

*Stealing Lincoln's Body* tells a fascinating and little-known story about Abraham Lincoln, the nation's 16th president and the subject of countless biographies and documentaries. In 1876, eleven years after Lincoln's assassination, a band of Chicago counterfeiters hatched a plot to steal his body and hold it for ransom (they wanted \$200,000 and the release of the gang's master engraver, who was in prison in Illinois). The Secret Service had recently been formed in part to deal with the country's ballooning counterfeiting problem and quickly infiltrated the gang with an informer. The grave robbers entered Lincoln's mortuary, broke open his marble sarcophagus, and pulled out Lincoln's lead-lined coffin... The rest of the story develops with unexpected turns in this two-hour special presentation. Based on the book of the same title by author Thomas Craughwell, *Stealing Lincoln's Body* offers a unique window into Lincoln's shocking assassination and its aftermath.

This program focuses on the plot to seize Lincoln's coffin, yet it reveals many insights into the broader issues and changes at stake. The birth of counterfeiting, the science of embalming, and the struggle to determine where the iconic leader should be laid to rest are some of the major topics explored as the plot unfolds. *Stealing Lincoln's Body*, most importantly, highlights how even beyond death Abraham Lincoln continued to cast an amazing influence over American life. Rarely seen archival photographs and images, restored and presented using the latest 3D technology, offer a new level of historical detail. These images, together with the commentary of key historians and experts, shed light on the ways Lincoln's death was experienced by those who lived through that dramatic era. This program offers educators and their students a unique perspective on the broad consequences of Lincoln's death, and the transformations that shaped the post-Civil War era.

### Curriculum links

*Stealing Lincoln's Body* would be useful for American History, Politics, American Studies and Journalism courses. It would also fit well with course units connected to the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial commemorations in 2009. **This program contains some sensitive content involving Lincoln's death and burial which may be shocking to some students. We recommend that teachers view the program before showing it in their classrooms. It is appropriate for high school students.** It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: (1) Conflict and cooperation; and (2) Patterns of social and political interaction.

### Vocabulary

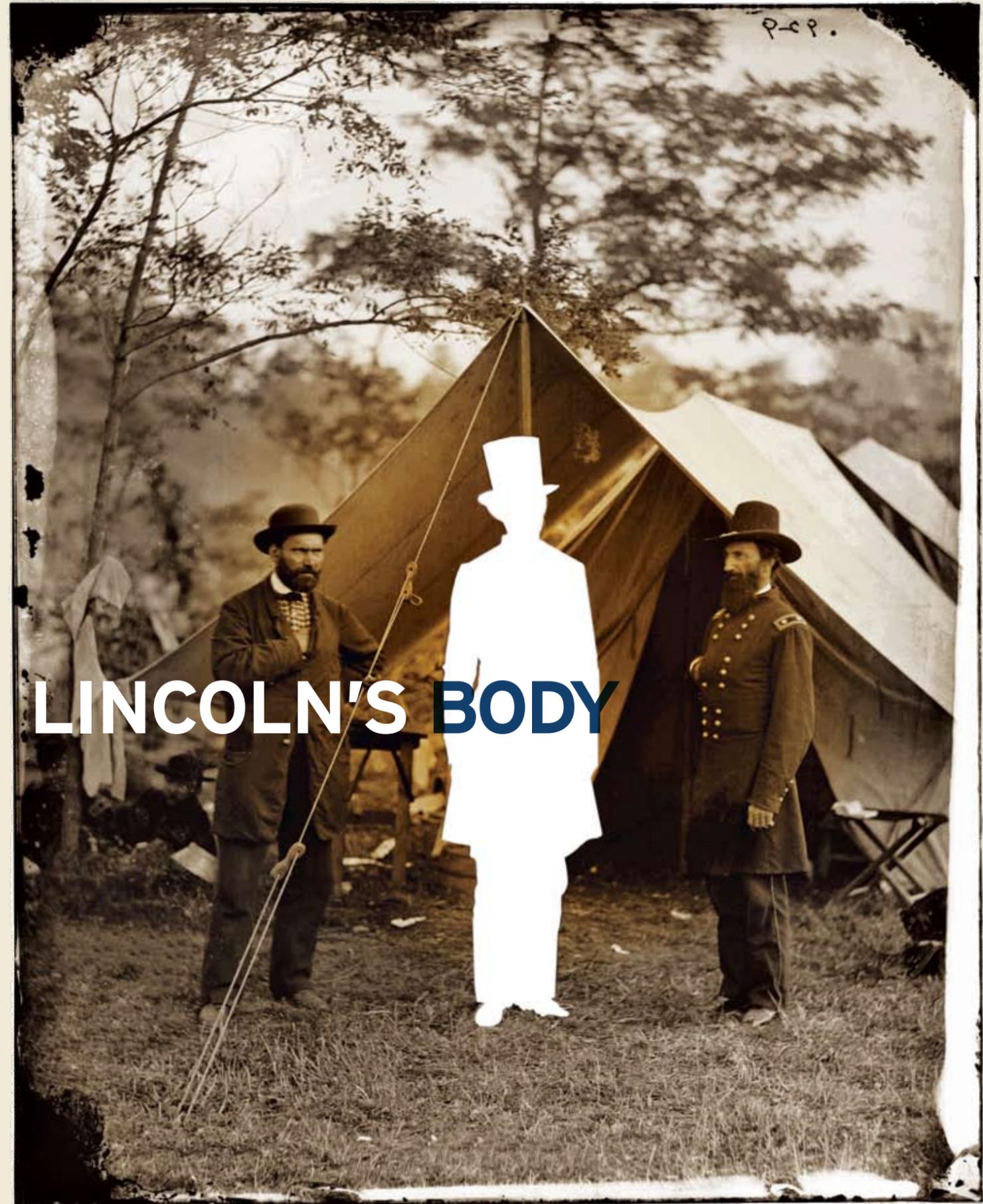
Using the dictionary at [www.merriamwebster.com](http://www.merriamwebster.com), an Internet resource such as [www.History.com](http://www.History.com), or an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

