LEARN FROM LINCOLN,  
LIVE LIKE LINCOLN

Grade Level: k-3

LINCOLN AND HONESTY

The purpose of this lesson is to take a look at Abraham Lincoln's life and instances where Lincoln shows honesty and empathy. There were instances in Lincoln’s life where he spoke with honesty and showed kindness to others.

Objectives:
- Students will learn the importance of honesty.
- Students will learn how to show kindness towards others.
- Students will learn how Lincoln treated others and how they should treat one another.

National Learning Standards

English Language Arts
State Goal 1: A.1a, B.1b, C.1b, C.1e, C.1f
State Goal 2: A.1a, B.1a, B.1c
State Goal 4: A.1a, A.1b, A.1c, B.1b

Vocabulary

Honesty: fairness and straightforwardness of conduct; adherence to the facts

Empathy: the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner

“For a man who was for a quarter of a century both a lawyer and a politician, he (Lincoln) was the most honest man I know. He was not only morally honest but intellectually so. He could not reason falsely; if he did it, he failed.”

- Samuel Parks, Logan County Attorney frequently with Lincoln in the courtroom

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HONEST ABE?

There are countless instances and examples of Lincoln’s honesty. But, what is the origin of this nickname Honest Abe?

THEORY #1

In “History of Logan County,” Lawrence Stringer writes about an 1843 court case in Postville, Illinois. The judge in the case, Judge Treat, was ready to proceed with the case and Lincoln could not be found. Judge Treat sent Sheriff Deskins to find Lincoln. The sheriff found Lincoln playing ball in the park. When Deskins requested that Lincoln come back to court, Lincoln responded, “Tell the judge I can’t come; my hands are dirty and I want to clean them.” Lincoln’s hands were dusty from the ballgame, but when the background of his client came forward it became clear he was also remarking about the ethics of his client. Stringer writes, “When Treat was notified of Lincoln’s remark, it is reported that he simply said, ‘Honest Abe.’” In the Honesty & Empathy Exhibit Area on the first floor, you can see this “barrel” chair, which was used in the original Postville Courthouse when Lincoln practiced law there. From 1839 to 1848. Postville served as the Logan County seat.

THEORY #2

When Lincoln first ran for President, John L. Scripps of the Chicago Press and Tribune asked him for an autobiography to write a campaign biography about him. The following account, mentions a store he came to purchase. (Lincoln wrote this account in third person). A man offered to sell, and did sell, to Abraham and another as poor as himself, an old stock of goods, upon credit. They opened as merchants…Of course they did nothing but get deeper and deeper in debt. The store winked out. In January 1833, Lincoln and William F. Berry purchased a small store. As the store became mired in debt, Lincoln decided to sell his part of the store to Berry in April 1833. When William Berry died in January 10, 1835, Lincoln was left with the debts of the partnership. Lincoln paid off every cent of the debt. It took him until 1848 to repay it completely. This circumstance may have contributed to his nickname “Honest Abe.” In the Honesty & Empathy Exhibit Area on the first floor, you can see the platter above that Lincoln sold while a store clerk in New Salem.
**PRE-TEACH: WHAT MADE ABE HONEST?**

For this lesson you will want to read *Abe’s Honest Words: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* by Doreen Rappaport. If you are teaching kindergarteners you may want to pick an easier to understand Lincoln children’s book. After reading the book ask the following questions (below each question are examples of the type of responses you are looking for. You may need to rephrase the student’s answers or guide them along):

(Ask) What does honesty mean?
1. To be truthful
2. To not lie, cheat, or steal.

(Ask) Why is honesty important?
1. Honest people are trustworthy, dependable, and respected by others.
2. It is the right thing to do. It feels good.
3. Telling the truth lets everyone know what happened and keeps the wrong person from being blamed for something they didn’t do.

(Ask) What are the consequences of dishonesty?
1. Losing the trust and respect of others.
2. The need to tell more lies in order to cover up.
3. You may face punishment and embarrassment.

(Ask) What are the qualities of an honest person Lincoln shows?
1. Tells the truth, regardless of the consequence.
2. Admits when he is wrong.
3. Does not cheat or steal.
4. Does not exaggerate to make things seem different than they are.
5. Keeps promises and encourages others to be truthful.

**ACTIVITY (GRADES 1-3)**

**Materials:** Ball of yarn

**Activity:**
Arrange ahead of time to have one of your students help you with this demonstration. Secretly ask the student to give false answers to each question that you ask. This will begin after he/she has taken a seat in a chair in front of the class. The student come up and take a seat in a chair in front of the class. Next, ask you the student a simple question such as, “Why didn’t you get your homework done for today?” As they answer with a lie, such as the dog ate my homework, wrap a long string of yarn around the student once. Then ask a follow-up question based on her reply, such as “How did the dog get your homework?” As the student makes up another answer, wrap the yarn around he or she again. Continue to ask follow-up questions until he or she is entangled in a web of yarn. After the class has observed the situation, explain that you asked this person to make up answers to all your questions (to lie).

**Discuss the following with the class:**
1. Ask them if they can see what telling lies can do to someone. Emphasize how one lie usually leads to another and how quickly we can become trapped and embarrassed by lies.
2. Ask them what will be experienced by the person who always tells the truth (not having to remember what your last lie was or how to cover it up, peace of mind, and feeling good about oneself.)
3. Ask the students to tell about a time when they were caught in a lie and had to tell another lie in order to cover it up.
4. Ask why it is important for us to always tell the truth (trust, respect, because it’s the right thing to do.)