Abe Lincoln in Illinois Study Guide

Abe Lincoln in Illinois by Robert E. Sherwood

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Introduction

Abe Lincoln In Illinois presents a vision that fits in with the legends of the sixteenth president that have been told to generations of American school children, but it gives these legends a human face. The play deals with Lincoln's formative years. It focuses in particular on Lincoln's growth from a shy, uneducated backwoodsman who was more willing to accept the enslavement of blacks than to accept war to the man who would lead half of the nation against the other half in the name of justice. When Sherwood's play was brought to the stage in 1938, its parallels to the international political situation were obvious. Adolf Hitler had established himself as the dictator of Germany and had started his expansion across Europe, and the people of America, an ocean away, found themselves faced with questions about whether to fight for justice or maintain peace. As the play continued to run on Broadway, Hitler invaded more countries, raising more and more support for America's entry into the war, giving audiences even more empathy for Lincoln's dilemma. Today, it stands as a reminder of the responsibilities that come along with power and of the sort of person that Lincoln must have been. Among constitutional scholars, historians, and average citizens, he is still the country's most respected president, and Robert Sherwood's play offers a well-rounded view of Lincoln's flaws as well as his greatness.

Author Biography

Robert E. Sherwood was a popular American playwright and novelist of the twentieth century. His works reflected the concerns of the generation that had lived through the First World War. They often explored the horrors of modern warfare and the moral choices that were required of those who participated in war. Sherwood was born on April 4, 1896, and attended Milton Academy, graduating from Harvard with a bachelor of arts degree in 1917. When he tried to enlist in the American army during World War I, he was rejected, and so he joined the Canadian infantry. During the war, he was wounded and was sprayed with toxic mustard gas. On his return from the war, he became a magazine movie reviewer, first *for Vanity Fair* and then for *Life*. He was, in fact, one of the country's first serious film critics. By the mid-1920s, he was an editor for *Life* and was doing some screenwriting for Hollywood studios. In 1926 his first screenplay, an adaptation of Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* was produced. The following year had the opening of his first stage play, The Road to Rome. He wrote several movies and plays during the twenties and thirties. His works were not praised for their artistry, but they were considered well crafted and effective and generally pleased the public.

In 1934 Sherwood divorced his first wife and remarried. The following period found him at the peak of his artistic powers. The Petrified Forest, from 1935, was a commercial success and is considered his most successful artistic piece. The following year, *his Idiot's Delight* won a Pulitzer Prize for drama. He won a second Pulitzer in 1938, *when Abe Lincoln in Illinois* was produced and a third in 1940 *for There Shall Be No Night*. It was through *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* that he began a friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the president of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. His friendship led to several government appointments during World War II, including Special Assistant to the Secretary of War in 1940, director of the oversees branch of the Office of War Information in 1942, and Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Navy in 1945. It also led to a book about the president called *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, which won Sherwood yet another Pulitzer Prize in 1948. Sherwood is most remembered today for his work in Hollywood where he wrote some of the finest screenplays of the thirties and forties. These screenplays include the adaptations of his own stage works and the script for *The Best Years of Our Lives*, which won numerous Academy Awards in 1946. Sherwood died on November 14, 1955.

Plot Summary

Act I

The first act of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* is comprised of the play's first three scenes. They take place in the vicinity of New Salem, Illinois, in the 1830s.

Scene 1 is set in the cabin of Mentor Graham, who is tutoring young Abraham Lincoln in the use of the English language. Lincoln, who would have been in his early twenties, discusses the financial troubles he has had and his desire to move out to the open territory out West to escape his failures. Mentor Graham tells him to "just bear in mind that there are always two professions open to people who fail at everything else: there's school teaching, and there's politics."

A major theme of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* is introduced when Lincoln tells Graham that he thinks often about death, describing his mother's death and her burial. Among the examples that Graham has Lincoln read from are a speech by Daniel Webster, a leading politician and noted orator of the time, about keeping the states united, and a poem by John Keats entitled "On Death."

Scene 2 takes place at the Rutledge Tavern, in New Salem. Lincoln is the local postmaster. This scene helps to establish his fine reputation among the uneducated country people. It begins with Judge Bowling Green and Joshua Speed, two friends of Lincoln's, bringing the governor's son, Ninian Edwards, to meet him. They buy drinks for an old veteran of the Revolutionary War, and they discuss the fact that Ann Rutledge, the daughter of the tavern owner, has become engaged to a man who ran off on her, much to her shame and horror. A gang of local toughs enters, and their leader, Jack Armstrong, threatens to fight with Edwards until Lincoln shows up. Armstrong knows that Lincoln is the only man in the territory who can beat him in a fight; Lincoln jokes with him so that Armstrong can back out of fighting with honor. Green, Speed, and Edwards explain to Lincoln their real reason for coming to see him. Knowing the prestige he has in the community, they want him to run for the state assembly. Lincoln, who owes fifteen hundred dollars because of a failed business venture, says that he will consider it. In the mail that he has brought to the tavern, there are two letters of significance. The first is from Seth Gale, with whom Lincoln had planned to move West, which says that Gale has to return home to the family farm. The second letter comes to Ann Rutledge, from her fiance, announcing that he will not return to her. Lincoln announces that he is in love with Ann, and, to improve himself and earn her love, he goes off to find Bowling Green to accept the political nomination.

In Scene 3, Lincoln has been elected and is back from the state assembly in Vandalia because Ann Rutledge is ill. The action in this scene takes place in the home of Bowling Green, where Lincoln is staying while visiting. Green, his wife Nancy, and Josh Speed discuss Lincoln, how much he loves Ann Rutledge, how he has failed in business, and how unimpressive he is in the legislature. When Lincoln enters, he is crushed because

Ann has died. He wants to go out, but his friends convince him to go upstairs and go to bed.

Act II

The action of the play's second act takes place in the 1840s, in and around Springfield, which became Illinois' state capital in 1837. Lincoln, at thirty-one, is a lawyer. Scene 4 takes place in his law office, on the second floor of the courthouse. He and his clerk, Billy Herndon, discuss the issue of slavery, with Lincoln taking the issue that free states should respect the sovereignty of the states that allowed slavery. Bowling Green and Josh Speed stop in to visit, and, in a general discussion of the South's threat to quit the union and form their own nation, Lincoln explains that his position is one of pacifism: he could not support fighting over it. Ninian Edwards comes in and invites them all to a party at his house where he hopes that Lincoln and the town's other eligible bachelors, including Stephen Douglas, will meet his unmarried sister-in-law, Mary Todd.

In Scene 5, Elizabeth Edwards objects to her sister Mary's choice of Abe Lincoln for a husband, though Ninian points out his promising career as a politician. When Mary enters, she explains that she sees Lincoln as a man with great potential, one who has not fenced himself in with the illusion of security. Lincoln enters and says that he is going to represent Duff, the son of Jack Armstrong, who tried to fight with Ninian in Scene 2. Duff is accused of murder, and Lincoln thinks he is clearly guilty, but he will represent him for old time's sake.

The action returns to Lincoln's law office in Scene 6, a few weeks later. Lincoln has his friend Josh Speed read a letter that Lincoln intends to send to Mary, breaking off their engagement. He has been to Bowling Green's funeral that morning, and it has made him philosophical about life. Ninian Edwards tells Lincoln to be careful of Mary's ambition: "My wife tells me that even as a child she had delusions of grandeur she predicted to one and all that the man she would marry would be President of the United States." Josh throws Lincoln's letter to Mary in the fireplace. Even Billy Herndon, who does not like Mary much, agrees that it would be wrong to call off the wedding; he is a staunch abolitionist and sees the move as Lincoln's way of ducking his social responsibility.

Scene 7 is set outdoors, near New Salem. Lincoln has been traveling over the prairie for almost two years since breaking his engagement. Seth Gale, who was forced to move back to the family farm, is now free and traveling with his wife and son to the West, but his son has become ill. Jack Armstrong is with the family, and Lincoln has been looking for a doctor. When Lincoln arrives, there is some talk about whether the new states opening in the West will have slavery. His friends convince Lincoln to say a prayer over the sick boy, and he does so, showing the oratory skills he is remembered for today.

Scene 8 is very brief. Lincoln returns to the Edwards' house and explains to Mary what he has learned about life, responsibility, and destiny by encountering his friends moving

into the new territory and the threat to the child's life. He asks her to marry, giving his promise that he will not run from his responsibility again.

Act III

Act III takes place in Springfield. Scene 9 presents one of the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858, with Stephen Douglas arguing that the North should tolerate slavery in the South and Lincoln arguing that the country cannot continue as it has been, half slave and half free, and that the South cannot be allowed to separate itself from the United States.

Lincoln and his family Mary and his three sons, the oldest one a student at Harvard are visiting the Edwards' house in Scene 10. Lincoln tells the boys about the time, depicted in scene 7, when he went for a doctor for the sick boy on the prairie. When Mary finds out that a committee of politicians is coming to the house to discuss the possibility of running for president, she is in a fit of rage because the house is dirty. The members of the committee have different ideas of Lincoln as a candidate. Sturveson, a businessman, questions whether Lincoln would be good for business interests because he supports the common people. Barrick, a clergyman, is bothered because Lincoln is not affiliated with any church. But Crimmin, a political operative, is impressed with the way that Lincoln handles their hostility and feels that he could win the election.

Scene 11 takes place at Lincoln's campaign headquarters on election night, 1860. In the tension of the vote count that shows Lincoln trailing but gaining, Mary becomes upset, and Lincoln angrily curses her. He apologizes almost immediately, but it is too late: "This is the night I dreamed about, as a child. .. . This is the night when I'm waiting to hear that my husband has become President of the United States. And even if he does it's ruined, for me. It's too late." As the election results continue, Lincoln wins. Almost immediately a security officer, Kavanagh, attaches himself to Lincoln, to protect him from Southerners who have sworn to kill him. The security guards place themselves between Lincoln and the people who elected him.

