

Lincoln and the Jews

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Module contains:

- Lesson plan which includes 6-8 identified Shapell Manuscript Foundation resources.
- Teaching strategies including differentiation for diverse learners.
- Ideas for assessment.
- National history standards met by teaching modules.
- Sample Document-Based Question (DBQ).
- Bibliography and supplementary readings.

Introduction

Throughout its history, the United States has been home to individuals of varied religious backgrounds, but acceptance and tolerance toward different religions has waxed and waned. The Civil War era was no different. In the 1850s, nativism was fueled by prejudice against Irish Catholics immigrating to the United States. Antisemitic views were also common and Jewish Americans were frequently scapegoated during the war, especially when controversies arose around illegal smuggling and the black market. At the same time, some Americans put forward a vision of religious tolerance and advocated for religious pluralism (the idea that the nation benefited from a diversity of religions). Abraham Lincoln was one who embraced this notion of religious pluralism. In this module, teachers will be introduced to learning activities that allow students to explore Lincoln's words and actions related to religious tolerance and learn more about this important dynamic in U.S. history.

Lesson Length: One 90-minute period or two 45-minute periods

Level: 11th grade U.S. History

Compelling Question: What were Abraham Lincoln's attitudes toward religious minorities such as Jews and Catholics and how did it differ from others at the time?

Description: Students will work in groups to plan a temporary exhibit intended for visitors to a historic site or museum related to Abraham Lincoln. The exhibit will concern Abraham Lincoln's attitude toward religious minorities. Students will analyze primary sources and select three they would like to include in their exhibit. From analyzing their sources, students will develop a "thesis" or argument that the exhibit will convey to their audience.

Materials needed:

- Primary sources (below)
- [Primary source analysis sheets](#): (one per student)
- Large poster board (alternatively, exhibit can be taped to the wall or whiteboard)

- Alternative: the assignment could take the form of a digital exhibit or digital story. Students can use websites like Padlet or Google Slides to create a digital exhibit. They may also take video of their sources and provide voiceover readings of their captions in a digital story or documentary.
- OPTIONAL: [Gettysburg Address](#)

Activities:

1. Bell ringer: Students examine source [Abraham Lincoln letter to Joshua Speed, August 24, 1855](#)
 - In particular students should read and analyze this passage: "I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except negroes" When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and Catholics." When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty -- to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy [sic]."
 - Teacher models primary source analysis and fills out [sheet](#) with class. When done, the teacher informs the class that Abraham Jonas was a close friend of Lincoln's and was Jewish.
 - Students may need to review or clarification on some of the terms Lincoln uses:
 - i. Know Nothing - A political party that existed in the United States in the 1850s. Know Nothings were against immigration in general and in particular opposed to Catholic immigrants from Ireland. They were called Know Nothings because they began as a secret society whose members weren't allowed to talk about their activities.
 - ii. Despotism - A form of government based on absolute power. This kind of government tends to take away freedoms, such as religious freedom.
2. Teacher informs the class that they will be planning exhibits for an Abraham Lincoln historic site. The exhibit will be about Lincoln's attitudes toward religious minorities, such as Jews and Catholics. To begin, students should think about what they know about attitudes at the time toward these groups. They may recall (or be introduced to) the Know Nothing party or the concept of nativism (anti-immigration). They may also recall that the population of the United States at the time was mostly Protestant.
3. Analyzing the sources
 - Group students into groups of three.
 - Give each group a selection of below sources either printed out or via links if students have access to a tablet or laptop. Tell students that these sources will help answer supporting questions such as:
 - What relationships did Abraham Lincoln have with Jewish individuals?

- What kinds of discrimination did Jewish and Catholic Americans face at the time of Civil War?
 - What actions did President Lincoln take with regard to Jewish-Americans?
 - OPTIONAL: How did Lincoln's treatment of Jewish-Americans relate to his beliefs on equality as expressed in the Gettysburg Address?
 - Formative assessment: Each student completes a [Primary source analysis sheets](#) on one source. Students may help each other but each student should complete a sheet. These sources will be used to create the exhibit.
4. Creating the exhibit:
- Each student takes turns sharing the source they analyzed in Step 3 with their group, summarizing what the source is and why it's important.
 - Students then write captions for their source to appear on their exhibit. The caption should both describe the source and explain why it's important in under 50 words. Students should choose their words carefully and read each other's captions to offer suggestions. A good caption will be accurate, clear, and explain why a source is important.
 - Students can then plan out their exhibit, which should include a title and a sub title that introduces their topic. Think both about how your design might draw visitors to your exhibit and how to arrange your sources and title to best communicate your thesis.
 - Students present their exhibits to the class or do a gallery walk.
 - OPTIONAL: The class can read the Gettysburg Address as a class and discuss how Abraham Lincoln's treatment of Jewish Americans relates to his views on equality as expressed in the speech. Students can think about what quote or line from the speech might make a good addition to their exhibits.

Ideas for differentiation:

- Students can be grouped according to ability with higher performers in groups with middle and lower performers.
- For ESL students or students with disabilities who may need language supports, teachers can use templates for writing captions.
- Students who need language supports may also require letters be read out loud by teachers or classroom assistants as appropriate. Teachers may decide to read excerpts rather than the entire letter.

