

“Oh Captain, My Captain” and the Effect of the Death of Abraham Lincoln on the American People.

By Barbara Barna

Objectives:

- Students will recall the events that lead to the end of the Civil War.
- Students will visualize how the American people felt about President Lincoln’s accomplishments and in turn his assassination.
- Students will read the classic poem, “Oh Captain, My Captain” and interpret the poem using the metaphor chart included in the lesson plan.

Time: Approximately 45 minutes

Materials needed: Copies of the poem “O Captain, My Captain” by Walt Whitman or a transparency.

5th Grade Social Studies TEKS:

522A,5.25E, 5.26B,5.22B

5th Grade Language Arts TEKS:

8A,10 D, 10H, 10K, 11A, 12E, 12G

Background on Walt Whitman: Walt Whitman was born in New York in 1819. He was raised in poverty and went to school for only five or six years. His poems portrayed Americans as a new nation nurtured in political liberty. During The Civil War, he cared for his brother who had been wounded at Fredericksburg and spent time at Washington area military hospitals caring for both Union and Confederate soldiers. He might have saw President Lincoln at Washington. He wrote an elegy (a lament for the dead) for the president titled "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." "O Captain! My Captain!" was written shortly after the assassination of President Lincoln. Walt Whitman died in 1892.

Start the lesson by asking the students to suppose it is April 1865 and they are Americans who supported Abraham Lincoln and the Union during The Civil War. Recall several points that lead up to the point of General Robert E. Lee surrender and the end of The Civil War. While students continue to visualize, ask them the following questions:

- Who is Abraham Lincoln (the president of the United States)
- What are his greatest achievements? (freed the slaves, saved the Union)
- How do Americans feel now that The Civil War has ended and the Union has been saved? (relieved)

Tell the students that it is now April 15, 1865, a few days after General Robert E. Lee's surrender, when they hear the news: President Lincoln has been assassinated! Ask the following questions:

- How do you take the news? (they are shocked)
- How do your neighbors react to the news? (sadness, grief)
- Ask the students to think of signs of mourning the general public shows for a recently deceased president (American flags flown at half staff, offices and businesses closed, etc.)

Tell the students that an American poet, Walt Whitman expressed in poetry the grief the American people felt over the president's death. Explain that Walt Whitman had cared for his brother and other soldiers injured in The Civil War at Washington area hospitals, and might have seen the president there. Explain that he wrote a poem that expressed his own grief as well as the nation's sadness.

Put up the text of the poem on transparency and/or distribute copies of the poem and ask the students to read it silently to themselves at least twice. Put up the following list of words from the poem on the board, draw the students' attention to them, explain that they may be difficult, and ask the students to refer to these words if they need to. Allow five minutes for students to read the poem to themselves.

Next, ask for volunteers to read aloud and specify the stanzas or lines of the poem that they will read. Then, ask students to express their reactions to the poem. Show the students pictures related to the assassination and funeral of the president. **See the "Suggested Books" section above for materials you can use with this lesson.**

Assign learning groups of three members each group: 1) a **recorder** who will write the group's response, 2) a **reader** who will read the directions and the group's response to the class, and a 3) **checker** who will ensure that the group understands what its task is and that it is completed on time.

Explain these roles to the class and ask each group to select a Recorder, a Reporter, and a Checker. Ask the students to begin discussing the answers and be prepared to share their answers with the class after ten minutes. While the students are working, visit the groups to ensure that they remain on task, that they are working along smoothly as a group, or, where this is necessary, to provide assistance understanding the task. Hand out one question per group.

O Captain! My Captain!

O Captain! my Captain! Our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart! 5
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up--for you the flag is flung--for you the bugle trills, 10
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths--for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning:
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck, 15
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won; 20
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O the bleeding drops of red!

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

BY WALT WHITMAN.

I.

O CAPTAIN! my captain! our fearful trip is done
The ship has weathered every track, the prize we sought is won
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring,
But O heart! heart! heart!

~~I have not the little spot~~

Where on the deck my captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

II.

O captain! my captain! rise up and hear the bells
Rise up! for you the flag is flung, for you the bugle trills:
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths, for you the shores a-crowd-
ing:

For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning.

O captain! dear father!

This arm ~~is~~ *beneath your head!*

It is some dream that on the deck
You've fallen cold and dead.

III.

My captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still:

My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will.

~~Beneath the ship~~ The ship is anchored safe, its voyage closed and done:

From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won!

Exult, O shores! and ring, O bells!

But I, with silent tread,

Walk the spot my captain lies

Fallen cold and dead.



1848. Photographer unknown. Courtesy Walt Whitman House, Camden, New Jersey. This daguerreotype was made in New Orleans, during Whitman's residence there between February and May, 1848, while he worked on the New Orleans Crescent.

