

# Abraham Lincoln

## *Holding the Nation Together*

by Meish Goldish

**Characters** (in order of appearance):

NARRATOR

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

NEWSPAPER REPORTERS 1-3

MARY TODD LINCOLN

OFFICER

CIVIL WAR WIDOWS 1-4

GENERAL GEORGE MEADE: A commander  
of the Union Army

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## **ACT 1**

**SCENE:** 1861. The White House. President Abraham Lincoln is answering reporters' questions.

**NARRATOR:** In 1861, when Abraham Lincoln took office as President of the United States, the country was sharply divided over the issue of slavery. Many Southern leaders were afraid that President Lincoln would end slavery. Eleven Southern states seceded—or withdrew—from the Union. This action led to the start of the Civil War.

**REPORTER 1:** Mr. Lincoln, do you intend to outlaw slavery now that you're President?

**LINCOLN:** I believe slavery is wrong. It goes against the ideas of democracy. I do not intend, however, to interfere with slavery in those states where the Constitution protects it.

**REPORTER 2:** If you don't wish to interfere, sir, then why go to war?

**LINCOLN:** As I've said in the past, this war is not really about slavery. It's about saving the Union. We're fighting to keep ourselves together as one nation, instead of breaking into two separate groups. I believe a house divided against itself cannot stand.

**REPORTER 3:** But Mr. President, nearly half of America is in favor of the United States becoming two separate nations. Why are you against it?

**LINCOLN:** We are a democracy. If democracy can be destroyed by a minority, then the whole idea of self-government is a failure. Suppose we do not remain one united nation. Imagine what the leaders in other countries will say. They'll say democracy doesn't work. They'll say people aren't capable of ruling themselves, that someone else must rule over them. Democracy works. We must prove that it does. To do that, we must remain united.

## **ACT 2**

**SCENE:** 1862. The White House. Lincoln and his wife Mary Todd Lincoln discuss the possibility of freedom for slaves.

**NARRATOR:** By the fall of 1862, the Civil War had expanded. Thousands of soldiers on both sides had died in battle. As the war continued, so did the fight over slavery. In the North, 200,000 black Americans served the Union as laborers, nurses, scouts, and spies. They rarely received the same amount of pay or the equipment as white people did. In the South, black people remained in slavery. Although Lincoln hadn't wanted to interfere with slavery in the Southern states, where it was legal, he was beginning to change his mind.



(Lincoln is pacing back and forth. Mary is sitting on a chair.)

**MARY:** Abraham, do sit down. Tell me what's on your mind.

**LINCOLN** (sitting): I'm troubled by all the suffering I see. I see the wounded in the hospitals. I see the women who have lost husbands and sons, I see the youth of our country being cut down in their prime. And the battle continues, with no end in sight.

**MARY:** I know. I want my four brothers home. I don't want to think of them on a battlefield somewhere. No one wants the fighting to end more than you or I, but slavery's not about to disappear.

**LINCOLN:** That's why I must change my tactics now.

**MARY:** What do you mean?

**LINCOLN:** It means the slaves must be set free. Slavery must finally be outlawed in the South. It's the only way to reunite the country.

**MARY:** Tolerating slavery where it already exists is one thing. Outlawing it is another. It will make you even more unpopular in the South than you already are.

**LINCOLN:** Mary, listen to me. The Declaration of Independence promised freedom and equality for all Americans—all Americans. Right now, negroes don't enjoy that equality. They're not allowed to be citizens. That's wrong, Mary. It's wrong.

**MARY:** I worry enough as it is about your safety. Do you realize what a dangerous step this is for you to take?

**LINCOLN:** I know it's dangerous, Mary, but I cannot be a strong leader if I'm a coward in my personal convictions.

## **ACT 3**

**SCENE:** 1862. Lincoln is at his desk in the Oval Office.

(An officer knocks and then enters the office.)

**OFFICER:** Excuse me, Mister President, but a group of war widows asks if you might see them now.

**LINCOLN:** Yes, of course. Send them in.

(Four women enter the room.)

**LINCOLN:** Please, ladies, sit down. (They all sit.) I am very sorry for your losses.

**WIDOW 1:** Nothing can be done to bring them back. We do beg you, please, Mr.



President, to call an end to the fighting immediately, so no one else has to suffer as we do.

**LINCOLN:** My heart goes out to you, and to all the other widows and mothers who suffer.

**WIDOW 2:** Then why can't you simply declare an end to the conflict?

**LINCOLN:** You have suffered terrible losses. I ask you to consider what the slaves in the South are suffering. They are living without freedom, without rights. Their suffering has lasted for generations. As long as slavery remains legal, they will continue to suffer for generations more. That is not democracy.

**WIDOW 3:** But why did my husband have to die for that?

**WIDOW 4:** The war has lasted for over a year. How many more men must die? You must do something, sir!

**LINCOLN:** I intend to. I don't know that it is what you wish me to do, but it must be done. I now feel that this war will not end until slavery is abolished entirely. The slaves must be emancipated.

**NARRATOR:** Abraham Lincoln was true to his word. On January 1, 1863, he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. It stated that slaves in states rebelling against the Union were now free. Unfortunately, Lincoln's declaration did not end the Civil War. The Southern states ignored the order, and the fighting continued. The Proclamation, however, did send a signal to all Americans that the country was headed in a new direction.

## **ACT 4**

\*\*\*\*\* **SCENE:** November 19, 1863. Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.


**Lincoln and General Meade are sitting on an outdoor stage. Meade is at the podium.**

**NARRATOR:** In July, 1863, the Union army, led by General George Meade, won a large and important battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. More than 40,000 soldiers were killed and wounded in the fighting. A few months later, it was decided that part of the battlefield would be set aside as a cemetery for those who died there. Lincoln attended the dedication ceremony to deliver perhaps his most famous speech ever—the Gettysburg Address.

**GENERAL MEADE:** Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States.

(There is applause.)

**LINCOLN:** *Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created*



*equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they, who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*

**NARRATOR:** Lincoln's speech lasted only three minutes. Some people say that the Gettysburg Address helped turn the tide of the Civil War. For although the fighting continued for another year and a half, Lincoln's words gave the Union the inspiration that it needed to finally achieve victory. As Mary Lincoln had feared, her husband's life did end in tragedy. Lincoln's dreams did not die with him. The Emancipation Proclamation was the start of a long struggle for civil rights and equality for all Americans.