



The Assassination of President Abraham Lincoln

History/Social Studies Lesson for 5th Graders

Time required: Two 40- to 55-minute class periods

Introduction:

Students will use primary sources to understand different points of view about Abraham Lincoln's assassination. By evaluating the motivations of John Wilkes Booth and others, students will create an original argument to help better understand what took place and why it mattered.

Learning Objectives for 5th Graders:

- Students will become familiar with the events of April 14 and 15, 1865
- Students will summarize John Wilkes Booth's motivations for killing the president
- Students will adapt primary source content to develop an original argument

Guiding Questions/Compelling Questions to Consider for Fifth Graders:

How can seeing an event from multiple points of view change our understanding of it?

- **Supporting Questions**
 - o What was the atmosphere like in Washington, DC at the end of the Civil War?
 - o What does it mean to be a "Confederate sympathizer"?
 - o Where did John Wilkes Booth grow up, and how did that shape his opinions of Lincoln?
 - o Why did John Wilkes Booth decide to kill the president?
- **Intended Outcomes**
 - o Students will know the sequence of events that make up the assassination timeline and understand the connections between them.
 - o Students will complete the S.O.A.P.S.Tone template, highlighting evidence from the primary sources to support their arguments for why Booth committed his crime.
 - o Students will write a letter that expresses point of view about the Lincoln assassination and explain why the person in whose voice they wrote held his or her beliefs about the crime.

Common Core Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1](#) - Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.2](#) - Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.3](#) - Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.5](#) - Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6](#) - Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.9](#) - Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

Materials:

- Timeline cards
- White board markers
- Tape
- Lined paper
- Diary image
- Diary excerpt
- S.O.A.P.S.Tone worksheet
- Primary source documents
- Annotation Rubric
- Assessment Rubric

Assessments:

You can assess student learning in four ways, using *the downloadable rubric*:

- By observing student engagement in the timeline activity
- By looking at student use of Annotation Symbols on their assigned primary source document
- By marking students' completed S.O.A.P.S.Tone worksheets
- By marking the letters written by students

Procedures:

Lesson Activity One: Human Timeline

- Students will work together to create a human timeline of events leading up to and following the assassination of President Lincoln and discuss connections among the events.

Lesson Activity Two: Booth's Diary Analysis

- Students will read an excerpt from John Wilkes Booth's diary and use the S.O.A.P.S.Tone Activity sheet to analyze his motivations for killing the president.

Lesson Activity Three: Primary Source Annotation and Letter Writing

- Students will read four primary source documents that explore the many responses to Lincoln's death and then imagine a fictional 1865 character and produce their own letter as if they were responding in real time to the event.

Lesson Activity One: Human Timeline

- Introduction: Ask the students to tell you what they know about the Civil War and President Abraham Lincoln. This will act as a warm-up activity to introduce the topic of the assassination.
- Shuffle the event cards (found at the end of the lesson plan, pages 16-30) and hand out, one per student. If there are fewer students than events, only use the events that you think are most important. If there are more students than events, students without cards can act as “movers” to help organize the students with cards.
- Once everyone has an event card, encourage students to move around the classroom, discussing their events with each other, with the aim of arranging themselves in a line, sequentially, based on what they believe to be a logical sequence of events.
- After several minutes, students should have arranged themselves in a single line across the classroom from earliest event to most recent, with event pages displayed.
- With the students in line, you will then tape the order on the wall (or white board) so that the entire class can see the results.
- Each student should then read aloud his or her event. If your students have a strong pre-existing knowledge about the Civil War/Lincoln assassination, you can have them guess the dates for each of the event cards. The teacher should write the guesses on the board. Every time a date is suggested, the teacher should follow up with the student to defend their answer, explaining WHY. The students should also suggest possible causes of the event and can share some of the questions they had about the event and how they came to place it in the order they see on the board. Students should also hypothesize which events are related on the timeline.

Questions to ask students to help facilitate discussion:

- When do you think this took place?
- Why is this event important?
- Does this event look like it’s related to/ result of another event on the timeline?

After the class discussion about the events, the students should participate in the same activity, having an opportunity to rearrange the dates based on the class discussion. The students need to work together to reorganize the timeline.