Online Source: <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/whitman/photos/1840s/docs/001.html>



Photograph of painting signed "J.W. Alexander." Detroit Publishing Co. no. 29379. Gift; State Historical Society of Colorado; 1949. **MEDIUM** 1 negative : glass ; 7 x 5 in **CALL NUMBER** LC-D418-29379 <P&P> **REPRODUCTION NUMBER** LC-D418-29379 DLC (b&w glass

WORDS IN THE POEM

weather'd (line 2): come safely through

rack (line 2): torment

port (line 3): place where ships unload

exulting (line 3): feeling or showing triumphant joy

keel (line 4): ship, boat

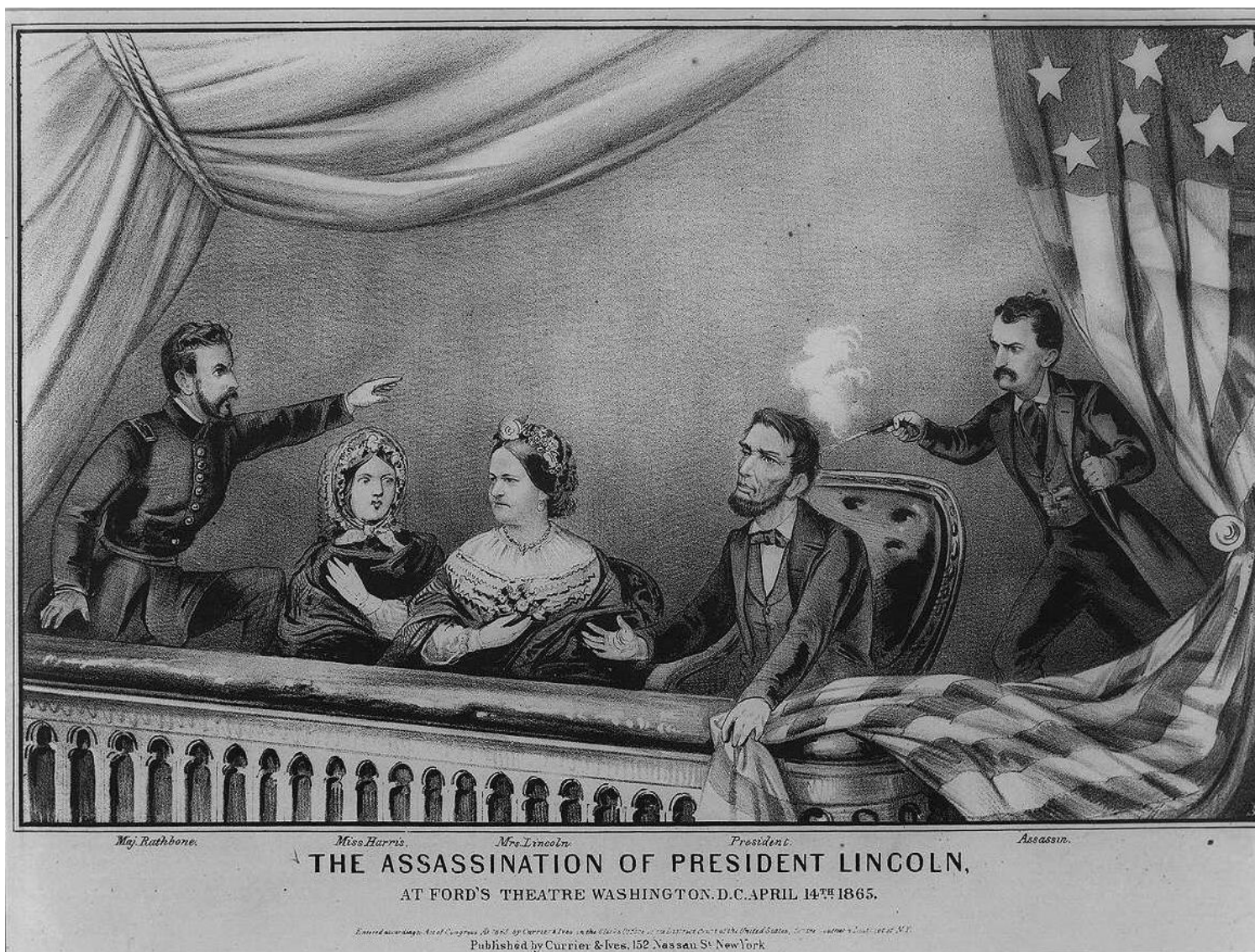
flung (line 9): flown, raised

trills (line 10): sound as that made by a

deck (line 15): floor-like surface of shipbird or person laughing

victor (line 20): conqueror; winner

tread (line 22): step



The assassination of President Lincoln: at Ford's Theatre, Washington, D.C., April 14th, 1865. [Currier & Ives.](#)
CREATED/PUBLISHED New York : Currier & Ives, 1865.

CALL NUMBER PGA - Currier & Ives--The **assassination of President Lincoln ...** (A size) <P&P>

REPRODUCTION NUMBER LC-USZ62-2073 DLC (b&w film copy negative)

REPOSITORY Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA

DIGITAL ID

([b&w film copy neg.](#)) cph 3a05805

Activity “O Captain! My Captain!”