Sources:

- [Abraham Lincoln letter to Joshua Speed, August 24, 1855](#)
- Lincoln and the Jewish experience during the Civil War:
 - <https://www.shapell.org/historical-perspectives/exhibitions/firmness-right-lincoln-jews/>
 - <https://www.shapell.org/historical-perspectives/exhibitions/passages-through-the-fire-jews-and-the-civil-war/>

- Lincoln's direct involvement in appointing specifically Jewish officers:
 - <https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/abraham-lincoln-appointment-jewish-sutler-henry-rice/>
 - <https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/lincoln-appoints-jewish-west-point-alfred-mordecai-jr/>
 - <https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/abraham-lincoln-appointed-a-hebrew-jewish-appointment/>
 - <https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/lincoln-gideon-welles-request-from-jewish-congressman-leonard-myers>
- Lincoln's words in his Second Inaugural Address:
 - Excerpt: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes."
 - Hand-written Second Inaugural Address sources:
 - <https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/abraham-lincoln-with-malice-toward-none-second-inaugural-aqs/>
 - <https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/abraham-lincoln-second-inaugural-address/>
- Context of anti-semitism:
 - General Benjamin Butler: The Jews "Betrayed Their Savior & Also Have Betrayed Us," October 23, 1862
<https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/antisemitic-civil-war-general-benjamin-butler-jews-betrayed-savior/>
 - William Tecumseh Sherman Vents Anti-Semitic Prejudices, Discusses Runaway Slaves, & Sketches Total War, November 2, 1862
<https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/william-tecumseh-sherman-antisemitism-runaway-slaves-total-war/>
 - American Civil War Union General George B. McClellan's Antisemitic Letter, August, 1875
<https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/anti-semetic-civil-war-union-general-george-mcclellan/>
 - Ulysses S. Grant Tries to Lose the Anti-Semite Label Engendered to Him by His Infamous "Jew Order," August 14, 1868
<https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/ulysses-grant-antisemite-labelcivil-war-jew-order-no-11/>

Assessment (option 1 of 2):

Areas for Improvement	<i>Criteria</i> Standards for This Performance	Evidence of Exceeding Expectations
	Writing in captions clearly described source and why source is important	
	Writing in captions was 50 words or fewer	
	Appearance and layout of exhibit work to communicate the thesis.	

Assessment (option 2 of 2):

	3 - 4 points	1 - 2 points	0 points
Source Analysis	Writing in captions clearly describes source and why source is important.	Writing in captions describes source and why source is important, but sometimes lacks clarity/precision.	Writing in captions does not clearly describe source and/or why source is important.
	2 points	1 points	0 points
Caption length	Writing in captions is between 35 and 50 words.	Writing in captions is less than 35 or more than 50 words.	Captions are not present for some/all sources.
Exhibit Design	The appearance of the exhibit was neat and easy to understand.	The appearance of the exhibit was somewhat neat and understandable.	The appearance of the exhibit was not neat and/or it was difficult to understand.
Title	The exhibit's title and subtitle expressed its theme clearly.	The exhibit's title and subtitle were relevant to its theme.	The exhibit's title and subtitle did not express its theme.

TOTAL: ____ 10

Applicable standards:

The lesson follows The Inquiry Design Model (IDM) which is defined as “a distinctive approach to creating curriculum and instructional materials that honors teachers’ knowledge and expertise, avoids overprescription, and focuses on the main elements of the instructional design process as envisioned in the Inquiry Arc of the [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework for Social Studies State Standards](#) (2013)”

Also aligns with typical state level content standards:

- California (8th grade)
 - 8.10 Students analyze the multiple causes, key events, and complex consequences of the Civil War.
 - 4. Discuss Abraham Lincoln’s presidency and his significant writings and speeches and their relationship to the Declaration of Independence, such as his “House Divided” speech (1858), Gettysburg Address (1863), Emancipation Proclamation (1863), and inaugural addresses (1861 and 1865).
- Virginia (11th grade)
 - STANDARD VUS.7b: The student will apply social science skills to understand the Civil War and Reconstruction eras and their significance as major turning points in American history by b) evaluating and explaining the significance and development of Abraham Lincoln’s leadership and political statements, including the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the principles outlined in the Gettysburg Address.

Possible Document-Based Question:

This question is based on the accompanying documents. Analyze Abraham Lincoln's views on equality and race compared to others who lived at the same time.

Sources:

- General Benjamin Butler: The Jews "Betrayed Their Savior & Also Have Betrayed Us," October 23, 1862
<https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/antisemitic-civil-war-general-benjamin-butler-jews-be-trayed-savior/>
- William Tecumseh Sherman Vents Anti-Semitic Prejudices, Discusses Runaway Slaves, & Sketches Total War, November 2, 1862
<https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/william-tecumseh-sherman-antisemitism-runaway-slaves-total-war/>
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<https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/anti-semetic-civil-war-union-general-george-mcclellan/>
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<https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/ulysses-grant-antisemite-labelcivil-war-jew-orde-no-11/>
- Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address:
 - Excerpt: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes."
- [Abraham Lincoln letter to Joshua Speed, August 24, 1855](#)
 - Excerpt: "I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except negroes" When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and Catholics." When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty -- to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy [sic]."

Bibliography and supplemental readings:

Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (2011)

Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (2006)

Jonathan D. Sarna and Benjamin Shapell, *Lincoln and the Jews: A History* (2015)