

The Death of Abraham Lincoln DBQ

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8th Grade DBQ Directions:

- Read the DBQ question. Do you understand exactly what is being asked?
- What prior knowledge do you have about the following issues?
 - The Civil War
 - The assassination of President Abraham Lincoln
 - John Wilkes Booth
 - Reaction of Americans to the murder of their President
- Now, look at the documents. Note that each one has its own section. Study each question and highlight any information that will help you to answer the main DBQ question.
- Each document is followed by a single question. Write a short response to each of the questions in the space provided.
- When you finish studying all of the documents, advance to part B of the DBQ question.
 - Finally, write a 5 paragraph essay that answers the DBQ question.

Historic Background: Abraham Lincoln was the first President of the United States to be assassinated (murdered) while in office. Lincoln was first elected to the presidency in 1860. With his election the state of America as a nation became unsettled. The issue of slavery was threatening to tear apart the Union. On December 20th, North Carolina officially seceded (left) the Union. Within months, 10 more southern states left as well. As Lincoln entered office, threats of assassination were everywhere. Shortly after his inauguration, the Civil War broke out. Destined to be the bloodiest of all American wars, the Union battled the Confederacy for four long years. The two key issues of the war were States' rights to do as they pleased (in opposition of the federal government), and slavery. During the course of the war, President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, effectively ending slavery when the war was over. Lincoln was re-elected in 1864, as the Union army began to turn the tide of the war. The Confederacy eventually surrendered on April 9, 1865. Abraham Lincoln would not live to see another week.

Tasks: For Part A: Read each document carefully and answer the questions after each document.

For Part B: Use your answers from Part A, information from the documents, and your prior knowledge related to these issues to write a well organized 5 paragraph essay. In that essay please address the following DBQ question:

DBQ Question: Many emotions and events swept across the nation immediately following the shooting of Abraham Lincoln. Given that the crisis of the Civil War had ended only days earlier, what, in your opinion, was the impact of his death upon America as a whole? Use details from the reading to support your ideas. Add relevant information from your personal knowledge.

Part A

Document 1: On the evening of April 14, 1865 Abraham Lincoln, his wife Mary, and another couple, Major Henry Rathbone and his future wife, Miss Clara Harris, attended a play at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. The group sat in a private balcony box 11 feet above and to the right of the stage.

John Wilkes Booth, a very famous stage actor of that time, had learned earlier in the day that the President would be attending that night's play. Booth was a southern sympathizer with a deep-seated hatred for all that Lincoln had accomplished. He and a small group of friends had weeks earlier planned to kidnap the President, but never got the chance. After the war had ended, avenging the south by murdering Lincoln was Booth's primary motive.

At about 10pm, as the play was winding down, Booth entered the President's well-decorated balcony box. Clara Harris gave the following statement about what occurred next.

“Major Rathbone arose and asked the intruder his business. He rushed past the Major without making a reply.” Then placing a small derringer-style pistol **“close to the President’s head—actually into contact with it—[Booth] fired.”**¹

Major Rathbone lunged at Booth. Booth dropped his pistol and drew out a hunting knife. He slashed Rathbone's arm to the bone, and leaped to the stage breaking his leg. Despite his injury, Booth wielded his large knife towards others, and managed to escape out a stage door, escaping on a waiting horse. Mary Lincoln, holding the mortally wounded President, screamed “Help!” three times before collapsing in tears.