Answer Key (in order):

- May 10, 1838: John Wilkes Booth is born in the state of Maryland, where slavery was legal.
- November 6, 1860: Abraham Lincoln is elected 16th president of the United States.
- December 20, 1860: South Carolina becomes the first state to leave the Union.
- April 12, 1861: Fighting between the states begins when Confederates fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor, South Carolina, when the Union tries to resupply the fort.
- September 22, 1862: Abraham Lincoln announces that unless the Confederate states return to the Union, he will issue an Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, declaring all slaves in “states in rebellion” free.
- January, 1865: Congress passes the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, outlawing slavery in all states.
- March 4, 1865: Lincoln begins his second term as President of the United States and delivers his Second Inaugural Address.
- March 17, 1865: John Wilkes Booth attempts to kidnap President Lincoln on his scheduled trip to the Soldier’s Home, but Lincoln never shows up
- April 9, 1865: Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrenders to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, a symbolic ending of the Civil War
- April 11, 1865: Lincoln gives his last public address on the balcony of the White House where he discusses the possibility of giving African American men the right to vote
- April 14, 1865: Abraham Lincoln arrives at Ford’s Theatre for a production of Our American Cousin
- April 14, 1865: John Wilkes Booth shoots President Lincoln in the back of the head using a derringer pistol
- April 14, 1865: John Wilkes Booth flees to southern Maryland, where his broken leg is set
- April 15, 1865: Abraham Lincoln dies at the Petersen boarding house, across the street from Ford’s Theatre.
- April 26, 1865: John Wilkes Booth is shot by U.S. Army soldier Boston Corbett in a barn in Port Conway, Virginia.
- May 4, 1865: President Abraham Lincoln’s body is buried in Springfield, Illinois.
- December 6, 1865: A majority of states ratify the 13th Amendment, making it part of the U.S. Constitution and ending legal slavery in the United States.

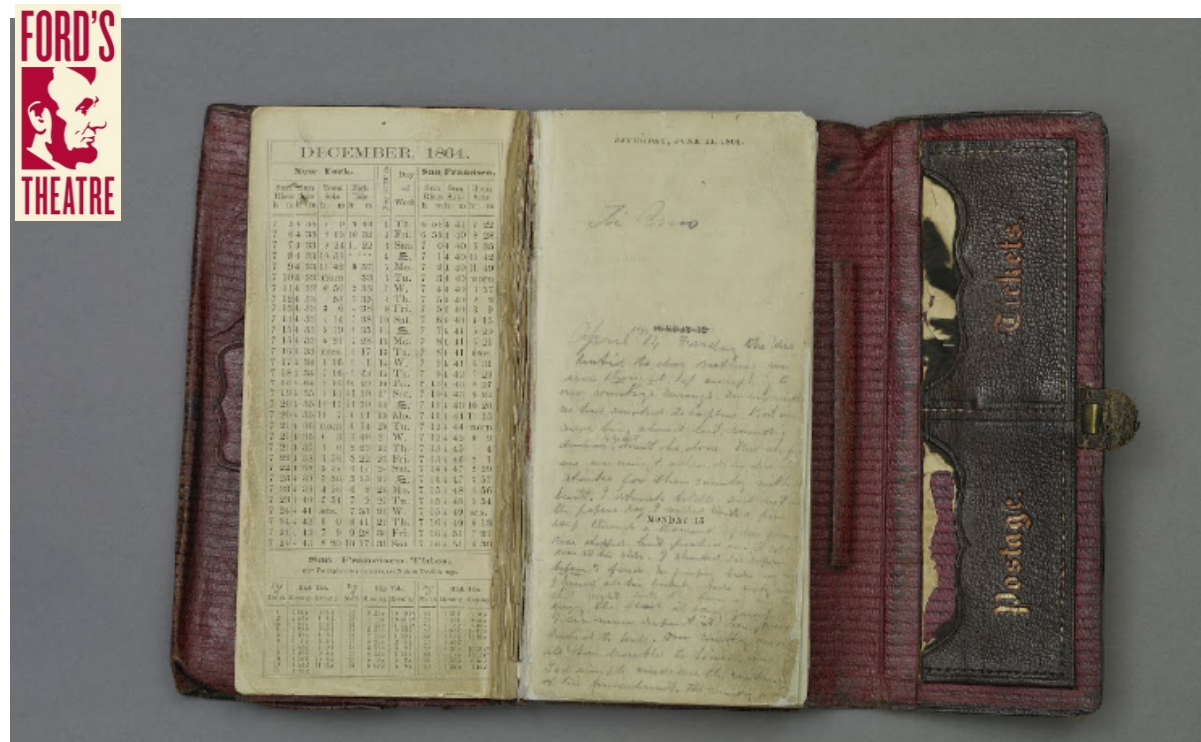
Lesson Activity Two:

