion of the Capitol Dome,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia), 03 December 1863, page 4.

At noon, to-day, the head and cap of the Goddess of Liberty [now called the Statue of Freedom] were placed upon the apex, which completes the statue upon the dome of the capitol. About three hundred people were gathered in East Capitol Square to witness the crowning, and as the head rose to its position a large flag was raised about twenty feet above the statue, and as it unfolded to the breeze, a battery of artillery from Camp Barry fired a salute of thirty-five guns, one for each State, and the crowd gave three cheers and quietly dispersed. The scaffolding around the statue will not be removed for two or three months, that much time being necessary to comple[te, sic] the base on which the statue stands.

Source 3: “Timeline,” *Library of Congress Abraham Lincoln Collection*, [loc.gov /collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/articles-and-essays/abraham-lincoln-and-emancipation/timeline/](https://www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/articles-and-essays/abraham-lincoln-and-emancipation/timeline/)

1862, July 13: Lincoln Discussed a possible emancipation proclamation with Secretaries William H. Seward and Gideon Welles.

1862, July 22: Lincoln presented a draft Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet. Secretary Seward suggested waiting for a Union military victory before issuing a proclamation.

1862, Sept. 22: President Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that as of January 1, 1863 "all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

1863, Jan. 1: Lincoln signed the Final Emancipation Proclamation, which freed all slaves not residing in specified Union-controlled areas of the Confederacy, and authorized enrollment of African Americans into the military.

1865, April 14: Abraham Lincoln shot at Ford’s Theater by John Wilkes Booth. Lincoln died at 7:22 a.m. on April 15...

Synthesis, Part 2 – Reflect: How did the secondary source change how you viewed the art? Cite specific examples. Look back at your observations – what did you observe accurately, what did you miss or observe inaccurately? Is it possible that this print represents a real moment? Cite evidence from sources. Look at your reasoned argument and audience. Has your concept of the audience or argument changed? What additional ways does this object differ from other examples of its type now that you've read additional sources? What questions do you still have? Where would you go to find answers to those questions?

[While many prints are based on photographs or attempted copies of real scenes, this image is a fiction. The capitol dome was completed long after Willies' death, and the Emancipation wasn't being worked on until several months after Willie dies. Additional reveals not sourced here: Robert was away at school, Harvard mostly, for most of Lincoln's presidency. He visited DC rarely. He is also photographed wearing a mustache during this time. After 1864, he enlists in the Union army and serves under Grant. He is in D.C. at the time of Lincoln's murder. Tad's outfit is anachronistic. While very young boys were dressed and kept their hair like Willie (see Art Lesson 71.90 Emery Children for more), by the time Willie came to D.C. he would have dressed in a boys suit. He's frequently photographed in a children's army uniform. What was this fiction created? What purpose does it serve? What historical value does it hold? Maybe it doesn't tell us much about Lincoln, but what does it say about Lincoln's memory, and the emotions Americans placed upon his memory?]

Additional Reflection Space:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for additional reflection space. The box is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower half of the document.

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Observe:

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Reasoning – Audience and Argument: What is this art used for? Who was it created for, and what are they trying to communicate? Do you know or do you think it is used for that purpose? Make sure to distinguish between *assumed knowledge*, *reasoned conclusions*, and *evidenced knowledge*. What specific elements help you determine the audience or the message? Where would this piece have hung?

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Reasoning – Comparison: Compare this to other art pieces like it. How is it different? How is it the same? Are they making the same argument or using the same imagery? Were they made for the same audience? What elements would you add or subtract to better communicate its message? Are these original elements, or would you borrow from other examples? How are children depicted in art today? Why would a museum value a piece like this?

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Additional Reflection Space:

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