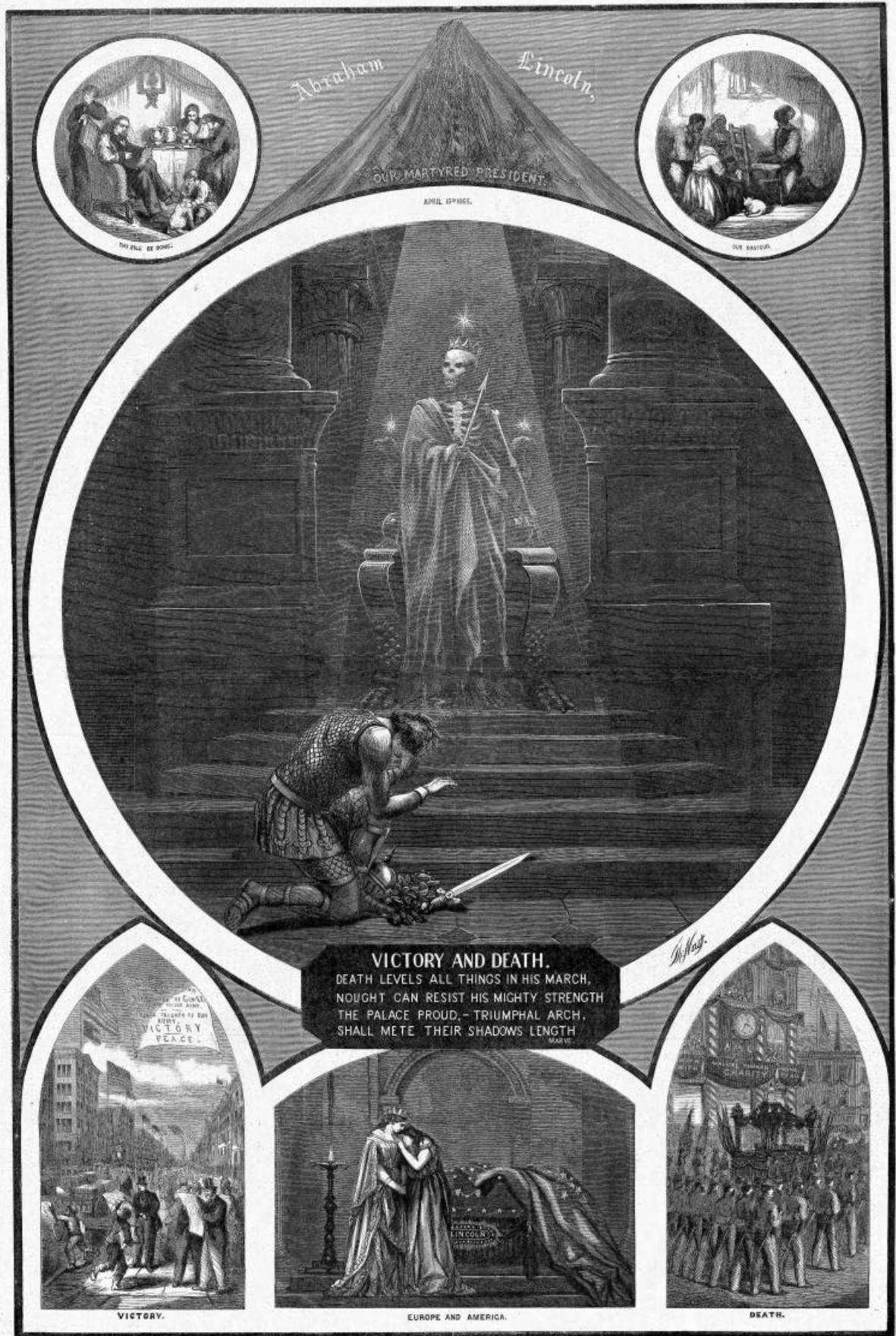
Question 1: Why would Clara Harris be considered a reliable witness to the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln? What is it about her that qualifies her as being “a reliable witness”?

“About once an hour, Mrs. Lincoln would repair (come to) the bedside of her dying husband and with lamentation and tears remain until overcome by emotion...” To the point that Secretary of War, Edward Stanton, ordered others “Take that woman out and do not let her in again...”⁴

“A little before seven I went into the room where the dying President was rapidly drawing near the closing moments. His wife soon after made her last visit to him. The death struggle had begun. Robert, his son, stood with several others at the head of the bed. He, bore himself well but on two occasions gave way to overpowering grief and sobbed aloud, turning his head and leaning on the shoulder of Senator Sumner. The respiration of the President became suspended at intervals and at last entirely ceased at twenty-two minutes past seven.” Said Stanton, “Now he belongs to the ages.”⁵

Question #3: How would you describe the mood in the room where Lincoln died? What questions might people in the crowd outside be wondering?

Document #4: Please examine the illustration from Harper’s Weekly Magazine, as drawn by artist Thomas Nash. ⁶



Abraham Lincoln,

OUR MARTYRED PRESIDENT.

APRIL 15 1865.



VICTORY AND DEATH.
 DEATH LEVELS ALL THINGS IN HIS MARCH,
 NOUGHT CAN RESIST HIS MIGHTY STRENGTH
 THE PALACE PROUD.- TRIUMPHAL ARCH,
 SHALL METE THEIR SHADOWS LENGTH
 MADE.



VICTORY.



EUROPE AND AMERICA.



DEATH.

Question 4: Describe the features used in the illustration that allow you to understand the nation's emotion following President Lincoln's assassination.

Question 5: Can you explain what symbolic woman is crying in the lower-center frame of the illustration? What does Nast symbolize by her display of emotion?

Document #5: In the reward poster on the previous page⁷, \$50,000 reward is offered for the apprehension of John Wilkes Booth. Another \$50,000 reward is offered for the apprehension of two of his co-conspirators. Accounting for inflation between 1865 and today, the value of the reward in today's dollars is well over a million dollars.