In Scene 12, Lincoln boards the train that will take him to Washington. Kavanagh discusses the danger that Lincoln is in (foreshadowing the assassin' s bullet that eventually killed him), and Lincoln, in a final speech to the people of Illinois, talks about the struggle to hold the Union together, even if war is the result. The crowd sings as his train pulls away.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The play opens in the cabin of Mentor Graham near New Salem, Illinois. It is late at night and one oil lamp hangs over a table on which are stacked books and papers. Mentor is talking to a young Abe Lincoln who is thin and dressed in the clothes of a backwoodsman. Mentor is coaching young Abe in the English language and they are currently working on the moods of language. Abe give examples of each one: Indicative, Imperative, Potential, Subjunctive, and Infinitive.

When he finishes, Mentor gives him a newspaper and asks him to read the speech printed in there that was delivered by Daniel Webster before the U.S. Senate. Mentor leans back to listen as Abe reads out loud and he periodically corrects his pronunciation of some words. The speech addresses the debate over the right of any state to secede from the Union and his response to South Carolina's position of states rights. Webster's speech counters that if there is no union, there would be precious little freedom left.

The conversation drifts to the troubles of Abe's store. Abe feels responsible and feels that he fails at any steady job he's ever had. Mentor tells him that there are men throughout the town who see potential in him and are willing to help him succeed. However, Abe thinks he just has bad luck. Mentor suggests that he move away from New Salem because there will never be any real opportunity here.

Abe has thought of moving; his family has moved many times during his young life, never quite sure what they are looking for and consequently never finding it. Mentor urges him again to go, and if he's afraid of failing there are two professions available to people who fail at everything else - school teaching and politics. Abe knows that politics would mean going to the city and he doesn't like cities. It is the people there who scare him; as if they want to kill him and he thinks about death a lot. Abe buried his mother when he was very small and he is so sensitive that he cannot even kill a deer.

Mentor thinks he is a study in contrasts; so friendly, yet misanthropic. Abe likes people one by one, but groups and crowds scare him. It is late and Abe gets up to leave but Mentor gives him a magazine containing a poem entitled "On Death." Abe likes it very much and is reading it again to himself as he leaves.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

It is interesting that Abe's teacher is named Mentor. In addition, he is lucky to have found a man who has shown interest in him and his life. Up until this point, Abe has been a boy of the wilderness with no formal study. However, Mentor and other important men in town see something in him and are willing to help. Maybe it is his intensity and passion for learning. Maybe it is his sensitivity to issues that people face. Abe seems to be a sponge for formal education as well as the education received from life experience.

There is a bit of foreshadowing too in the discussion about his obsession with death. Abe has been faced with it early and that can be easy and hard - hard at the time, but easier to teach you how to face your own mortality. Mentor senses this in him and gives him the Keats poem to read, and he likes the thought that death is just the beginning of a new life. Abe seems very young to be able to grasp that concept already.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

This scene takes place in the Rutledge Tavern in New Salem. It is noon on the Fourth of July. A Revolutionary War veteran named Ben Mattling is sitting at the back of the room when three important looking men enter - Judge Bowling Green, Ninian Edwards, and Joshua Speed.

Judge Green is introducing Mr. Edwards to the people in the tavern, but they have come specifically to see Abe Lincoln. Mr. Edwards is the governor's son and has to be back in Springfield by sundown so they are in a bit of a hurry. Ann Rutledge, the daughter of the proprietor serves them their whisky and tea. When she leaves the room, the judge tells them that Ann had promised herself to a man named McNiel whose real name is McNamar and who had made some money and left town. Now Ann was waiting for some news from him.

Mr. Edwards is cordial but his real purpose at the tavern that day is to generate votes as he intends to oppose Andrew Jackson in the next election. The political machine is working, too, to drive out Jackson's people at the state level of government.

There is an interruption by the boisterous entry of the Clary's Grove boys: Jack, Bab, Feargus, and Jasp. The town bullies demand that Ann bring them a keg of liquor. When she declines and brings them each a glass, they are ready for a fight and Mr. Edwards comes to her defense. The wild boys challenge him to a fight, and as they're about to step outside, Abe Lincoln walks in.

Abe convinces him that if they have to beat up a politician they should just fight him. After all, he is the postmaster of the town and that is a political position. The boys do not want to fight him because it is not any of his business, but he tells them that everything in the town is his business. Luckily, they back down when he tells them that he had seen Hannah down by the grove and that if they do not come to the picnic soon, she is going to give away the cake she made and they would all go hungry. Jack tells him that he needs to stop reading all the time; he's going soft. However, they are satisfied with how the situation has been resolved and leave. Mr. Edwards thanks Abe for saving him from a potentially disastrous situation.

Abe has brought the mail with him. There is still no long-awaited letter for Ann. However, Abe sits down to read the *Cincinnati Journal, which* was in today's delivery. The gentlemen ask if he will put the paper down so they can speak to him and they come right to the point and tell him that they want him to run for the State Assembly. Mr. Edwards has heard good things about him and after what he has seen today, he knows that Abe would be the perfect candidate for the Whig party in the fall.

Abe hesitates because he is not someone who likes groups. Therefore, they tell him that he would earn three dollars a day. Abe agrees that that is handsome money and he would be able to pay off his debts that way. However, he tells them that the Whig party stands for money and he is a man with much debt, and that doesn't seem to make sense to him. Essentially, he has no earning power and is $1,500 in debt.

Judge Green explains the nature of Abe's debt to Mr. Edwards. Abe had entered into business with a man named Berry who drank all the whiskey that should have been sold. Therefore, the store went bankrupt and Abe voluntarily assumed all the debt. That's one reason why people in the area think so highly of him. Mr. Edwards agrees that he has a fine character.

The men tell him that this could also be a great opportunity for him to learn, which he loves so much. In Springfield, he would have access to a fine library and some of the best legal minds in the state. This sounds very appealing, but Abe wonders how his political views would mesh with those of Mr. Edwards. Mr. Edwards tells him that the party is looking for someone with conservative views to counteract all the radicals that are assuming Andrew Jackson's role. Abe agrees that he is very conservative and would never start any movements for reform or progress.

Mr. Edwards also thinks that Abe's being the postmaster puts him in a very good position to get the word out to people. The men would give him the literature he would need as well as a new suit. Mr. Edwards rises to leave and asks Abe to think about it. It would be a great opportunity to start up the political ladder at a time when the country is expanding south to Texas and west to California.

Judge Green leaves with Mr. Edwards, but Josh stays to talk to Abe. Josh is Abe's friend and Abe is surprised that he would bring up his name to this Mr. Edwards. Josh tells him that Mr. Edwards wanted to know if there was anyone in town who had potential and Josh told him about Abe. Josh hopes he isn't mad at him but he also knows that Abe needs to grow and this is his chance to do something important.

Abe is not angry with Josh; he just does not know how he can fit into Mr. Edwards' world of political games. Mr. Edwards has lots of money and connections and Abe has neither. To him, the law is a serious business and there is something more important about government than just getting the Whig Party back into power.

Then Seth Gale enters the tavern because he has heard that Abe has a letter for him. Josh leaves to go back to Springfield and Abe resumes reading the newspaper. Ben Mattling, who has stayed in the background through all this asks Abe if he is going to run for office. Abe hasn't had enough time to think about it yet and Ben tells him not to do it. Abe is an honest man—a debt-ridden loafer—but honest just the same and he has no place going to the capital, which is nothing more than a den of thieves. Ben continues his tirade and Abe consoles him by telling him not to worry, he will not be going.

Fortunately, Ann comes back into the room to collect the empty glasses. Abe can tell by her tone of voice that something has happened; maybe it was bad news from McNiel. He asks her if she will come back and talk to him when she is finished, and she agrees to.

Seth has finished reading his letter and tells Abe that he will not be able to go west with him like they were planning. Seth's father is ill and he has to return to Maryland to run the family farm. Seth was look forward to going to Nebraska and seems to be bitterly disappointed. In addition, he does not want to disappoint Abe either. Abe tells him not to worry about it; that maybe he himself would not be able to go for a while yet. Maybe when Seth's father is well, he can return. Seth doesn't think his father will recover at his age. Seth seems resigned to his fate and tells Abe that he will see him before he leaves for good.

Ann comes back into the room and Abe asks her if her letter has brought her bad news. When she questions him, he tells her that he is the postmaster and he could not help but see that it was from McNiel and the look on her face does not indicate the receipt of good news. Ann makes a mental note to herself that he is more observant than she thought. Abe tells her that it makes him sad to think that something could have hurt her and he admits that he thinks a lot of her—he has ever since he came here and met her.

Abe invites her to talk to him and she tells him that Mr. McNiel has said that he has been delayed yet again by family troubles and does not know when he will be able to return to New Salem. In addition, she is reading between the lines believing that he never plans to return. However, it is probably just as well that he won't return, because she could not love anyone who is as faithless as he is.

Ann feels foolish for having promised herself to this man and knows how the town will gossip about her. It will be well known that she was jilted and her pride and vanity will be hurt. That is when Abe tells her about his feelings for her. Abe doesn't like to be talked about either and he has been too shy to tell her before. Abe tells her that he knows that he is not a handsome man and doesn't have much to offer any girl. However, he loves her just the same, she is sensible and brave and those are two very fine qualities, and she is easy to look at too so it's only natural that he would be attracted to her. Abe wouldn't blame her if she didn't feel the same, but if she would do him the honor of keeping company with him for a little while, maybe the town gossips would think that she had rejected McNiel in favor of Abe, and that would shut them up good and tight.

Ann tells him that she admires him too as a person but has never thought of him romantically. Abe tells her that he doesn't expect her to return his feelings. Ann does know that if she ever falls in love with him, she'll know that she's with a very fine man and she would be very happy about that… and lucky to be loving someone like him.

Abe's heart lifts a little at the prospect that she might consider him someday and he tells her that if he were able to win her, he would have faith in everything wonderful that he's ever heard or read in any poetry books. However, he vows not to pressure her or even bring up the subject until the time is right.