Give the students a copy of the handout below, including background information, instructions, image and diary entry. This should be an independent activity:

At the end of Booth's escape, he and his accomplice David Herold were sleeping in a tobacco barn at Richard Garrett's Virginia farmhouse when U.S. Army troops surrounded them. Herold surrendered, but Booth refused. After several hours of negotiations, the soldiers set the barn on fire, hoping to force him out. Against orders, Union soldier Thomas "Boston" Corbett fired a fatal shot into Booth's neck, ending his escape.

The objects found on Booth's body showed the amount of planning he had put into his escape. He had a dagger and revolver for defense and a map and compass to navigate. He also had photographs, "cartes de visite," of his girlfriends. Most importantly, he left behind a diary, which gives us insight into his motives. John Wilkes Booth scribbled his thoughts in this 1864 appointment book while he hid in southern Maryland after killing the president.

Read below what John Wilkes Booth wrote about the assassination and use the S.O.A.P.S.Tone Analysis Guide to help you determine how Booth justified his actions. After you have completed the Analysis Guide, identify and write down 2 to 6 motivations for killing the president you notice Booth mention in the diary.





TEACHER'S COPY – Booth's motivations are highlighted

Transcript from the Diary of John Wilkes Booth

[Ford's Theater NHS, FOTH 3221]

Excerpted Entries for April 17-22, 1865

Until today nothing was ever thought of sacrificing to our country's wrongs. For six months we had worked to capture, but our cause being almost lost, something decisive and great must be done. But its failure was owing to others, who did not strike for their country with a heart. I struck boldly, and not as the papers say. I walked with a firm step through a thousand of his friends, was stopped, but pushed on. A colonel was at his side. I shouted Sic semper before I fired. In jumping broke my leg. I passed all his pickets, rode sixty miles that night with the bone of my leg tearing the flesh at every jump. I can never repent it, though we hated to kill. Our country owed all her troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment. The country is not what it was. This forced Union is not what I have loved. I care not what becomes of me. I have no desire to outlive my country. The night before the deed I wrote a long article and left it for one of the editors of the National Intelligencer, in which I fully set forth our reasons for our proceedings. He or the gov'r—[Sic]

After being hunted like a dog through swamps, woods, and last night being chased by gunboats till I was forced to return wet, cold, and starving, with every man's hand against me, I am here in despair. And why? For doing what Brutus was honored for. What made [William] Tell a hero? And yet I, for striking down a greater tyrant than they ever knew, am looked upon as a common cutthroat. My action was purer than either of theirs. One hoped to be great himself. The other had not only his country's but his own, wrongs to avenge. I hoped for no gain. I knew no private wrong. I struck for my country and that alone. A country that groaned beneath this tyranny, and prayed for this end, and yet now behold the cold hands they extend to me. God cannot pardon me if I have done wrong. Yet I cannot see my wrong, except in serving a degenerate people. The little, the very little, I left behind to clear my name, the Government will not allow to be printed. So ends all. For my country I have given up all that makes life sweet and holy, brought misery upon my family, and am sure there is no pardon in the Heaven for me, since man condemns me so. I have only heard of what has been done (except what I did myself), and it fills me with horror. God, try and forgive me, and bless my mother. Tonight I will once more try the river with the intent to cross. Though I have a greater desire and almost a mind to return to Washington, and in a measure clear my name - which I feel I can do. I do not repent the blow I struck. I may before my God, but not to man. I think I have done well. Though I am abandoned, with the curse of Cain upon me, when, if the world knew my heart, that one blow would have made me great, though I did desire no greatness. Tonight I try to escape these bloodhounds once more. Who, who can read his fate? God's will be done. I have too great a soul to die like a criminal. Oh, may He, may He spare me that, and let me die bravely. I bless the entire world. Have never hated or wronged anyone. This last was not a wrong, unless God deems it so, and it's with Him to damn or bless me. As for this brave boy with me, who often prays (yes, before and since) with a true and sincere heart - was it crime in him? If so, why can he pray the same? I do not wish to shed a drop of blood, but 'I must fight the course.' 'Tis all that's left to me.