The following activities must be answered in complete sentences.

Group # 1: The poem "O Captain! My Captain!" tells of a journey by sea. Describe how the journey ended.

Group #2: In the poem "O Captain! My Captain!," the ship's captain is compared to President Abraham Lincoln. State what the ship in the poem is compared to. Explain your answer.

Group #3: Line 2 of the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" reads "Our fearful trip is done,..." Identify the event in American History that the expression "our fearful trip" refers to

Group #4: Describe one of the ship's captain's character traits in the poem, "O Captain! My Captain!" and cite words from the poem to support your answer.

Group #5: State whether in your opinion, the narrator (the person speaking) in the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" is likely to have supported the Union or the Confederacy in The Civil War and cite words from the poem to support your opinion

Group #6: Suppose the ship's captain represents President Lincoln. Describe the attitude of the narrator (the person speaking) in the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" towards President Lincoln and cite words from the poem to support your answer.

Group #7: A tragic poem makes its readers sad. A comic poem makes its readers happy. State whether "O Captain! My Captain!" is a comic or tragic poem and cite words from the poem to support your answer.

Group #8: Identify your favorite line in the poem by citing its number and explain why it is your favorite.

Answers

Rubric: One point for minimal or partial answer, two points for correct and expanded answers.

Answer for group #1:

A captain takes his ship safely through a stormy journey but dies when his ship nears port.

(Stanza 1; Stanzas 1-3)

Answer for group #2

In this poem, the ship refers to the American nation, the Union, or the American people.

(Stanzas 1-3)

Answer for group #3

The event of American History that the expression "our fearful trip" refers to is The Civil War.

Answer for group #4

Accept any character trait that is supported by a relevant reference to the poem.

Answer for group #5

The narrator supports the Union because he refers to the president of the Union as "my Captain."

Answer for group #6

The narrator is fond of the president. He refers to him as "dear."

Answer for group #7

(Line 13) He mourns the president's death.

the poem is tragic because it describes the death of a great personality.

Answer for group #8

Accept any response which identifies a line and explains why it is your favorite.



	Funeral Car
Series	Assassination & Death
Item ID	P0406_104
Description	Abraham Lincoln's body being taken to the state capitol in Columbus, Ohio . The seventeen-foot-long hearse was designed in Chinese pagoda style .
Subject	Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865--Funeral journey to Springfield Capitols Hearses
Geographic Location	Ohio--Columbus
Creator	Ruger, Albert
Date	1865
Publisher	S. Selleck & Co.
Format of Original	Two toned lithograph
Digital Format	jpg
Owning Institution	Indiana Historical Society
Collection Name	Jack Smith Lincoln Graphics Collection
Collection Number	P 0406
Original Filename	Ruger, Albert. FUNERAL CAR OF PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN PASSING THE STATE HOUSE AT COLUMBUS, APRIL 29. 104.tif
Copyright Notice	Digital image © 2003 Indiana Historical Society. All Rights Reserved.
Full resolution	Volume4\1_104.tif http://images.indianahistory.org/fullres/p0406/volume0/1_104.tif

Suggested Books

Student Reference

D'Aulaire, Ingri and Edgar Parin. *Abraham Lincoln*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1970. A classic picture book about Abraham Lincoln that every student interested in Lincoln should read.

Jacobs, William Jay. *Lincoln*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991. This is a forty-one-page easy-to-read book with black-and-white pictures of the assassination and burial of Lincoln on pages 38 and 39. Show the students the pictures and recommend this book for independent reading.

Kent, Zachary. *Cornerstones of Freedom: The Story of Ford's Theater and The Death of Lincoln*. Chicago: Children's Press, 1987. This easy-to-read book contains thirty pages of lively narrative and color pictures of Lincoln's assassination. Show the pictures to the students and recommend the book for independent reading.

Lincoln, Abraham. *The Gettysburg Address*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1995. This is a picture book whose text is *The Gettysburg Address*. The illustrations are by Michael McCurdy. It is strongly recommended that you read this text to the students, showing them the accompanying artwork. Also, recommend this book for independent reading.

McGovern, Ann. *If You Grew Up with Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Scholastic, 1992. This book describes life in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois in the 1800s. Recommend it for independent reading.

Teacher Reference

Freedman, Russell. *Lincoln: A Photobiography*. New York: Clarion, 1987. Pages 121 to 129 contain pictures related to Lincoln's assassination and burial. Show the students these pictures.

Hakim, Joy. *A History of US: War, Terrible War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Chapter 30 is a lively account of Lincoln's assassination.

Hirsch, E.D., ed. *What Your 5th Grader Needs To Know*. New York: Doubleday, 1993. The text of "O Captain! my Captain!" is on page 56.

Whitman, Walt. *Everyman: Leaves Of Grass and Selected Prose*. London: J. M. Dent, 1993. This reference volume contains a section titled *Memories of President Lincoln*, which includes "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

<http://www.cstone.net/~bcp/5/5ALit.htm>