Question 6: What facts can you compile about the assassination of the President that would warrant such a large reward being offered for the apprehension of people involved in the plot to murder him?

Question 7: Is there any analogy to our government today offering \$25 million dollars reward for the apprehension of Osama Bin Laden?

Document #6: John Wilkes Booth managed to avoid capture for 12 days before he was ultimately shot and killed while trying to avoid arrest. During that time he kept a personal diary. In his diary he wrote the following:

"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... I struck boldly, and not as the papers say (that he shot the President from behind like a coward)... 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... 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."⁸

Question 8: Do you think that much of the South felt the same as Booth? Or were the people of the South glad that the war was over, and thought that the murder of Lincoln was wrong? Explain your answer.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Zanesville, Ohio is still today a very small town. It is located about 50 miles east of the present Ohio capital city of Columbus. It was the state capital from 1810-1812. In 1865, the population for the entire county surrounding Zanesville, was only around 2000 people. The population today is only about 25,000 people.

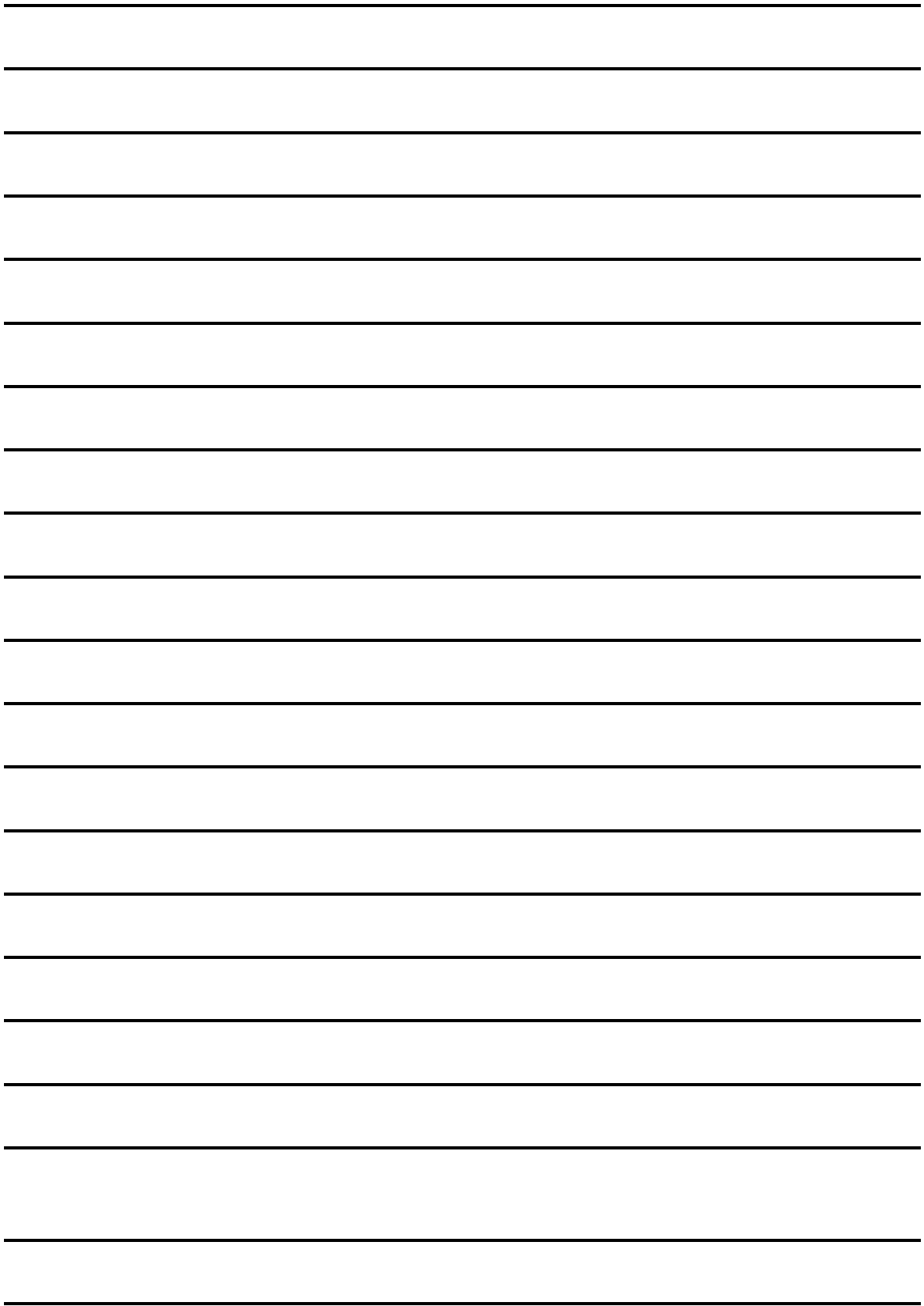
Document 7: President Lincoln died early on a Saturday morning. The following day was Easter Sunday. In Zanesville, Ohio, the paper reported the following:

“Before 8 o’clock on Saturday morning we had received the Official announcement that our most excellent Chief Magistrate had died. Never had such sad news reached the inhabitants of this city before. Very soon a meeting was called at the Court House, which, after appointing committee, adjourned to the Market House in the afternoon, where resolutions were adopted and speeches were made by several citizens. Committees were appointed to suggest and carry out other proceedings regarding the sad event. The details of which appear in this paper. As soon after the first emotions of sadness permitted, stores, offices and places of business were closed, manufactories stopped and all business was suspended.”⁹

Question 9: Based on the description given in this newspaper, what reactions do you think citizens had upon hearing about the murder of the President?

Part B

For Part B, use your answers from Part A, information from the documents, and your prior knowledge related to these issues to write a well organized 5 paragraph essay. In that essay please address the following DBQ question:



DBQ Rubric

Name: _____

Score of 5

- Thoroughly addresses all aspects of the task by accurately analyzing and interpreting most of the documents.
- Incorporates relevant outside information
- Richly supports outline with relevant facts, examples, and details
- Writes a well-organized outline, consistently demonstrating a logical and clear plan of organization.
 - Includes a strong introduction
 - Includes a strong conclusion
 - Includes an original thesis statement

Score of 4

- Addresses all aspects of the task by accurately analyzing and interpreting most of the documents.
- Incorporates relevant outside information
- Supports outline with relevant facts, examples and details-may be more descriptive than analytical
 - Writes a well-organized outline, demonstrating a logical and clear plan of organization
 - Includes a good introduction
 - Includes a good conclusion
 - Includes a clear thesis statement
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Score of 3

- Addresses most aspects of the task or all aspects in a limited way
- Incorporates limited or no relevant outside information
- Uses some facts, examples, and details-but is more descriptive than analytical
 - Writes a satisfactorily developed outline, demonstrating a general plan of organization
 - States the theme in the conclusion
 - Includes a thesis statement

Score of 2

- Attempts to address some aspects of the task by accurately analyzing and interpreting most of the documents
- Incorporates limited or no outside information
- Uses few facts, examples, and details-simply restates contents of documents
- Writes a poorly organized outline, lacking focus
 - Has a vague or missing introduction
 - Has a vague or missing conclusion
 - Lacks a clear thesis statement

Score of 1

- Shows limited understanding of the task with vague, unclear references to the documents
- Presents no relevant outside information
- Attempts to complete the task but demonstrates a major weakness in organization
 - Uses few or no accurate or relevant facts, details, or examples
 - Has vague or missing introduction or conclusion

Score of 0

- Fails to address the task
- Writing is illegible
- Blank paper

References

1. *Lincoln – An Illustrated Biography*. Philip B. Kunhardt Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III, Peter W. Kunhardt. Knopf. New York: 1992. p. 353
2. *On Stage When Lincoln Died*. Retrieved from:
<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~wynkoop/webdocs/2211916.htm>
3. *Lincoln – An Illustrated Biography*. Philip B. Kunhardt Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III, Peter W. Kunhardt. Knopf. New York: 1992. p. 353
4. *Lincoln – An Illustrated Biography*. Philip B. Kunhardt Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III, Peter W. Kunhardt. Knopf. New York: 1992. p. 358
5. *Eyewitness to History: Gideon Welles*. Retrieved from:
<http://Eyewitnesstohistory.com/Lincoln.htm>
6. "Victory and Death". Harper's Weekly. June 10, 1865. Artist: Thomas Nast. Retrieved from:
<http://www.harpweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=June&Date=10>
*Note: The bottom center illustration is of Lady Liberty/Columbia crying on the shoulder of Europa. The inference might be that Liberty has been dealt a mighty blow.
7. *Smithsonian Institution*. John Wilkes Booth reward poster. Retrieved from:
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/presidency/3d1a2.html>
8. *John Wilkes Booth's Diary*. Retrieved from:
<http://att.net/%7Erjnorton/Lincoln52.html>
9. *Daily Zanesville Courier*. Sunday, April 16, 1865. Retrieved from:
<http://www.newspaperarchive.com/PdfViewer.aspx?img=16227019&firstvisit=true&src=search¤tResult=1¤tPage=0>