

ABRAHAM LINCOLN COMES TO KALAMAZOO

A Proposed Draft Curriculum Framework to Educate Students About Abraham Lincoln's 1856 Visit to Kalamazoo

A Gift of History

If you have visited Bronson Park in Kalamazoo, you have walked the same ground Abraham Lincoln walked over 160 years ago!

Mr. Lincoln has been ranked by many historians as America's greatest president, but he came to Kalamazoo as a private citizen in the summer of 1856, four years before he was elected president. Lincoln is especially remembered for his honesty, and for his leadership role in ending slavery. And while President George Washington is credited with being the "father" of our country, President Lincoln is remembered for his role in saving the nation as it divided against itself in the American Civil War. But what is to be known about Lincoln's Kalamazoo visit?

Most adults and school-age children are unaware that Lincoln came to Kalamazoo. They are also unaware that Lincoln's Kalamazoo Speech was not only a precursor to his famous House Divided Speech two years later, but it was also an early public demonstration of his future role in ending slavery. Lincoln's Kalamazoo visit is a *gift of history* no other Michigan city can claim! For this reason, the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute (KLI) is committed to developing educational resources to help local educators and community organizations unwrap this gift so Kalamazoo's Lincoln legacy can be shared and passed on to future generations.

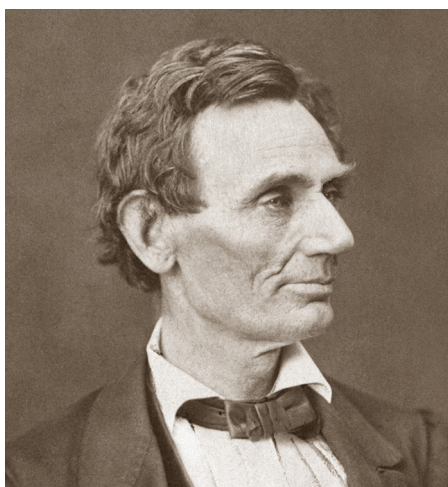
In cooperation with area educators, the KLI is exploring the development of a set of lessons and collateral

materials for grades 4, 8, and 10 that would help give this gift of history new life. Like other Lincoln-related sites across the country, Kalamazoo has its own story to tell about this towering figure in American history who still captivates the imagination of people of all ages.

These new materials, which would include booklets, videos, online lessons, and teacher lesson plans, would be reinforced by the efforts of other local organizations such as the Gilmore Car Museum, the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, and the Kalamazoo Public Library. Special presentations, interactive visits, and classroom field trips are some of the possible collaborative opportunities that are being explored. All instructional lessons would align with the Michigan State Standards for Social Studies Education—standards that are mandated to be taught in all Michigan public schools.

As this educational initiative takes root, the KLI is also involved in commissioning an instructive educational piece of statuary art to be placed in Bronson Park to commemorate Lincoln's 1856 visit and speech. The Institute has received specific site approval by the Kalamazoo City Commission to complete this project.

The following pages include a relevant statement about social-emotional competencies, and a draft narrative of Lincoln's Kalamazoo visit to be used as the basis for creating collateral instructional materials, and curriculum structure and material types that will be used to create teacher curriculum packets for grades 4, 8 and 10. The **thoughts and suggestions of area educators are invited. We welcome your input!**



Addressing Social-Emotional Competencies

In America today, young people face challenges and setbacks in their daily lives that range from the stress and strain of family discord and economic challenges to the emotional impacts of bullying and peer pressure, all amidst a national culture that is increasingly polarized and divided. Abraham Lincoln would have well understood how these conditions impair the healthy development of a child as they mirror many aspects of his own upbringing and adult life. Lincoln's mother died when he was nine and from the time he was 10 years old, he was raised in a blended family of eight in a log cabin in the Indiana frontier. America was strongly divided at that time by the issues of slavery, race, and social class distinctions.

Through hard work, perseverance and determination, Lincoln rose from poverty to political prominence and ultimately to the presidency of the United States. But there were many personal setbacks along the way, not the least of which was the untimely death of his mother, his sister and two sons. Because of his anti-slavery views, his election to the highest office in the land helped foment the advent of the Civil War, the most divisive event in our nation's history. From the crucible of his own trials and losses, Lincoln developed an unusual capacity to endure suffering, and consequently he was able to extend sympathy and compassion and mercy to others. All of these traits were effectively woven into his character and leadership skills, without which he never could have saved the nation. His vision for Reconstruction was imbued with the values of unity and civic harmony with charity and good will void of malice. Sadly, his vision for America cost him his life at the hands of a Confederate sympathizer at the war's end.

Lincoln's life and legacy provides a tangible model for teaching social-emotional competencies in classroom instruction. His story is particularly compelling to young people. Most importantly, his character reflects those core democratic values grounded in the rule of law, in respect for diverse groups and opinions, and in peaceful and constructive civil engagement; all positive attitudes and behaviors students should develop in order to be productive, responsible, and contributing citizens.