Transcript from John Wilkes Booth's Diary

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I do not wish to shed a drop of blood, but 'I must fight the course.' 'Tis all that's left to me.



S.O.A.P.S.Tone Primary Source Tool

S.O.A.P.S.Tone Primary Source Tool		
S	What is the Subject? What are the general topics/ideas?	
O	What is the Occasion? What are the time, place, and setting of the piece?	
A	Who is the Audience? To whom is the piece directed?	
P	What is the Purpose? What is the reason this was written/spoken?	
S	Who is the Speaker? Who is the voice or author?	
Tone	What is the Tone of the piece? What is the attitude or tone of the piece?	

Lesson Activity Three:

Distribute excerpts of these four primary source documents representing a range of public opinions about Abraham Lincoln and his assassination. Full details for each document can be found at <http://RememberingLincoln.Fords.org>.

Students should annotate each document using the Annotation Symbol Guide on page 12. After annotating each document, students then write their own diary entries as if they were hearing about the Lincoln assassination in real time (in 1865) explaining their reactions to the news, based on the documents they have read. Students should first brainstorm using the worksheet on page 13.



Lesson Activity Three: Document #1

Document #1:

Mary Henry. "Mary Henry Diary". *Remembering Lincoln*. Web. Accessed September 4, 2017.
<http://RememberingLincoln.Fords.org/node/551>

Mary Henry, the daughter of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, recorded her thoughts about the death of Lincoln in her diary the day President Lincoln died.

[April] 15th. We were awakened this morning by an announcement which almost made our hearts stand still with consternation. The President was shot last night in the Theater. When the morning paper was issued he was still alive although little or no hopes were entertained of his recovery but now the tolling bells tell us he has ceased to breathe. He is dead. Mr. De Bust has just told Hannah he died at ½ 7 o'clock. Deeply must the country mourn this death for although uncouth & ungainly he was true hearted, magnanimous and kind and in the present crisis ready to follow the [...] such a course with the defeated belligerents [sic] as would win them back to their allegiance to the Government and subdue the rebellion in their hearts as well as subjugate their aims. The South has lost in him a good & judicious friend. His successor Johnson heartily desires the death of the leaders of the rebellion & is in every way ultra in his views. I have not given the particulars of the disaster. It was announced in the yesterday's papers that the President with Gen Grant would be at Ford's Theater in the evening and a large crowd collected there in consequence. Gen Grant however left the city before night for N.Y. Mrs. Lincoln had not been well & the President went to the place of amusement with reluctance, not wishing to disappoint the audience. He was received with more than usual applause. About 9½ o'clock a shot was heard which was at first supposed to be from the stage and a man leaped from the President's box upon the stage crying, "Sic semper Tyrannis" "I have done it." and making his way to the door mounted a horse & rode off. The shrieks of Madame Lincoln first announced to the petrified audience the catastrophe which had taken place. The President was found to be in a state of insensibility, shot twice through the head. He was immediately conveyed to a house opposite the theatre followed by Mrs. L. escorted by her friends in an almost frantic condition.



Lesson Activity Three: Document #2

Document #2:

Cleveland Daily Leader. "'How They Talk.'" October 11, 1865. *Remembering Lincoln*. Web. Accessed September 5, 2017.

<http://RememberingLincoln.Fords.org/node/462>

“Copperhead” was a pejorative term used to describe any citizen in the North who disagreed with the Federal Government’s war policy and advocated negotiating a settlement with the Confederacy to end the war. Copperheads did not advocate for emancipation.

**teacher can censor this word if deemed inappropriate*

The following elegant specimen of Copperhead sentiment and argument is from the La Crosse Democrat, edited by “Brick” Potnerory:

The war is virtually ended.

Where are the will-o-the-wisp statesmen and generals who led the Abolition party through the bloody lanes of tyranny and power, from plunder to corruption?

Where is Lincoln, the patron saint of niggerism*, who owes so much to John Wilkes Booth, and who is well-nigh forgotten already, with hardly a dozen in the land to revere his memory?

Where is Chase? Where is Brough? Where is that crowd of Constitution-breaking, law-despising fungi?

Gone or going into oblivion, leaving a nation in tears, a country in ruins, a once happy people in debt and taxation, a treasury once well filled with coin, empty, and thousands of millions for us to pay. – They have gone to perdition, and their victims are many. They have gone from their field of power.

