

Abraham Lincoln Structured Academic Controversy

Central Historical Question:
Was Lincoln a racist?

Materials:

- SAC PowerPoint (if it's students' first SAC)
- Copies of Lincoln Documents A-D
- Copies of Lincoln Guiding Questions
- Copies of SAC Graphic Organizer

Plan of Instruction:

Note: This activity works best if students have an opportunity to read the documents and answer the Guiding Questions **before** starting the SAC.

1. If this is your students' first SAC, introduce SAC as a new activity. Show PowerPoint slides. Ask students if they have any questions about the structure.
2. Divide students into groups of 4, and then divide each group of 4 into Team A and Team B.
 - Team A will argue Lincoln was a racist. Team B will argue Lincoln was not a racist.
 - Teams use Graphic Organizer to collect data for their side.

Note: If students haven't answered Guiding Questions in advance, they should do so before beginning to collect evidence for their argument.

3. Team A presents to Team B, and Team B repeats arguments back to Team A, until Team A is satisfied.
4. Team B presents to Team A, and Team A repeats arguments back to Team B, until Team B is satisfied.
5. Teams try to reach consensus.
6. Share out groups' consensus. Discuss:
 - *Was Lincoln a racist?*
 - *Is it appropriate to use the word "racist" when discussing events in the 1860s?*
 - *Can we judge people in the past by our standards?*

Citations

Document A

Stephen A. Douglas, argument in the first Lincoln-Douglas debate at Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858. Retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/liho/historyculture/debate1.htm>.

Document B

Abraham Lincoln, reply to Stephen A. Douglas at Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858. Retrieved from <http://www.nps.gov/liho/historyculture/debate1.htm>.

Document C

Abraham Lincoln, letter to Mary Speed, September 27, 1841. Retrieved from <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.617:1.lincoln>

Document D

John Bell Robinson. (1863). *Pictures of Slavery and Anti-Slavery: Advantages of Negro Slavery and the Benefits of Negro Freedom Morally, Socially, and Politically Considered*. Pennsylvania. p. 42.

Acknowledgments

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Document A: Douglas's Speech (Modified)

In 1858, Abraham Lincoln ran against Stephen A. Douglas for a seat in the U.S. Senate. The two engaged in a series of seven public debates, which attracted national attention. Although Lincoln lost the election, he became widely known for his views on slavery. This is part of Douglas's speech in their first debate at Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858.

If you desire Negro citizenship, if you desire to allow them to come into the State and settle with the White man, if you desire them to vote on an equality with yourselves, and to make them eligible to office, to serve on juries, and to judge your rights, then support Mr. Lincoln and the Black Republican party, who are in favor of the citizenship of the Negro. For one, I am opposed to Negro citizenship in any and every form. I believe this government was made . . . by White men, for the benefit of White men and their **posterity** forever. . . .

Mr. Lincoln believes that the Negro was born his equal and yours, and that he was endowed with equality by the Almighty, and that no human law can deprive him of these rights.

Source: *First Debate: Ottawa, Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas, 1858.*

Vocabulary

posterity: future generations

Document B: Lincoln's Reply (Modified)

I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together in perfect equality, and. . . I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong, having the superior position. I have never said anything to the contrary, but there is no reason in the world why the Negro is not entitled to all the natural rights in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I hold that he is as much **entitled** to these as the White man. I agree that the Negro is not my equal in many respects—certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual **endowment**. But in the right to eat the bread . . . which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of every living man.

Source: *Abraham Lincoln's reply to Stephen A. Douglas at Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858.*

Vocabulary

entitled: to have a right

endowment: ability

Document C: Lincoln's Letter (Modified)

Today, on board a boat, I saw a gentleman who had purchased twelve Negroes in different parts of Kentucky and was taking them to a farm in the South. They were chained six and six together. A small iron chain was around the left wrist of each so that the Negroes were strung together precisely like so many fish upon a trot-line. In this condition they were being separated forever from the scenes of their childhood, their friends, their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, and many of them, from their wives and children, and going into perpetual slavery, . . . yet amid all these distressing circumstances . . . they were the most cheerful and apparently happy creatures on board. One, whose offense for which he had been sold was over-fondness for his wife, played the fiddle almost continually; and the others danced, sung, cracked jokes, and played various games with cards from day to day. How true it is that “God **renders** the worst of human conditions tolerable. . .”