From an early age, Abraham Lincoln valued the pre-eminent importance of education. In his first recorded political statement, he made this affirming pronouncement: "Upon the subject of education . . . I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in." We heartily agree!

Lincoln in Kalamazoo: Narrative for Developing Lesson Plans for Grade 8

In the late 1840s, Abraham Lincoln served a single term in Congress and did not seek re-election. He then returned to Illinois and threw his energy into practicing law. It seemed his political days were over, but then something happened in 1854 to change his mind and once again stir his passion for political life. That change was the passage by Congress of the Kansas-Nebraska Act—a federal law that established *popular sovereignty*—allowing new states coming into the Union to be able to decide for themselves whether they wanted to have slaves or not. This changed an 1820 congressional compromise that had limited the practice of slavery to the southern states, barring new northern states entering the union from practicing slavery.¹ This provides the background for Lincoln's trip to Kalamazoo. Here is his Kalamazoo story . . .

On the morning of August 27th, 1856, a clean-shaven 47-year-old Abraham Lincoln left Chicago on the Michigan Central Railroad bound for Kalamazoo. He was to speak at two o'clock that afternoon at a political rally in what is now Bronson Park.² It would be his first and only public appearance in Michigan, and the only time he traveled outside Illinois that year.

One rally attendee said the crowd was immense. "[We] got there before the multitude commenced pouring in. We stopped upon the corner of Portage and some other street under the shade of some oaks and saw our delegation come up. [It] was over two miles long! We then went in near the ground for speaking and attempted to count the number of teams that drove past . . . after [counting] up to 250, they came pouring in so fast that we gave up in despair."³ In the park were "four or five tables spread with the staples of the land: bread, meat, cheese, etc. The tables were about 15 rods (247.5 feet) long and every few rods were set barrels of ice water with tin cups attached."⁴

Mr. Lincoln was little known to the gathering crowd whose numbers swelled to four times the city's population. The local paper even spelled the Illinois visitor's name wrong. Other, more prominent speakers were scheduled to speak that day. Four years later, all that would change. With Michigan's help, this unknown visitor would be elected president of the United States.

Several Michigan newspapers published reports of the Kalamazoo rally. Years later, one eyewitness recalled Mr. Lincoln "had a clear, penetrating voice of tenor quality, which reached the confines of the great crowd."⁵ By a stroke of good fortune, a Detroit reporter captured Lincoln's speech in its entirety, and it was printed verbatim in the *Detroit Daily*

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Advertiser two days later. To the people of Kalamazoo Lincoln said: “We stand at once the wonder and admiration of the whole world, and we must enquire what it is that has given us so much prosperity, and we shall understand that to give up that one thing, would be to give up all future prosperity. This cause is that every man can make himself.”⁶

In concluding his speech, Lincoln extended an invitation to “come to the rescue of the great principle of equality.”⁷ Mr. Lincoln spoke again later that evening in an area adjacent to the park and then spent the night in Kalamazoo. He left the next morning boarding a train back to Chicago. Lincoln’s visit to Kalamazoo and the speech he gave in the city’s downtown park remain a singular gift of history to the people of Kalamazoo.⁸

Conceptual Framework for Lincoln Visit Curriculum

Introduction

Social studies teaching and learning in K-12 schools today is much different than from a generation ago. In the past, a teacher could choose and emphasize the topics and information they desired. Today, teachers and schools are evaluated by adherence to the state social studies standards and the standardized state and national tests that measure the achievement of those standards. The standards can be found in their entirety at https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Final_Social_Studies_Standards_Document_655968_7.pdf.

Background

The state standards divide teaching the topic of US History into three distinct phases:

Grade 5: Pre-colonial and Indigenous Peoples to 179;

Grade 8: Post Constitutional Ratification to Reconstruction (1870);

Grade 10:⁹ Reconstruction to present day.

While it is clear that in a purely historical context Lincoln’s Kalamazoo visit would be only presented at grade 8, secondary themes could be presented in the elementary grades and in high school, which will be fleshed out later in this document.

In order to get a grasp of the concept, let’s look at it chronologically:

Grade 4: Kalamazoo and Lincoln Too!

Grade 4 was chosen for the introductory lessons because it aligns with US studies and the history of Michigan from statehood to the present day, both called for by the state standards at this grade.

State Standards Addressed:

P3.4 Explain the challenges people have faced and actions they have taken to address issues at different times and places. (Process skill.)

4 – H3.0.3 Use case studies or stories to describe the ideas and actions of individuals involved in the Underground Railroad in Michigan and in the Great Lakes region.

Description:

In this brief set of lessons, students would be introduced to Abraham Lincoln and the factors that caused him to be not only an important US president, but also an iconic figure. These lessons would give the basic facts of Lincoln’s 1856 visit to Kalamazoo in the context of efforts to curb the expansion of slavery as well as how people in Michigan were actively engaged in this national debate (i.e., the underground railroad—especially in Kalamazoo County—and the abolitionist movement in general).