Abe stands to leave and tells her that he is going to find Judge Green to tell him that he has decided to run for the assembly of the State of Illinois.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

Abe's reputation in the area has earned him votes of confidence from influential men in the town and now they are seeking him out for state government. Abe is a bit skeptical of the political machine; he is a simple man not given to cunning or manipulation. However, he seems to handle people diplomatically even on the small stage of the Rutledge Tavern and it validates what Mr. Edwards has already heard of him. In addition, they know him to be a man of character who is honoring the debt incurred from his failed business. Abe is naïve yet at this point, because a political career could earn him more than enough money to rid him of that relatively small debt. However, it's his simple approach that will win him favor with his constituents and therefore with the political bosses.

The mail has been important to the events of his life today as well. Seth learns that he must return to Maryland, thwarting his and Abe's plans to move out to Nebraska. In addition, Ann's letter from McNiel has opened the opportunity for Abe to tell her how he feels about her. Ann's promise to spend time with him gives him a new confidence that allows him to run for state government. Fate has stepped in to keep Abe in Illinois to realize his destiny.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

This scene takes place at the home of Judge and Mrs. Green near New Salem. The two are reading and sewing respectively when they hear a knock at the door. The Judge and Mrs. Green comment that it doesn't sound like Abe's knock and it is actually Josh Speed, Abe's long time friend. Josh has heard that Abe is in town and has been staying with the Greens.

The Green's tell him that Abe is out at the Rutledge Farm because Ann has been stricken with the brain sickness that has been fatal for so many lately. However, they have every confidence that Ann will pull through.

Abe had rushed down from Vandalia the moment he heard that she was sick. Abe is in love and she is all he can think about, but Josh wonders if she returns the feelings. Judge Green tells him that Ann has broken off her promise to Mr. McNiel in order to marry Abe. Mrs. Green feels that Ann will be good for Abe, as he needs a woman who will look at life for him. However, Josh and the judge think that she would only be a hindrance to his career. The judge thinks that Abe should go to Springfield and set up a law practice and with Mr. Edwards' help he would be quite successful.

Josh doesn't know if he agrees with that or not and he's given up on predicting anything about Abe Lincoln. The first time he met him, Abe was piloting a steamboat and Josh was waiting on some of the goods aboard for his father's store. The boat ran into trouble at a dam, but Abe pulled it through. Josh knew immediately that Abe was a reliable man and built a friendship with him thinking that he could help him discover fame and fortune. However, Abe proved to have enough strength and courage of his own. Josh finds it hard to understand him completely. Abe can split rails and crack jokes all day, but then at night he reads things like Hamlet and broods over his resemblance to the melancholy fellow. Is Abe a great philosopher or a great fool?

Now Abe's knock is heard at the door and when they open it for him, he is standing bare headed in the rain. Abe is dressed in a respectable dark suit and looks gaunt and grim when he tells them that Ann has died. The fever got worse and there was nothing they could do. Abe is naturally very sad, yet apologizes to the Greens for his melancholy temperament, but they assure him that they care for him and want him to stay.

Abe tells them that he used to think that it was better to be alone because he always had the thought that if you got too close to people, you could see that behind the surface, they are all insane, and they could see the same in you. However, when he met Ann he knew that there was hope for beauty and purity and all doubt left him. It made him believe that anything was possible and he would have worked to get her anything she wanted and if she thought he could do something, then he could. However, tonight,

he stood by helpless as she died. Abe couldn't pray tonight and he couldn't give devotion to anything that has the power of death and uses it.

Abe stands to leave saying that all he wanted was to die and be with her right away, because he can't bear the thought of her being alone. The Greens frantically convince him to stay and get some rest, he agrees as a favor to them, and they all retire for the night.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

There seems to be a thread of untimely death in Lincoln's life. Abe's mother died when he was young, and now Ann has died as a young woman. All the women he loves die early and it seems to have made relationships difficult for him. Therefore, when Ann dies so unexpectedly, it is abound to affect him profoundly as he is already prone to melancholy… obsessing over Hamlet and comparing his own dire fate with his. How will he recover from this profound loss? Abe's male colleagues think that his career should have been the focus of his life, yet Mrs. Green thought that he simply needed the love of a good woman. How will he make the choice on what to do next? Can he have it all?

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

It is now five years later and the scene is set in the law offices of Stuart and Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. It's a small office with a desk, a few chairs, and a bed in the corner. A law clerk named Billy Herndon is working at a table when Abe walks in and tells Billy that everything has gone fine on the circuit. Abe then sits down to sort through the letters and papers that have accumulated in his absence. Billy asks him if he's had a chance to make any political speeches while he was gone, and he tells him that he did deliver a few speeches and even ran into Steven Douglas and they had a public argument.

Billy tells Abe that he has received an invitation to speak at the League of Freemen's Abolitionist rally next week. Abe tells Billy of an experience he had on a boat the other day. There was a man on board who had 12 slaves he was taking to auction and they were chained together just like fish on a line. Abe was shocked to see such a hideous display, yet he doesn't really want to speak at the Freeman's Rally because they are fanatics. Billy is disappointed, but knows that any argument on the subject is futile.

Judge Green and Josh Speed enter the office and Abe is delighted to see them. The judge tells Abe that he hears that he is still broke, but is a great social success. That's true on both counts according to Abe. In fact, he is going to the home of Mr. Edwards this evening. Mr. Edwards' wife is one of the Todd family from Kentucky, who are very important people.

Abe tells them that he has also met the President of the United States recently. In addition, he jokes that Billy is disgusted with him for associating with the wrong people. Billy is a real radical and wants Abe to let some of his own passionate impulses out to help his fellow men. Billy needs to run a legal errand before he goes, so he asks Judge Green and Josh to use their influence to drag Abe out of the stagnant pool of his current life.

Abe tells them that he is a candidate for the Electoral College. Judge Green is appalled because he has higher aspirations for Abe, but right now that's all he can manage. The slavery issue and the potential for civil war are discussed. Lincoln says that if that happens it will be the abolitionists who are to blame, because they know the potential for trouble but keep things stirred up. The judge says that he thought Abe was opposed to slavery. Abe confirms that he is opposed to it, but he's even more opposed to going to war, as he is a peace loving man and has no interest in politics. If he were to get involved now, there might come a time when he would have to cast a vote on war or peace. Therefore, he is content to serve on the Electoral College where he will simply vote in the man who will make all those momentous decisions.

Mr. Edwards now enters the law office and greets all the gentlemen. Mr. Edwards invites Abe to dinner tonight to see his sister-in-law, Miss Mary Todd, who is visiting from Kentucky. The Edwards' have asked several eligible men to come over to meet her. Apparently, she is a fine young woman who speaks French fluently, recites poetry, and knows everything possible about every flower that blooms. Abe thanks him for the invitation and tells him that he will be along soon.

Before Judge Green leaves, Abe tells him that he knows that he wants him to run for a higher public office, but he knows himself too well. There is a civil war going on inside him all the time. To him, both sides are right, both sides are wrong, and they are equal in intensity. The Bible says that a "house divided against itself cannot stand," so he doesn't think there's much hope. However, it's time for him to leave and make a good impression on Miss Mary Todd from Kentucky.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

Abe is now only 31 years old, but his youthful spirit seems to have been buried with Ann Rutledge. Lincoln seems to be a careful, thoughtful attorney more interested in what is right than in making money and he is content with that. However, there is the presence of other people who seem to think he should have higher aspirations… Judge Green and Josh Speed for example. The nature of their names leads you to believe that they have other motives… money, and quickly too. For some reason they have hitched their wagon to Lincoln's star even though he is a poor attorney with no great ambitions. Do they feel that they can gain power by leveraging their friendship if he were to attain a high political office? Are they symbolic for other public interests… Green for banking… and Speed for communications or transportation?

At any rate, Abe seems to be quite the social character, and seems pleased that he will be meeting the delightful Mary Todd this evening. Abe's life is on the verge of major changes, both personally and professionally, and it all begins tonight.

Act 2, Scene 5

Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

It is now November, six months later, and this scene takes place in the Edwards home. Mr. Edwards and his wife Elizabeth are having a heated discussion over her sister Mary's intention to marry Abe. Elizabeth feels that she must have lost her senses to consider such a thing. Abe Lincoln is amiable enough, but not fit for marriage to a high-bred, high-spirited young lady like Mary.

Mr. Edwards tells her that Abe loves her sister and has no ulterior motives for his interest in Mary. The fact that she is elegant, cultivated, and the daughter of the president of the Bank of Kentucky has no bearing on his decision.

Mary enters the room and can sense that they have been talking about her. Elizabeth tells her that she cannot understand why she would entertain the thought of marrying this fellow Abe Lincoln. It's just out of the realm of possibility for her. Mary confirms that she indeed will be Mrs. Lincoln and she has given it a lot of thought and it is exactly what she wants. Mary has met many of the young and old gentlemen they have introduced to her and he is the one she finds superior to all the others. Abe is her choice and she will tell him so tonight when he comes to call.

Elizabeth is pained by her decision and begs her to reconsider. Mary tells her it is fruitless to ask her to change her mind because she is fixed on it. Mr. Edwards is not questioning her decision; he himself has been a friend of Abe's for several years, but he would just like to know what it was that made her choose him. Mary wishes that she could give him a plain answer, but she can't.

Mary contends that her love for him is not the result of some infatuation. Make no mistake; she hasn't been swept off her feet. It's hard for her to explain, but of all the men she has known, his is the destiny she wants to share. Elizabeth challenges her that she can't be happy living his life□think of his lack of breeding, his background, his whole manner, not to mention his points of view.

Mary stoically tells her that she could never be content with a "happy" marriage. Adventure and new horizons, not security and contentment, is what she craves. Elizabeth will not give up and tells her that she will live in a log cabin, have no servant, and will not have a stitch of clothing that is fit for decent society.