We deprecate assassination, yet we feel compelled to thank God for calling Abraham Lincoln home, wherever that home may be. The will of God be always done on earth as it is in Heaven. Not all the cannon in the world ever sent an echo so far into the future as did the report of a pistol that fatal night in a Washington theatre, where great men were playing and nations the spectators. It woke up the American people. It broke the spell. It gave the country a statesman for a President. It flashed the *sic semper tyrannis* from Maine to the golden strands of our western boundaries, and halted the advance of usurpation most effectually. – Lincoln has gone. Booth has gone. The nation wept, and yet for what it did not know.

“Democracy” is coming up to our help. Read!

Peering through the bloody vista—rising gradually in lovable sublimity—lifting itself to meet the wish of millions, there once more comes to the nation, Democracy, blessed hope and joyous memories. The people have tired of strange doctrines, and every breeze comes to us laden with glad tidings of a return to the only true principles of government. Democracy still lives. It cannot die, for with it dies the hopes of the nation—the Republic itself. And we shall live to chronicle its restoration to power and to mingle our voice with those who will rejoice, as surely as we have lived to see come and go the men named above and the principles they advocated.”



Lesson Activity Three: Document #3

Document #3:

P.W. Oakley. "P.W. Oakley to Norman Henry Ives". Remembering Lincoln. Web. Accessed September 4, 2017. <http://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/1016>

P.W. Oakley of St. Louis, Missouri, wrote this letter to Norman Henry Ives in Nashville, Tennessee.

April 22, 1865

St. Louis Mo

Friend Ives

Dear Sir,

I just got your note of Apr. 10th. I was glad to receive a line from my brother soldier. It has been a long time since I had a line from you. I am glad that you have got around once more. I can get around very well, but my limb discharges yet. It is very sore. I am haveing [sic] a peace of bone coming out, & I hope when it gets out that it will close up. We aught [sic] to be thankful to god that we came out as well as we did, many a poor man has lost his life since this war began. What a loss we have met with. (Aughful [sic] to think of, when we think of Uncle Abe. & to think that it was a Reb. that took his life. The Rebs. have lost a good friend in the death of our Chief Magistrate, for he has gave the Rebs more lenity than Andy Johnson will. I say when they struck at the heart of Mr. Lincoln they struck at the heart of all loyal men in America, & I hope to god that Andy Johnson will make the head men of the south pull hemp. You are aware how I once felt in regard to this war. But, I say today, kill the last traitor to his country. By the way, Ives, I have got the bigist son of his age in the west. 10 months old and his weight is 40 lbs. Have you seen a bigger one than that? If so, let me know it. My wife is well. And so is my son. Ives, some day you will get your money that I owe you. I shant forget your kindness nor nether shall I forget that I ow you. I would like to see you & if you should come to St Louis, come and see me. Say what you are at in your next.

Yours &c,

P.W. Oakley



Lesson Activity Three: Document #4

Document #4:

E.H. Cushing. "Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph". Tri-Weekly Telegraph.

Remembering Lincoln. Web. Accessed September 5, 2017.

<http://RememberingLincoln.Fords.org/node/1091>

Houston [Texas] Tri-Weekly Telegraph Newspaper, April 26, 1865:

K.H. Cushing. Editor and Proprietor.


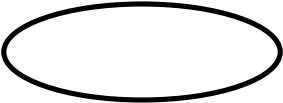




From now until God's judgement day, the minds of men will not cease to thrill at the killing of Abraham Lincoln, by the hand of Booth, the actor, in the theatre at Washington, on the night of April 14th, 1865. It goes upon that high judgement roll for nations and for universal man, with the slaying of Tarquin, of Caesar, of Charles I, of Louis XVI, of Marts. Various, most oppositely will men judge it. Some will regard it with all the horror of the most wicked assassination, others will feel it to be that righteous retribution which descends direct from the hand of God upon the destroyer of human liberty, and the oppressor of a free people. Ours should not have been the hand for the deed. Nor does our conscience yield approval to it. But whilst we often condemn the human instrumentality, the death it inflicts is recognized to be a doom of that awful Nemesis which avenges wrong in dark and cruel fate. Mr. Lincoln was, it is true, the lawful head of the government of the United States. It may be that his own sense of right has gone along with all his acts in that high place. He has impressed us as natively a kindly, genial man. We do not suppose a love of oppression, or tendency to wrong, any part of his original disposition. We believe he thought at the beginning, that the great movement of the Southern people for self-government was a mere passionate outbreak, caused by designing leaders, and that the hearts of the great mass of the people would soon return to the Union. In good faith, he thought "nobody hurt," and very few likely to be hurt. He thought that the "fire-eaters" who had been warning and threatening in words so long at Washington, had even carried secession to the extent of a practical joke...