<b>accessory</b>	<b>counterfeit</b>	<b>infiltrator</b>	<b>novice</b>
<b>affidavit</b>	<b>fraternal organization</b>	<b>larceny</b>	<b>sarcophagus</b>
<b>conspiracy</b>	<b>"greenback"</b>	<b>lucre</b>	<b>stone mason</b>

# STEALING

### Discussion questions

1. What are three adjectives you would use to describe the way Americans reacted to Lincoln's assassination?
2. Do you think any other American leaders were mourned as deeply as Abraham Lincoln? Discuss.
3. What was the significance of Lincoln's "funeral train?" Could you imagine this kind of event taking place today?
4. Why do you think Mary Todd Lincoln was so determined to have her husband buried in Illinois? Do you agree with the decision that he be buried in Springfield, Illinois?
5. What is counterfeiting? Why do you think counterfeiting became so widespread during the late 19th century?
6. Do you think the plot to steal Lincoln's body could have been successful? What do you think the consequences would have been if Lincoln's body had been captured?
7. What were some of the reasons Lincoln's burial place lacked significant security? Why do you think it took so long for this to change?



8. Do you think John Power did the right thing by moving Lincoln's coffin? What do you think were the risks of moving the coffin, and what were some of the potential risks if he did not?
9. What was the Lincoln Guard of Honor, and what was the mission of this group?
10. When was Lincoln's coffin finally buried in a secure place? What measures were taken to make sure it was safe from thieves?
11. The plot to steal Lincoln's coffin is not well known by most Americans. Why do you think this is the case? Do you think more people should hear this story?

## Extended activities

*Note: The Library of Congress has written excellent lesson plans using primary sources that can also be used in course lectures and units on Lincoln. See page 18 to explore those lessons.*

1. As this documentary shows, Abraham Lincoln's funeral procession was an event of national mourning. Public viewings and funeral ceremonies took place in ten cities along the route from Washington, DC, while small towns along the journey were draped in black with signs proclaiming their feelings of loss. Imagine you were a reporter in one of the cities or towns along this route. Students should write a short article describing the scene, the meaning of the procession, and the overall significance of Lincoln's death for that community.
2. The decision over where Lincoln should be buried became a significant debate between his family members and national leaders. Lincoln's family insisted that he be buried in Illinois, where he rose through the political ranks. U.S. leaders, however, felt Lincoln should be buried in the nation's capital, Washington, DC. In a newspaper op-ed piece or short essay, make your own argument for where you think Lincoln should be laid to rest and why. Be sure to make your arguments plausible based on the historical context in which Lincoln lived.
3. This documentary examines the rise of counterfeiting. The Legal Tender Act of 1862 had established a new national paper currency, giving the federal government the new challenge of tracking down people who made fake bills. These new dollar bills were known as "greenbacks" and like today, they came in a variety of values. In small groups, ask students to research paper currency in 1876, the year the plot to steal Lincoln's coffin took place. Students can look online or at the library to find images of what bills and coins during this era looked like. Then ask each small group to create an illustrated presentation in PowerPoint format, on posterboard, or using another format which shows



the denominations of these bills. One student from each group can present their findings along with a short report on the role of counterfeiting during this era.

4. One of the most useful ways for students to reflect on the significance of a leader is to write an obituary and epitaph. Ask students to write an obituary which outlines in 2-3 pages the most important accomplishments in Lincoln's life. These obituaries can also be descriptive, and reveal the ways his personality shaped his decision-making style and his public perception. Students can also be asked to write an epitaph which succinctly captures Lincoln's life and his importance. Ask students to share their epitaphs with the larger class or group. They may also want to vote on their favorite epitaph and design a project incorporating these words.
5. This documentary features a story that is not well-known, even though many Americans know more about Lincoln than they do about most other historic figures. Ask students to write a short abstract or one-page proposal for a new documentary or book about some aspect of Lincoln's life. Students can be creative in their topics, as long as they make a good argument for why this topic should be explored. Students can share their ideas with the larger class or group.

## Websites & books

### WEBSITES

A HISTORY site with original video, lesson plans, and background: [www.history.com/lincoln](http://www.history.com/lincoln)

Mr. Lincoln's Virtual Library from the Library of Congress (a compilation of two archives of documents related to Lincoln's life with images, correspondence and photographs): <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alhome.html>

Official site of the Lincoln Bicentennial: [www.lincolnbicentennial.gov](http://www.lincolnbicentennial.gov)

More streaming video and background information from Ford's Theatre: [www.fordstheatre.org](http://www.fordstheatre.org)

### BOOKS

Craughwell, Thomas J. *Stealing Lincoln's Body* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (Simon & Schuster, 2006).

North, Sterling. *Abe Lincoln, Log Cabin to White House* (Landmark Books, Random House, 1993).

Oates, Stephen B. *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (HarperCollins, 1993).