Elizabeth wants to know how far her new horizons will be with a man who is lazy, shiftless, and prefers to stop and tell jokes. Mary firmly tells her that he will not stop if she is strong enough to make him push further. Mary will not lead the live that Elizabeth has chosen, living with her husband in a house with a fence all around it, not to keep others out, but to keep them from escaping their own narrow lives. Elizabeth had

married a man who was settled with a comfortable inheritance and she is now comfortably stagnant. That is not Mary's idea of the perfect life.

Abe, wearing a new suit with his hair reasonably tamed, is announced now by the maid. Abe senses that there is some electricity in the air, tries to be casually jovial, and tells them that he has been detained by a law case involving someone from back in New Salem. Mr. Edwards excuses himself and his wife to put their children to bed and Mary invites Abe to sit by her on the couch as she looks at him adoringly.

Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

Mary Todd has set her sights on Abe Lincoln despite her sister's protests. Mary is a high-spirited girl who seems to be a good match for the conservative Abe. Mary seems to be ambitious, too, and has had the benefit of power and privilege and can help him move in that world. Mary claims that she would not mind a simple life with him as long as there were some adventure, but you wonder if her ambition can be held in check. Does she really love him for who he is or who she can mold him into? Does her sister's resistance to him just fuel a perverse streak in her and make her more fixed on marrying him?

Act 2, Scene 6

Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

It's a few weeks later now… New Year's Day. It is also the day Abe and Mary are to be married. Josh and Abe are sitting in the law office and Josh is reading a letter that Abe has written. Abe wants Josh to deliver it to Mary, but after having read it, Josh refuses. Josh tells Abe that you can't deliver that kind of news to a girl in a letter. Abe is clearly distraught and it comes out that he wants to be released from the engagement. Abe has broken off relationships with other women through letters but Josh tells him that Mary Todd is no ordinary woman and he can't do this to her in this way. If he is set upon breaking up, he needs to tell her in person.

Abe feels sure that he has gone crazy, he is at the end of his rope, and is afraid that he will just drop and won't survive the fall. Abe is desperate to get out of the engagement. Josh tells him that he believes he is desperate, his situation is possibly worse than even he imagines, and that possibly he should seek some medical attention. Josh suggests that Abe show Mr. Edwards the letter when he arrives, but Abe is adamant about keeping it a secret from him.

Mr. Edwards is in a jovial mood when he comes into the law office. It is, after all, New Year's Day and Abe's wedding day. Mr. Edwards senses Abe's black mood and asks about it but he is told that Abe has just come from the funeral of Judge Green and that seems to suffice. Abe tells them that he had been asked to give an oration, but he wasn't any comfort to anyone there.

Mr. Edwards tells him that he knows that the judge would want him to put any sadness away on this day in the prospect of his happiness. All the arrangements have been made for the minister and the dinner, and it will be a very nice affair. Mr. Edwards brought a wedding present for Abe… a cane with an ornate silver head, because he thought that Abe might like to have it when he takes his first walk out with his new bride. Mr. Edwards did confess that he bought it with Mary in mind. Mary places great importance on keeping up appearances.

Mr. Edwards also tells Abe that he must keep Mary's ambition in check. According to his wife, even as a child, Mary had been headstrong, driven, and prone to delusions of grandeur. Mary always told people that she was going to marry the President of the United States. Mr. Edwards urges Abe to convince her to be content with the station she will now have. That said, he says goodbye until the wedding later this afternoon.

Billy speaks up and says honestly that he hadn't thought much of Mary up until he heard what Mr. Edwards just confessed about her. Now he thinks she is grand and that her ambition is just what Abe needs. Billy drinks to their marriage and to her courage. Abe tells him that he has a letter that he would like him to deliver to Mary, but before he can say anything, Josh pulls it out of his pocket and throws it on the fire.

Josh tells Billy the contents of the letter; that Abe wanted to be released from his promise to her; their marriage would only lead to endless pain and misery for both of them. Josh concedes that Abe is allowed to feel however he wants, but delivering the message in a letter to a girl on her wedding day is not appropriate at all.

Abe says that he is afraid to face her. Abe knows he will blurt out the hatred he has for her ambition—that he doesn't want to be poked and prodded all his life, upward and onward, with her whip lashing at him until the end of his days. Let her marry Stephen Douglas, as he would be a more suitable partner for her. If that's the case, then Josh tells him to tell her that—but don't let her think that his ardor has cooled.

Hearing all this, Billy is moved to passionate speech now and tells Abe that he would not be abandoning Mary Todd. Abe would only be using her as a living sacrifice in the hope that he will gain forgiveness of the gods for his failure to do his own great duty. Abe is frustrated beyond words and is tired of everyone reminding him of his great duty when he has no idea what it is. Right now, he prefers to mind his own business and there would be no threat to the Union if everyone were to do the same.

Abe is weary of all this rhetoric and is resigned to go visit Mary. After that, he says he will go away somewhere. Abe leaves and Josh tells Billy that Abe is a sick man. After he speaks to Mary, he'll be in such a state of emotional upheaval just like after Ann Rutledge died, that he will wander on the prairies groping his way back into the wilderness from which he came. There is nothing they can do for him right now.

Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

For some reason, Abe is despondent about marrying Mary Todd. Could it be that every woman he has ever loved has died and he can't bear to lose someone else in his life? Abe says that it's her ambition that is the problem, but is it really? Although he does get pleas from all sides to realize his great destiny, does he think Mary is the one to make the final push into the inevitable?

Abe seems to be plagued with depression too, as exhibited in his appearance and demeanor. Josh alludes to it when he tells Billy that he will wander on the prairies groping his way back into the wilderness from which he came. That indicates a sense of darkness and maybe even temporary madness stemming from these depressive episodes. Josh is probably right in telling him not to commit to marriage in his current state and suggesting some medical treatment.

Act 2, Scene 7

Act 2, Scene 7 Summary

Eight years later, Abe's old friend Seth, his wife Aggie, their son Jimmy, and a Negro named Gobey are camped out on a prairie near Old Salem. Jack Anderson has approached their campsite and tells them that Abe will be here soon after he has visited the grave of Ann Rutledge. Billy has swamp fever and Seth would feel better if Abe were around.

Finally, Abe wanders in and the old friends greet each other warmly. Seth tells him that he is finally moving out to Nebraska and taking his family to start a new life where there is room to move. Abe wants to know if Gobey is free or a slave and Seth tells him that he has been free for 20 years. Abe tells him that he hopes the Western territory will be free of slavery but there is no guarantee. Seth vehemently tells him that if it isn't, he will move his family to Canada or start a new country out there.

Abe tells Seth that after listening to him he now knows what he needs to do to keep people like Seth and his family in this country. Abe encourages Seth to never give up and not to let anything beat him. The family asks Abe to say a prayer, so he does, and then he leaves to go find the only doctor in the area to return to help little Jimmy.

Act 2, Scene 7 Analysis

Seth has set out to realize the dream that he and Abe had all those years ago. In the meantime, Abe has just been wandering. However, seeing Seth's conviction about a new life and the intense hope that the Western states will stay free states, has given Abe new courage and inspiration. After all this time, and all the influential people who have tried to get Abe to realize his greater purpose, it is his old friend with a dream which has never died that shows him what he must do. Abe must keep this country as one union so that it doesn't lose the good people whose spirit and hard work have made it great.

Act 2, Scene 8

Act 2, Scene 8 Summary

A few days after meeting Seth near Old Salem, Abe returns to the Edwards home to call on Mary Todd. Mary is startled when the maid tells her that he is here and takes a few minutes to compose herself. When he comes into the room, he wants to get right to his point, but she is trying to be sociable. Abe apologizes for his behavior at their last meeting, the day that would have been their wedding day. Mary excuses him and tells him that whatever happened was her fault because she had been blinded by her own self-confidence. Mary felt that she could make him love her and that they could achieve a union where her fire would burn in him. Abe would be a leader of men but he didn't want that. Mary knows that he is strong, but she never dreamed that he would use that strength to resist his own magnificent destiny.

Abe apologizes again and says that he now sees the error in his judgment all those years ago and would like her to marry him if she'll have him. Mary would have liked to play the coquette, but she was so overcome with love for him that she threw herself into him and declared her undying love.

When she asked him what made him change his mind he tells her about meeting Seth who is moving out West with his family and that Seth asked him to go along. Although he was tempted, he realized that his destiny and direction lay in the way she always wanted him to go. Mary cries, they embrace, and he looks down at the carpet over her shoulder.

Act 2, Scene 8 Analysis

Even though it has been eight years since they last saw each other, Mary's love for Abe is just as strong as it has ever been. Mary has not married anyone else in all this time. It's as if she knew all along that he would realize that what she had been telling him was true and that he would return one day. Being a person of strong ambition, she could recognize it in him, but probably knew that it would just take longer to be realized in someone like Abe who shunned most public interaction. Therefore, it's not really the celebrity that finally lures him back to his destiny, but the chance meeting with his old friend who rekindles the spark he once had for doing a greater good. Somehow, he knows that Mary is the one who can help him accomplish it.

Act 2, Scene 9

Act 2, Scene 9 Summary

On a summer evening in 1858, Abe is on a platform in an Illinois town, about to debate Judge Stephen Douglas in the race for the U.S. Senate. Mr. Edwards is the moderator and invites Judge Douglas to speak first. The judge begins by telling the crowd that Mr. Lincoln uses his artless charm to deceive them because he is as Brutus was to Caesar. Mr. Lincoln is an honorable man but also adept at using daggers on his opponent when his opponent least expects it. Douglas continues that Mr. Lincoln will make you laugh one minute and then have you crying for the plight of the black man in the Southern states. However, never does he address the dire situation of the mill workers in New England who are on strike. How about the railroad workers in Illinois who are also on strike? Is this what he would call equality and freedom?

The judge tells them that Lincoln is trying to stir up rebellion in this country and is willing to set brother against brother. There can be only one consequence of all this talk and that is Civil War. Douglas will not side with those who advocate that he eat, drink, and sleep with Negroes. Each state should mind its own business and let its neighbors alone. The division among the States should go on as it has and this country will achieve even greater prosperity and power.