Source: *Abraham Lincoln, letter to Mary Speed, a personal friend, September 27, 1841.*

Vocabulary

renders: makes

Document D: Pro-Slavery Book (Modified)

John Bell Robinson, a White pro-slavery spokesperson, wrote the book Pictures of Slavery and Anti-Slavery: Advantages of Negro Slavery and the Benefits of Negro Freedom Morally, Socially, and Politically Considered in Pennsylvania in 1863.

God himself has made them for usefulness as slaves, and requires us to employ them as such, and if we betray our trust, and throw them off on their own resources, we reconvert them into barbarians.

Our Heavenly Father has made us to *rule*, and the Negroes to serve, and if we . . . set aside his holy arrangements . . . and **tamper** with his laws, we shall be overthrown and eternally **degraded**, and perhaps made subjects of some other civilized nation. . . . If they could all be colonized on the coast of Africa, they would fall back into **heathenism** and **barbarism** in less than fifty years.

Source: Pictures of Slavery and Anti-Slavery: Advantages of Negro Slavery and the Benefits of Negro Freedom Morally, Socially, and Politically Considered *by John Bell Robinson, 1863.*

Vocabulary

tamper: interfere

degraded: disrespected

heathenism: not belonging to a widely held religion

barbarism: not having culture or civilization

Name _____

Document A:

1. (*Close reading*) What are two things that Douglas warns will happen if Lincoln is elected?

2. (*Close reading*) Based on this document, what do you think Douglas's views were on African Americans?

Document B:

1. (*Contextualization*) Try to picture an outdoor debate in 1858. These debates lasted 3 hours (!) with each candidate speaking non-stop for at least an hour. Do you completely trust what either candidate will say in this setting? Why or why not?

2. (*Close reading*) Carefully read Lincoln's response to Douglas. On what points is Lincoln willing to agree with Douglas? On what points does he differ from Douglas?

Document C:

1. (*Sourcing*) This document is a personal letter from Lincoln to a friend. Does that make you trust the document? Why or why not?

2. (*Close reading*) What amazes Lincoln about the scene he sees on the boat?

Document D:

1. (*Corroboration*) How do Lincoln's views on slavery compare with John Bell Robinson's?

Structured Academic Controversy: Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, making abolition a Union goal of the Civil War. *Your job is to determine whether you think he was racist.*

During today's class, you will work in teams to discuss arguments convicting and defending Abraham Lincoln. Your goals for today should include looking at all the issues, seeing both sides, and finding common ground.

SAC QUESTION: Was Abraham Lincoln racist?

Team A will argue: YES, Abraham Lincoln was racist.

Team B will argue: NO, Abraham Lincoln was not racist.

PROCEDURE

30 minutes With your teammate, read the documents in the Lincoln document set. Find four pieces of evidence that support your side.

10 minutes Team A presents. BOTH PARTNERS MUST PRESENT!!!
Team B writes down Team A's arguments and then repeats them back to Team A.

10 minutes Team B presents. BOTH PARTNERS MUST PRESENT!!!
Team A down arguments of Team B and then repeats them back to Team B.

10 minutes Everyone **CAN ABANDON** their positions. Groups of 4 attempt to develop a consensus.

ORGANIZING THE EVIDENCE

Name _____

Use this space to write your main points and the main points made by the other side.

Abraham Lincoln was racist: List the 4 main points/evidence that support this side.

1) From Document _____:

2) From Document _____:

3) From Document _____:

4) From Document _____:

Abraham Lincoln was not racist: List the 4 main points/evidence that support this side.

1) From Document _____:

2) From Document _____:

3) From Document _____:

4) From Document _____:

Coming to Consensus

STARTING NOW, YOU MAY ABANDON YOUR ASSIGNED POSITION AND ARGUE FOR EITHER SIDE.

Use the space below to outline your group's agreement. Your agreement should address evidence and arguments from both sides.