He may have felt pity, but no remorse; and to fasten despotism upon a people free as himself, entitled to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness like himself, he would have stood unmoved and inflexible and with no eye turned to heaven, would have seen the swept from the earth and only the land remaining, and felt himself a great Republican President, and one of the world's heroes...Doubtless if the South had bowed a submissive knee and kissed the rod of its masters, Mr. Lincoln's good human would have largely returned. Conquered and loyal, behaving ourselves quietly, bending meekly to the burdens put upon our backs, and drawing smoothly under the yoke fastened upon our necks, Mr. Lincoln would have imagined himself friendly and patronizing toward us...He was the instrument of the North to effect upon us and our children this destructive, ruinous object...

From 1787 to 1861 no guard had a President of the United States. He was the chosen officer of a free people, with no more concern for his personal security than that of the humblest individual in the land. If the reign of despotism is again to be re-inaugurated at this day and over this people, then let despotism and whoever may be its minions beware the deserved fate of tyrants.



Annotation Symbol Guide

Annotation Symbol Guide	
Symbol	Concept
	This is an important detail
	This is an emotion or opinion
	This is a fact
	I have a question about this
	This reminds me of something else
	This confirms something I already thought



Writing About the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

Before writing your letter, answer these questions to help you develop your argument:

1. From what point of view do I write this letter? (How old? A boy or a girl? In what state do I live?)

2. Did anyone in “my” family fight in the war? On the Union or the Confederate side?

3. How will “my” life change because of the assassination?

4. To whom am I writing? What do I want to tell them?

Lincoln Assassination History Assessment Rubric				
	4	3	2	1
Understanding Cause and Effect	Student actively participates in the timeline activity, knows where their event should be in relation to others and leads the group in organizing the other event as a whole	Student actively participates in the timeline activity, may not know where their event belongs but course corrects in the second part of the activity	Student struggles to find their place in the timeline but asks for help and looks for clues with other events	Student does attempt to participate and has someone else place them in the right position
Author's Motivations	Student uses at least four examples of evidence in JWB's diary to illustrate his motivations	Student highlights 2-4 of JWB's motivations but doesn't make clear connection with evidence	Student highlights 1-2 possible motivations for JWB but only does not use the primary source as evidence	Student is unable to articulate any motivations for JWB
Recognizing and Assessing Different Points of View	Student creates multiple annotations for each primary source document and writes a well-constructed letter applying 2-4 arguments found in the readings	Student creates annotations for each primary source document and writes a well-constructed letter applying 1-2 arguments found in the readings	Student creates minimal annotations for the primary sources and does not create a convincing argument in the letter	Student does not annotate the primary sources and writes a unrelated letter that does not apply any examples from the texts
Total Points: /12	Comments, Suggestions, and Questions:			

**John Wilkes Booth
is born in the slave state
of Maryland, where
slavery was legal**

Abraham Lincoln is elected 16th president of the United States

South Carolina becomes the 1st state to leave the Union

The Civil War begins when Southerners fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina

**Lincoln begins his second term as
President of the United States
and delivers his Second
Inaugural Address, “to bind up
the nation’s wounds”**

**John Wilkes Booth attempts
to kidnap President Lincoln on
his scheduled trip to the
Soldier's Home, but Lincoln
never shows up**

**Confederate General
Robert E. Lee surrenders to Union
General Ulysses S. Grant at
Appomattox Courthouse, a
symbolic ending of the Civil War**

Lincoln gives his last public address on the balcony of the White House where he discusses the possibility of giving African American men the right to vote

Abraham Lincoln arrives at Ford's Theatre for a production of *Our American Cousin*

**John Wilkes Booth shoots
President Lincoln in the
back of the head using a
derringer pistol**

John Wilkes Booth escapes to Southern Maryland

Abraham Lincoln dies at the Petersen House, across the street from Ford's Theatre

**John Wilkes Booth is
shot by Union Army
soldier Boston Corbett in
a barn in
Port Conway, Virginia**

President Abraham Lincoln's body is buried in Springfield, Illinois