Abe gets up to speak and his tone is sincere and profound. Abe thanks Mr. Douglas for acknowledging his skills with a dagger, but he is the one who is the expert, as he can keep ten daggers in the air at once and none ever falls to hurt anyone. The judge can condone slavery and protest its cousin in the North. In the same breath, he talks about preserving the Union and the states' rights.

Abe's speech continues that in no way does he condone the deplorable conditions under which some people live in the industrial states. Certainly none of them would trade places with the slaves in the South. The people in the North at least have the right to strike which makes all the difference. Rebellion or disrespect for the Supreme Court is not what he is preaching, but the men who make the decisions for this country come from the privileged class in the South, and that is what must be changed if this country is to continue to stand.

The Constitution says that all men are created equal… not all men except Negroes. Who's to say it would stop there? Soon it may include Catholics, Jews, foreigners, or just poor people in general. When you start to qualify freedom, beware of the consequences to you. Civil War is not what he is recommending; he is simply restating the fundamentals of democracy. Abe feels that the judge's position of letting things alone shows an indifference to evil and he cannot abide that.

Abe ends by saying that there can be no distinction in the definitions of liberty as between one section and another, one race and another, or one class and another. A

house divided against itself cannot stand. This government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.

Act 2, Scene 9 Analysis

Lincoln has hit his stride as a great orator in this famous debate, he delivers it without the benefit of any notes, and he delivers it with a passion that comes from his very core. It's interesting to see that Douglas' comments about his backwoods naiveté don't rattle him at all. Abe is highly principled and has the courage of his convictions, in contrast to Douglas who seems to say what is convenient or popular. Although this is still just a Senate race, he has set the stage for his future role. The political climate is heating up and he will be compelled to follow this course to its completion.

Act 3, Scene 10

Act 3, Scene 10 Summary

The Lincolns are now living in the home once used by the Edwards family. It is in the early spring of 1860 and Abe is telling his sons about his old friend Seth. Josh is also there and listening. Mary comes into the room and finds out that some very influential men are scheduled to visit this afternoon with the intent to determine whether Abe would make a good candidate for President. Mary is alarmed that he didn't tell her of this important visit and when she sends him away to clean his boots, she speaks to Josh.

Mary is frustrated with his casual attitude about this. Most men who achieve anything have to fight and assert themselves and are questioned by their friends. Abe has never had to struggle for any position and his friends are always furthering his cause. Even before she met him, she was told that he had a glorious future… why won't he believe it? So much energy is put into him avoiding it and she can't make the least bit of progress with him. Now the greatest opportunity in the world is about to enter their home and it doesn't even occur to him that his boots are muddy. Mary thought she could help shape him but she has succeeded in nothing but breaking herself.

Josh tells her that she shouldn't be hard on herself as the destiny of each of us in the hands of God. Abe returns with clean boots and Mary leaves to prepare some refreshments. The men arrive and interview Abe about his position on business issues, religion, and labor issues. The men feel that he has won enough popular appeal, is diplomatic enough to swing the private interest groups, and they agree that he is their man for presidential candidate.

Act 3, Scene 10 Analysis

Abe, the most non-political person, is about to enter the biggest political arena ever at one of the most critical times in the history of the country. The men who interview him to determine his readiness for candidacy feel that they can get him elected and then continue to use him when he inhabits the White House. However, his being true to his own code, which is part of his appeal, will probably dash any long-term hopes they might have of controlling him. Even his wife of 18 years has no such influence and her ambition for him and them has not yet been allowed to flourish, but the stage is now set for its debut.

Act 3, Scene 11

Act 3, Scene 11 Summary

It is now the evening of Election Day, November 6, 1860. Lincoln's campaign headquarters are buzzing with Abe, Mary, their son Robert, Josh, and Mr. Edwards. Clerks run in and out of the room updating the tally board as new information comes in. Mary's nerves are really rattled from the pressure and the constant changes in the results. Abe tells her that maybe she should go home and he would be there very soon, but she erupts and tells him that he has never wanted her around, even before their marriage and it hasn't changed up to this day. Mary then accuses the others of the same thing. Abe asks them to leave the room, chastises her harshly for her outburst, and warns her to never do it again in front of other people. Mary leaves, but not before telling him that she had dreamed of this night when she was a little girl and now even if he does win, his behavior toward her has ruined it.

There is a continuous flurry of clerks in and out of the room and a crowd outside begins singing Lincoln's praises. The people in the room know that a victory this night will be a mixed blessing. If he is elected, the Southern states will begin to secede from the Union and surely, Civil War will be right behind that. However, if there ever was a man who could lead the country through this, it is Abraham Lincoln.

At 10:30, the bulletin comes in that Lincoln has carried the state of New York and won the election. Abraham Lincoln is the new President of the United States. The supporters in the room congratulate him heartily and he thanks them all for their help and support. Now he must go home to be with Mary. Almost on cue, a military officer named Kavanagh enters with two other soldiers and tells Abe that they have been assigned to escort him. Abe is resigned to his fate now and leaves with his personal guards around him.

Act 3, Scene 11 Analysis

Abe is very nonchalant during the frenzy of the Election Night returns, while Mary is a bundle of nerves. It clearly has more significance for her. It has always been a dream of hers and for him it's the reluctant acceptance of a noble duty. It is shown that Mary has a highly neurotic personality and it is Abe who must keep her in line. Was she always this way or have all the years of his rebuffing her attempts to infuse him with more ambition simply worn her down? If that's the case, she has just won the biggest prize of her life too and she is too fragile to enjoy it. So in the end, both of them have accomplished this magnificent goal. What will be the cost?

Act 3, Scene 12

Act 3, Scene 12 Summary

Today is the day that Lincoln will leave Springfield for Washington. Kavanagh is pacing the ground at the railroad car anticipating his arrival. The guard has been with him for three months now and is afraid that he won't be able to protect him with all the threats on Abe's life. Abe is not concerned about it and he just prefaces any statements about the future with the words "if I live." Edwards and his wife Elizabeth are there, as well as Josh and Billy. The crowd, which has gathered to see him off, is growing and chanting. Finally, Abe enters with Mary and their sons following him. Kavanagh is anxious to get him into the train car, but the crowd calls for a speech. Lincoln obliges them and thanks them for everything. Springfield has been his home for 25 years and he leaves today not knowing if he will ever see it again. The challenges facing him and the country are immense. Yet it is also a time of great opportunity to test the strength of the Constitution and hopefully find it intact when the challenge is ended. Abe asks God to watch over them and turns to board the train and watches the singing crowd with some melancholy, waves, and then enters the train car as the whistle screeches with impatience.

Act 3, Scene 12 Analysis

Abe's destiny is about to be played out on the world stage. Lincoln seems to be suffering from a perpetual state of melancholy at what fate has offered up for him and he regretfully tells the people goodbye as if he knows that his future will be trying at best and short lived. It's interesting to note that Mary's sister, Elizabeth, who once told her that Abe had no future, is now on the platform to show support. Mary herself says nothing and shows no sign of happiness or sadness. You wonder if this is still a hollow victory for her personally or whether she has been able to rally and assume her new role. At any rate, she wanted adventure and new horizons with this man and she is about to get her wish, however delayed.

Characters

Jack Armstrong

Armstrong is the leader and the most aggressive of the Clary's Grove Boys, a gang of bullies in New Salem. When the gang enters the Rutledge Tavern, Armstrong speaks roughly to Ann Rutledge and tries to pick a fight with Ninian Edwards. He stops when Lincoln enters, though. He respects Lincoln, in part because Lincoln is a man of the people and not a rich sophisticate like Edwards, but mostly he respects Lincoln because Lincoln is the only man in the territory who can beat him in a fight. Lincoln shows respect for Armstrong, too, preferring to joke with him rather than threaten him. Years later, Lincoln mentions that he is defending Armstrong's son Duff on a murder charge, even though Duff seems to be hopelessly guilty. Armstrong is the one to bring Lincoln to the aid of Seth Gale when Jimmy Gale falls sick as the family is passing through New Salem.

Billy

See William Herndon

Stephen A, Douglas

Douglas was a politician who ran against Lincoln for the Senate. He was a skilled orator, only slightly less persuasive than Lincoln. The series of debates that the two men had in 1858, primarily over the issue of slavery, became national news, giving Lincoln the fame that he needed across the land to run for president. Scene 9 presents one of those debates.

Ninian Edwards

Edwards is the son of the governor of Illinois. Although he comes from a wealthy background, he is not afraid to stand up for himself and fight Jack Armstrong, if necessary, although it is likely he would lose. He is the one to introduce Lincoln to his sister-in-law, Mary Todd. During the debate between Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in Scene 9, Ninian Edwards is the narrator.

Seth Gale

At the very start of the play, Seth Gale plans to move with Lincoln out to the open territory west of the Mississippi river, where land is cheap and political systems are not yet established. He has to drop out of the plan, though, when he receives a letter saying that his father is ill and that he has to return to run the family farm. Ten years later, when

his parents are dead, Seth finally does move west. While passing through New Salem with his wife, child, and a free Negro servant, Gale's son Jimmy becomes ill, and Lincoln and Jack Armstrong help out his family. Seth's family is an inspiration to Lincoln, who sees how important it is to stop slavery before it spreads to the new territory, so that people like the Gales do not have to worry about what kind of morals with which their children will be raised.

Gobey

A free Negro who works for Seth Gale's family. His father had been a slave, but was freed by Seth's father twenty years earlier. While they lived in Maryland, there was always the danger that kidnappers might abduct Gobey and take him to the South, where they would sell him as a slave.

Mentor Graham

Mentor Graham only appears in the first scene, tutoring Lincoln. The examples that he uses reflect the political attitudes that Lincoln shows later in the play, particularly the selection from Senator Daniel Webster about whether the South has a right to secede from the Union.

Bowling Green

One of Lincoln's oldest friends, Green is a judge whose influence guides Lincoln's early political career. He brings Edwards, the son of the state's governor, to see Lincoln and to consider him as a possible candidate for the state assembly. It is partially because of his grief when Bowling Green dies that Lincoln breaks off his engagement to Mary Todd and goes off for nearly two years to think.