Resources:

- Booklet to be created about Lincoln and his 1856 visit in both print and online versions;
- Video produced that recaps the booklet with more contextual information;
- PowerPoint with teacher presentation notes;
- Interpretive visit to the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, the Gilmore Car Museum* and/or the Kalamazoo Public Library.
- Complete lesson plan provided.

* *The Gilmore Car Museum has a statue of Lincoln onsite and is a collaborative partner with the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute.*

Grade 8: Lincoln Comes to Kalamazoo:

Reasons and Results

State Standards Addressed:

8 – U5.1.4 Draw conclusions about why the following increased sectional tensions:

- *the Missouri Compromise (1820);*
- *the Wilmot Proviso (1846);*
- *the Compromise of 1850, including the Fugitive Slave Act;*
- *the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) and subsequent conflict in Kansas;*
- *the Dred Scott v. Sandford decision (1857);*
- *changes in the party system.*

8 – U5.2.3 Examine Abraham Lincoln’s presidency with respect to: ... the evolution of his emancipation policy (including the Emancipation Proclamation).

CONTINUED

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Resources:

- KLI video about Lincoln's Kalamazoo visit;
- Lincoln's speech excerpts with curated interpretation notes (Kalamazoo Valley Museum);¹⁰
- Interpretive visit to Gilmore Car Museum, Kalamazoo Valley Museum, the Zhang Legacy Collections Center: Archives and Regional History, the Kalamazoo Public Library, and/or Bronson Park (site of future Lincoln statue);
- PowerPoint with teacher notations;
- Complete lesson plans.

High School Civics: Lincoln, Slavery and the Birth of the Republican Party

Civics was chosen instead of US history because the material is more relevant to the standards being addressed.

Standard Addressed:

C – 3.3.2 Describe the evolution of political parties and their contemporary influence on public policy.

Description:

In this lesson(s), students will learn how the Republican Party was “born” in Jackson, Michigan in 1854 on a platform of classical liberalism (economic freedom), economic reform and the opposition to slavery.¹¹

John C. Fremont was the first presidential nominee of the Republican Party in 1856. The Kalamazoo rally that brought Lincoln to Kalamazoo was essentially a Fremont rally. Excerpts and interpretations from the text of Lincoln's speech will be used to show how Lincoln explained the Republican platform, and his sense of the imperative of opposing the expansion of slavery and impressing upon his audience the importance and urgency of such a stand. Also, the thematic and rhetorical aspects of Lincoln's Kalamazoo Speech as a precursor to his famous House Divided Speech should be explored.

The lessons on Lincoln's Kalamazoo speech should be taught in the context of an overall lesson of how political parties are created and how they evolve from one of narrow objectives to eventually become a major modern party. The underlying thread would be that political parties must evolve to remain relevant to survive and thrive, which means they may look quite different today from how they looked in the past.

Resources:

- KLI-produced video as an introduction;
- PowerPoint with teacher notations;
- Complete lesson plans.

Summary

The goal of this project is to produce high-quality enduring lesson sets presented in physical and virtual format. Implementation would require no small amount of labor, and include the collaboration of stakeholders including educators, school administrators, area historians, local history enthusiasts, and representatives of interpretive resources such as those associated with the Gilmore Car Museum Education Department, the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, the Zhang Legacy Collections Center: Archives and Regional History, and the Kalamazoo Public Library.

Monetary costs to produce an initial single prototype set of materials including an instructive 10-to-15-minute video using mostly volunteer labor is conservatively estimated at upwards of \$10,000.

Timeline for completion will depend greatly on collaboration with stakeholders, but likely at a minimum of nine months. Available grants will be explored to help underwrite this educational initiative.

Notes

- 1 What was the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and who introduced the Kansas-Nebraska bill in Congress? What was his relationship with Abraham Lincoln?
- 2 What was the rally about? Answer: Rally to support John C. Fremont for President. Who was John C. Fremont? Answer: Known as “The Pathfinder” . . .
- 3 Henry Parker Smith Diary, August 27, 1856, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- 4 Henry Parker Smith.
- 5 “A Happy Reminiscence of the Great American,” by Charles S. May, the Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, Saturday Evening, December 2, 1893, p 7.
- 6 Kalamazoo Valley Museum, “Lincoln Letter & Speech.” <https://kalamazoomuseum.org/localhistory/lincoln/speech.html> (What was Lincoln referring to? Answer: Freedom and Liberty.)
- 7 Kalamazoo Valley Museum. (One Lincoln scholar calls Lincoln's Kalamazoo Speech his “transitional pronouncement.” What does this mean? Answer: It anticipates or was formative in developing the rhetorical arguments expressed in his famous “House Divided Speech” four years later.)
- 8 What is meant by “a gift of history”? What can we learn from studying history?
- 9 Grade 10 is the traditional placement of this class, but today it may be presented at grades 9, 10, or 11.
- 10 Kalamazoo Valley Museum.
- 11 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_Party_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_Party_(United_States))