William Herndon

A young clerk in Lincoln's law office in Springfield, Herndon is driven by two strong compulsions. The first is alcohol; there is not a scene in which he is not either drunk or on his way to get himself a drink. Lincoln notes in Act IV that when Herndon leaves to take some papers to the clerk's office, which is downstairs in the same building, he takes his hat, which is a sign that he intends to go to the saloon. Herndon's other driving passion is his staunch opposition to slavery. He functions as Lincoln's conscience on the slavery issue. While Lincoln himself takes a tolerant attitude toward the laws of the South, Herndon is more radical, constantly pushing him to speak out against slavery, to refuse to associate with slaveholders or with supporters of slavery. Although Lincoln privately opposes slavery, he resists Herndon's efforts to get him to speak out against it at political gatherings.

Kavanagh

Kavanagh is a secret service agent who moves in to protect Lincoln immediately after he is elected president. His presence indicates the way that the office distances the man from the men who helped him get there. Immediately after the election returns are announced, Kavanagh moves in, coming between Lincoln and the people, walking before Lincoln through doorways to look for assassins. His concern is not just a matter of paranoia; as he points out, there were many threats on Lincoln's life by Southerners who felt that he would endanger their right to own slaves. Audiences, of course, know that Lincoln was killed by an assassin, so all of Kavanagh' s precautions have an element of prophecy to them.

Abe Lincoln

This play is about the formative years of Abraham Lincoln, explaining how he grew in outlook and popularity from a simple country man to the president of the United States. As a result, every scene of the play either has Lincoln in it or has people talking about him. In the beginning, Lincoln is in his early twenties and being tutored in English grammar at night, using a variety of texts for examples. Even at such a young age, he is financially destitute, having invested in a business with a man who ran away with all of the funds and feeling responsible for paying back all creditors. He is already haunted by death, having helped his father make a coffin for his mother when she died out in the prairie wilderness. He is popular with the men of New Salem, where he delivers mail. He is in love with Ann Rutledge, but when her fiance drops her and Lincoln has a slight chance with her, she dies. After Lincoln begins practicing in Springfield, he becomes engaged to Mary Todd, whose ambitions for his political career are greater than his own. On the day of his wedding, though, he runs away from her, and stays away for two years, until a chance encounter with an old friend and his family makes him think about responsibility, both to his family and to the country. He returns and marries Mary.

In the late 1850s, while they both are running for the United States Senate, he and Stephen A. Douglas have a series of debates on the subject of slavery: these debates receive much attention and make Lincoln's name a household word. A committee of civic leaders comes to him to ask if he is interested in running for president. The final chapter of the play presents his farewell speech to the people of Illinois. Lincoln is not entirely enthusiastic about being the president he tells friends that he expects to die, and he feels cut off by security measures from the people he knows best, the common people. He and Mary Todd are both unhappy in their marriage, but both are driven toward the presidency.

Ann Rutledge

Ann is the daughter of the owner of Rutledge Tavern, a meeting place in New Salem. She is forced to take orders from the tough local people who order her around when they want drinks. Lincoln has a crush on her, but he is not able to say so because she is

engaged, and also because he is a homely man with financial debt and no social prestige. In Act II, a letter comes from Ann's fiance, Mr. McNiel, and Lincoln recognizes the handwriting and the fact that it has come from New York State. Seeing that it has upset her, he asks and finds out that McNiel probably is not coming back. Because Ann is upset about what people will say about her when they find out that her fiance has dropped her, Lincoln declares his love for her, hoping that she could use an engagement with him to explain breaking up with McNiel. She tells him that she has never thought of him like that, and that she would have to consider his proposal. In the following scene, Lincoln's political patrons, Green and Speed, discuss the fact that his romance with her might hinder Lincoln's political career, but Lincoln arrives soon after with the startling news that she has died of a sickness that they all thought she would easily survive.

Joshua Speed

Described in Scene 2 as "quiet, mild, solid, thoughtful, well-dressed," Speed is from Springfield, and is a member of the Whig party who knows the small local towns like New Salem well enough to think of Lincoln when asked who might be a good candidate for the state assembly. He is full of admiration for Lincoln, but has doubts about his ability for success: "he has plenty of strength and courage in his body," Speed tells Bowling and Nancy Green, "but in his mind he's a hopeless hypochondriac." Speed is usually present in meetings for political planning, but he is not very instrumental, usually limiting his input to asking questions and giving encouraging advice. In a decisive moment, he destroys the letter that Lincoln has written to Mary to break off their engagement.

Mary Todd

Mary is a willful woman, a bright, well-connected socialite, the daughter of the president of the Bank of Kentucky. She has many suitors, including Stephen Douglas, but to the surprise of her sister, Elizabeth Edwards, she chooses to marry Lincoln. Her choice is carefully thought out; she sees him, of all of the eligible bachelors around, to be the one with the greatest potential. She does not want social prestige or financial comfort and would live in poverty, "so long as there is forever before me the chance for high adventure so long as I can know that I am always going forward, with my husband, along that road that leads to the horizon." On the day of their wedding, Lincoln gets cold feet and runs away, but when he returns two years later Mary accepts him back and marries him. Mary becomes very status conscious when she is married to him, which causes strain in their marriage. She is horrified that he has invited several politicians over without telling her, because she feels that the house is not sufficiently clean. She refuses to let him smoke in the house, and so, when one of the politicians lights a cigar, Lincoln encourages him, telling him to bring it along as he comes to the dining room. On the night of his election to the presidency, they have a serious fight. Nervous about the changing results, Mary becomes hysterical and shouts, "You only want to be rid of me! That's what you've wanted ever since the day we married and before that. Anything to

get me out of your sight, because you hate me!" Lincoln calmly asks the other people to leave the room before shouting back at her. Even though he immediately apologizes, Mary declares that he has ruined the most important day of her life.

Themes

Death

Lincoln's life, as it is presented in this play, was ruled by his feelings about the deaths that he witnessed. Lincoln's issues with death begin early, in the first scene, when Lincoln tells Mentor Graham that he thinks about death often "because it has always seemed to be close to me as far back as I can remember." He then describes helping build a coffin for his mother, who died when he was young, relating it to the men he saw in New Orleans who "had murder in their hearts." The theme of death is continued with his loss of Ann Rutledge, the woman that he loved, who was socially and physically out of his league. Her death causes him to retreat from his political rise. He explains to Bowling and Nancy Green, "I couldn't give any devotion to one who has the power of death, and uses it" a statement referring to prayer, but with implications to the responsibilities he will accept as president, sending troops off to war. Just as Ann's death drives him away from political involvement, the death of his longtime friend Bowling Green makes him retreat from his planned marriage to Mary Todd. It is the near-death of young Jimmy Gale, though, that pulls him back into a sense of responsibility in both political and personal arenas. His prayer at the end of Scene 7 relates life to freedom and death to imprisonment and shows Lincoln shifting from despair to hope. Throughout the whole play, one element of death remains constant. His expectation of his own early death is present in the first scene, with his fear of the city, and is still present in the final scene, when, as Elizabeth points out, he always prefaces his plans with, "If I live ..."

Doubt and Ambiguity

Abe Lincoln in Illinois offers audiences a new way to look at Lincoln. Popular conception, based on his decisive actions during the Civil War, remember him as a man with a vision, who could see the necessity of fighting to preserve the Union no matter what the cost, and historical studies almost unanimously praise him for making the right choices. What Sherwood presents in this play, however, is a view of Lincoln as an uncertain man who in no way felt that he knew the right thing to do and who did what he could to avoid the responsibility of making decisions about the lives of others. From the moment when it is first suggested that he might run for political office, in Scene 2, he comes up with various excuses why the people would not want to vote for him, and why he himself is unfit for the position. His run for the presidency is just as clouded by doubt. "I'm afraid I can't go quite that far in self-esteem," he tells the committee that comes to offer him the nomination. In addition, he is never confident in romance, humbly asking Ann Rutledge to consider him in spite of his faults, and later backing out on his marriage to Mary Todd on their wedding day because, as his letter puts it, their marriage "could only lead to endless pain and misery for them both." In his notes, Sherwood points out that the real Lincoln did not seem so ambiguous, especially regarding his own political career; while the play presents him as someone who has to be dragged to action, he

was actually a much more active participant in his own fate. For the sake of drama, this man, who is known all over the world as a fearless leader, is presented as growing into his fearlessness and confidence in his early, formative years.

War and Peace

Lincoln's entire presidency was engulfed by the Civil War. Some Southern states split away from the country before he even took office. The war began when Southern troops fired on Fort Sumter, just over a month after he was inaugurated, and he was assassinated five days after the South surrendered. It is ironic that he is so closely associated with war, when Lincoln, as presented in this play, is a man who supported peace at almost any cost. Throughout much of the play, Lincoln opposes slavery, but he does not oppose it strongly enough to support open hostility over it. In Scene 4, he speaks with disgust about seeing slaves shackled together, but when he is asked to participate in a rally against slavery he dismisses the opponents of slavery as "a pack of hell-roaring fanatics." He equates opposition to slavery with violence, and so he cannot condone it. He feels that the abolitionists who are fighting to abolish slavery are agitators who should be put in jail for disturbing the peace. "I am opposed to slavery," he tells his friends. "But I'm even more opposed to going to war."

By the time of his debate against Stephen Douglas in Scene 9, he is more in favor of involvement. He opposes his own former policy, saying that the fundamental virtues of democracy are threatened by the institution of slavery: "I believe most seriously that the perpetuation of those virtues is now endangered, not only by the honest proponents of slavery, but even more by those who echo Judge Douglas in shouting, 'Leave it alone!'" On election night, Billy Herndon points out two facts that are evident to everybody: Lincoln will go to war against any states that try to secede, and that they will secede upon his election. Horrible as the prospect of war is, he has come, throughout the course of the play, to accept it as the only right thing to do.

Style

Structure

Most full-length plays are divided into two or three acts, or, as in the case of most of Shakespeare's works, into five. Each of these acts is further divided into scenes, usually two or three per act. Very few dramas reach the level of twelve scenes, as *Abe Lincoln in Illinois does*. In addition, very few are written for a cast as large as this, which has more than thirty performers. This is a work of epic scope, fitting three decades of Lincoln's life into a few hours onstage. It incorporates many familiar moments and expressions that are part of the Lincoln legend, as well as new ones that were fabricated by Sherwood to dramatize the aspects of Lincoln's character that he thought were most important. There is no consistency in the lengths of the individual acts, nor is there any pattern used in the play's structure to remind readers of things that came before. For instance, Scene 8 is the shortest scene, just a little more than four pages, which is a length not approached by any other scene. It is not part of any larger repeating pattern, either; there is no real relationship between Scene 8, which ends Act II, and either of the scenes that end the first or third acts. The structure of this play is not aimed at any measurable sense of style, it is aimed at making sure that all of the important parts of the Lincoln legend have been taken into account.

Because it is a biography, the most obvious structure, the one that Sherwood used, is chronological, following the order of time. Other plays use devices such as flashbacks, to tell what happened earlier in time, or tricks of lighting to show action that happens in two different places at once. *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* starts when Lincoln is twenty-one and progresses straight through to his election to the presidency. It would be a simple structure, if not for the many scene changes and characters involved.

Setting

The setting of this play is crucial to its message. It is a play about Lincoln's formative years, how he came to be the president that he was. It does not focus solely on his formative years in the wilderness, but presents Lincoln within a period of transformation. In the early scenes around New Salem, in the first act, he is light-hearted, good-natured, well liked, but unsure. His attitude is changed by the death of Ann Rutledge, who succumbs to "the brain sickness." Like Seth Gale's son Jimmy, who is overcome in Scene 7 with "the swamp fever," and Lincoln's own mother, whom he describes as having died of "the milksick," people out in the prairie were susceptible to disease and early death. When Lincoln moves to Springfield, the issues examined by the play take on a more political nature. His rise in politics coincides with scenes that are set in offices and homes. In these settings, political issues are discussed, especially the burning issue of the day: slavery. This follows naturally because Lincoln is a politician, but it also is more expected that people in town would be aware of national political issues than people in remote villages like New Salem, where the news is delivered once a week. A

turning point in Lincoln's life comes when he discusses the issue of slavery with the Gale family on the prairie, as they are passing from the sophisticated, crowded East Coast to the unsettled space in the West, and he realizes that slavery affects people in all areas of the country, no matter how remote.

The importance of this play's prairie setting can be seen in the fact that it ends when Lincoln leaves Illinois. In part, this change is required by the play's title it only promises to tell audiences about his life in Illinois but it also makes thematic and psychological sense to consider a chapter of his development complete and fulfilled.

Historical Context

The Abolitionist Movement

Slavery existed in the United States from the earliest colonial days, with settlers first using captured Native Americans to do the heavy labor of cultivating and then importing poor people from Europe to work as indentured servants, a position almost equal to slavery. In the 1680s, southern landowners began importing slaves from Africa. From colonial times, laws defined black slaves and their children as property, to be owned for life. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 made it easier to process cotton and increased the demand for cotton. In the South, which had the soil and climate for cotton production, slavery became an institution and a necessary part of the economy.

The Abolitionist Movement, which fought to abolish slavery, is generally considered to have started in 1831, when the newspaper *The Liberator* began publication in Boston. A few years later, in 1833, which is the year of the first act of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, delegates from all over the country met in Philadelphia to form the American Anti-Slavery Society, which was to become the principle organization for fighting for slaves' freedom. It was a time of vocal opposition to injustice, especially in the New England states. There were movements to encourage the government to adapt free schooling, workers rights, and voting rights for women, and groups that wanted the government to put an end to slavery, consumption of alcohol, and imprisonment for debt. Out of this rash of social movements, the Abolitionist Movement was to become one of the largest and most lasting. Its members, like Billy Herndon in *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, were passionate in their opposition to slavery, and they kept pressure on the government to limit the spread of slave ownership as the country grew.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act

Throughout this play, Abraham Lincoln becomes increasingly conscious of how slavery affects his life, even though he lives in a free state and would rather ignore the issue altogether. One of the reasons that Americans were so aware of slavery in the 1830s to 1860s was that the country was still expanding westward, and when each new territory applied to become a state, there had to be a decision about whether it would be free or slave. The issue was settled for a long time by the Missouri Compromise, which was a series of legislative measures enacted in 1820. To get around Southern opposition to Maine entering the Union as a free state and Northern opposition to Missouri entering as a slave state, Congress decreed that future slavery states would be limited to those south of a line near 36 degrees latitude. By the 1850s, though, activists on both sides of the issue were becoming angry about the gains that were being made on the other side. Congress passed a new law, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which superseded the Missouri Compromise.

Some politicians, led by Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas (who appears as a character in this play), fought for measures that would allow new territories to vote on whether they wanted to be free states or slave states as they entered the Union. When the Kansas Territory was opened for settlement in 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed, allowing the issue of slavery to be settled by popular vote. Thousands of settlers crossed the border from pro-slavery Missouri, and, to counter their votes, thousands of Abolitionists came from the Northeast. The violence that followed was extreme, earning the territory the nickname "Bloody Kansas." Compromise measures to end the killing were suggested, voted upon, and rejected, until Kansas finally was admitted to the Union as a free state in 1861. In the meantime, though, the country had seen that emotions on the slavery issue were so strong that they could not be ignored or be left to settle themselves in a spirit of cooperation. The face of politics had changed: the Whig party, which had existed since the country was formed, was so divided that it eventually dissolved, and in its place rose a new party: the Republicans. When the Democrats nominated Douglas as their presidential candidate in 1860, southern Democrats objected, putting forward their own candidate instead. The split in the Democratic party allowed Lincoln to win the election in 1860.

Theater in the 1930s

The Great Depression began in 1929, two years after the first commercially successful sound movie. During the 1930s, audiences shifted their attention to movies, which cost a fraction of what plays cost and were able to bring the biggest stars to small towns all across America, all at the same time. Theater became more of an isolated pursuit, written for and enjoyed by an educated class. At the same time, intellectual circles, disappointed by the failure of the American economy, began experimenting with other forms of government, such as communism and socialism. In some ways, this new social consciousness resembled the rise of the social movements like the abolitionists in New England in the 1830s. Some theater groups were formed on socialist principles, with equal rights granted to all players and decisions made by group consent. For instance, the members of the American Laboratory Theater not only worked together, but lived together, as well, and the members of the Mercury Theater staged *The Cradle Will Rock* without any sets or costumes after the government withdrew its support money, claiming that its pro-union stance was too controversial.

Abe Lincoln in Illinois was the first production of the Playwrights' Company, a group that Sherwood and several other writers formed in response to the mishandling of their plays by members of the Dramatists' Guild. They felt that the Guild was too wrapped up with making petty decisions about casting and rights for movie adaptations to present their works properly, so they decided to form their own group. Sherwood, Elmer Rice, Maxwell Anderson, Sidney Howard, and S. N. Behrman founded the Playwrights' Company in 1938. At the time, Sherwood had almost completed *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, so he presented it to the others in the group, and it was the first play that they staged, with great success.

Critical Overview

Critics have considered Robert E. Sherwood's drama *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* to be a labor of love, and an important part of the mythology that defines the American character, but the general consensus among serious critics is that it is not a very well-crafted piece. Even before this play was produced, Eleanor Flexner identified several repetitive aspects of Sherwood's plots. "A man wise, cynical, and charming finds the answer to his quest for the meaning of life, in a woman; suddenly he falls in love, no less suddenly his life is wrenched from its old pattern, and in three cases out of four he goes gallantly to his death in consequence." She went on to identify the background of war as a device that Sherwood used for sustaining tension, "a device forced upon him by his inability to construct a play in which the suspense will arise from the actions of the characters themselves." Flexner found these plot elements overextended in 1938, and it is unlikely that she would have found much changed in *Abe Lincoln In Illinois*, from the title character's doomed but ennobling love for Ann Rutledge to his own impending fate.

When the play was produced, critical responses were mixed. It was immensely popular, running on Broadway for 472 performances, longer than any of Sherwood's other works, and it was successfully adapted to a movie in 1940, for which Sherwood wrote the script. Many critics accepted it, as audiences did, as an entertaining dramatization of the old legends, and these critics endorsed the play enthusiastically, but with the slightly condescending sense that viewing it would be one's civic duty. More thoughtful critics, however, held the play to a higher standard, and these writers seemed to find it their reluctant duty to point out its flaws. Even Carl Sandburg, whose three-volume biography of Lincoln was one of Sherwood's main biographical sources, seemed to choose his words of praise very carefully. Instead of saying that Sherwood has done a fine job of translating Lincoln's life to the stage, Sandburg tells readers that Sherwood was conscious of using good sources and also of the fact that he needed to change some facts for dramatic purpose. The introduction continued with further evasion, telling readers that Sherwood's play "carries some shine of the American dream," that it "delivers great themes of human wit, behavior and freedom." What was lacking, in this discussion of Sherwood's methods, was any statement that it is consistently good.

Sandburg implied that the play bends reality too much for the sake of popularity his only criticism of a more accurate drama is that people might not go "to see or value it as a drama." Other critics, in contrast, have found that Sherwood did not take enough dramatic license with his biographical material. Francis Fergusson, writing in the *Southern Review*, felt that the play offered a succession of elements of the Lincoln legend without ever coming together as a unified work of art. "We never get the immediate sense of actuality which good drama gives and which comes from the vitality and dramatic necessity of each character and the imaginative consistency of the whole," he wrote. The facts of Lincoln's life, Fergusson wrote, just were not enough to tell the story: "they may be history, they may be souvenirs, but they are not drama." He noted that Sherwood's supporting characters, such as Mary Todd and Joshua Speed, "owe their existence to the books, they have no life of their own." They are "perfunctory, like the Martha Washington in the school pageant."

After Sherwood's death, a critical biography by R. Baird Shuman was able to look at the context of all of his works. "If Robert Sherwood were to be remembered for any one of his plays," Shuman wrote, "it is likely that the play which would fix his name in the galaxy of the immortals is *Abe Lincoln In Illinois*. The Lincoln play is not his best drama, but more people have probably seen it and been affected by it than by any of his other productions." Like most critics, Shuman was willing to admit that his own misgivings about the play's artistry must give way to its immense popularity.

In 1970, Walter J. Meserve came close to defining that exotic mixture of talent and popular sensibility that made Sherwood's work difficult for critics to either love or ignore. "It is easy enough to describe the part that Sherwood did not play," he wrote. "He was not an experimenter nor an innovator, nor was he an influential dramatist in the developing American theatre. He was not a theorist; in fact, one of his friends and directors stated that he did not have a theory of drama.... He was, of course, a dramatist who naturally and frankly dealt with the emotions that America wanted to feel, who knew how to express them in good theatre." With the benefit of looking back in time, Meserve was able to summarize Sherwood's career and mixed accomplishments with respect but not flattery: "Never a great playwright, he spoke intensely and with wit and integrity during a period in history when such plays as his were needed."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of Creative Writing and Script Writing at two colleges in Illinois. In the following essay, he discusses the inherent limitations of writing biographical drama.

One of the most respected of all American historical biographies for the stage is Robert E. Sherwood's play *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. It is a difficult piece to judge objectively, since it concerns a president who, more than most, is key to how Americans see themselves. Lincoln was a man of the people, a pioneer who came to be president without a law degree or much formal schooling at all. He was a compassionate man, willing to face up to a force as powerful as the Confederacy to end slavery. There are folktales about Lincoln, and there are many witticisms attributed to him, whether he said them or not.

Sherwood was right to realize the dramatic potential inherent in the story of Abraham Lincoln, right to realize that the story of Lincoln's life before his presidency had enough dramatic potential to captivate audiences. One thing that he might not have been right about, though, is the labor and responsibility involved in constructing a biographical work for the stage. The version of Lincoln that Sherwood presents is reverent and accurate, but Sherwood does not imbue his character with the kind of fire and consistency needed to make him come to life. The problem does not seem to be in Sherwood's writing, which is, at the least, craftsman-like, but in the very nature of what he is trying to do.

Biographies have always been written, and they always will be. They represent one of the most basic functions of literature, the opportunity to look at other people's lives and compare them to one's own. Biographies are treated with a level of respect above that allowed to fiction because they are, in some ill-defined way, considered to be "real." In this modern age of made-for-television movies and rampant lawsuits, the nuances involved with representations of reality are commonplace. Almost everybody knows that "based on a true story" is different than "based on actual events," which is different than "inspired by actual events." The number of variations on the theme of reality is a testimony to the great value placed by our culture on real-life drama.

Western culture has come to some sort of understanding with biographical books, which are just naturally assumed without much thought to be mostly true, perhaps around ninety percent or more based on what actually happened. Biographies sit in their own sections of libraries and bookstores, comfortably nestled between the textbooks, which ought to be one hundred percent true, and the novels, which tell made-up stories. Recently, political biographies have played around with the form and have upset the assumption of truth. One writer has presented Edward Kennedy's private thoughts, which the writer could of course only have guessed at, as if they were verifiable facts. Another said that he could find no way of writing his biography of president Ronald Reagan without including himself as a character not just as someone passing by in the background, but as a boyhood friend who in fact never existed. The very fact that these experiments upset the traditional notion of biography is an indication that, in general,

readers feel comfortable with their understanding of how much in biographical books is true.

The same cannot be said about movies and plays, where the biographical subject has to be portrayed by someone else. While it represents just a slight shift from the "textbook" frame of mind to a written biography, in terms of how much truth can be expected, there is a leap of abstraction when one person recreates what another person did.

Art is artifice. Theater is one of the most artificial forms of art, asking its audience to believe that people are in places, as strange as a boat or a log cabin, when they are in fact just steps away. If viewers stop suspending their disbelief for a moment, they become aware of the untruth of it all, of the actors in costumes who actually share the same reality as the ticket rippers, the lighting system, and all of the rest of the trappings.

It seems that playwrights should count themselves lucky enough when their audiences are willing to pretend that the people they are seeing are real people, in real situations. The playwright who wants viewers to believe that the people on stage are in fact reproducing actions and situations that have actually occurred before in the world is really stretching credibility thin. The Abe Lincoln in Carl Sandburg's three-part biography is likely to resemble how Lincoln really was, his essence captured in the poet's words. William Herndon's biography of Lincoln has been praised for being less likely than the writings of the president's other friends to hide his unsavory characteristics, achieving a level of truth greater than the sugar-coated version. Robert Sherwood's Lincoln, however, will always be whoever is portraying him Raymond Massey, in the case of the Broadway production and the subsequent film.

Drama lacks accuracy it cannot record events, but only reproduce them. Biography is, though, at its core an accurate record. At its best, drama can give its audience some sense of the essence of a person, a truer philosophical feel for personality than simple, recorded historical fact. Audiences understand things that are not shown outright, like an optical illusion that arranges black dots on a white page to make the viewer see another dot that is not really there. With Abe Lincoln in Illinois, it is not enough to present a series of events from Lincoln's life. The question that every reviewer has to ask when considering Sherwood's script is whether it at least gives a complete portrait of who Lincoln might have been.

The straightforward chronological structure of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* is the first clue that Sherwood may have allowed his play to be ruled by reality as readers know it, rather than his artistic reality. In common reality, childhood is followed by adolescence, which is followed by adulthood, then old age. There is no reason why a narrative has to follow such a structure, though. It depends on what point the writer is trying to make. In the case at hand, Sherwood's point might be to examine how the cumulative weight of events built, year after year, to make Lincoln into the man he was when he boarded the train out of Illinois, shown in the last act. The chronological structure, though, is reason enough for at least suspecting that Sherwood might lack imagination and/or an artistic vision.

This is not to say that Sherwood, or anyone involved in the original Broadway production, did not do the best job possible, only that the thing they were trying to do may have been self-defeating. By all accounts, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois was* not something that Robert E. Sherwood dashed off quickly. According to his biographer, John Mason Brown, Sherwood worked the structure repeatedly in his mind, cutting scenes, adding, struggling to turn his Lincoln into an American archetype. The supplemental notes that are usually printed with the play should be sufficient indication that this play is no sloppy piece of work. It is, however, stiff, the sort of presentation that has audiences leaving the theater feeling more like they have been taught a lesson than that they have been entertained.

This question of whether Sherwood might have given his audience too much historical record at the expense of offering up an actual play has been a point of contention since *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* was first produced. The play did win the Pulitzer when it debuted, and it basked in the glow of critical support, overall, although some critics found it too stifled by the greatness and familiarity of the subject to ever take on a personality of its own.

It is either ironic or a sign that Sherwood worked the issue to the finest balance that could be achieved to see that both sides, cheering and dismissing his achievement, have been supported by one writer John Mason Brown, the aforementioned biographer. In his original review of the play, Brown was one of the few critics to stray from the consensus, which was that Sherwood had done the country a great service with his portrayal of Lincoln. His original review complained that the play wasn't really Sherwood's at all, or at least wasn't solely Sherwood's accomplishment: to be honest, he would, according to Brown, have to give half of the credit to Lincoln himself, or, more specifically, to the text of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, from which he had taken so much of his dialog. He also commented on how much the play relied, not on its own dramatic situation, but on the audience's knowledge of events that were to happen in Lincoln's life after the events presented on stage.

In future years, though, Brown came to reverse his judgment. In *The Worlds of Robert E. Sherwood: Mirror to His Times*, he looked back on his old review and wrote, "I was rotten, and wrong, though not entirely so. I had some points to make which were not without their validity, though they now seem to me academic, ungrateful, and carping." Having had access to Sherwood's diaries while working on his biography, Brown had come to realize how much effort Sherwood had put into controlling the incredible amounts of information he had compiled, how he struggled to keep the process from being "too much reading, too much homework, and too little playwriting by Sherwood himself."

The background information may have helped Brown understand his subject and how his subject, Sherwood, understood his own subject, Lincoln. Still, it is almost impossible to take seriously a reviewer who takes back what he has said on the grounds of having been "ungrateful." Reviewers owe authors nothing more than an honest appraisal. One gets the sense that Brown felt he had been an ungrateful citizen for not appreciating the service done for the American populace with this portrayal of a president. But this is not

a standard for artistic criticism, any more than a work of art can be judged by how "nice" its main character is.

If this country's citizens can get beyond national pride for Abraham Lincoln, who historians (Northern ones, at least) constantly rank among the two or three greatest American presidents, it does in fact seem that Sherwood's play is too focused on Lincoln as a historical figure, turning Lincoln the human being into an emblem. It could use some firmer control. Lincoln needs to be more of a character in the play, less of a caricature. This is what Shakespeare did with his histories, and England's national honor was in no way compromised by his decision to let go of some of "the truth" in order to better present the spirits of his subjects. Drama relies on the human thought processes and interactions that may not have been part of the public record, but are necessary for the playwright to really convey the nature of his subject. *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* retells old stories about the great man, and Sherwood certainly put his heart into arranging those old tales in a way that would make a larger point, but it makes for a clumsy play, so uncomfortable with itself that even readers and viewers who aren't familiar with the legends can pick out the lines that come from Lincoln himself, because they are so unevenly worked into the story.

There is no way for a play to function as a documentary, because theater, of all visual media, works on an abstract level that does not allow the use of original material. Documentary films can show viewers actual participants, or play their voices, or at least show locations where events occurred. Books have been used for conveying information for so long that most readers have a sense of how much reality to expect from them. On stage, the subject of a biography cannot speak for him- or herself, which leaves the playwright with the awful responsibility of choosing just what parts of reality to include and how to organize the facts. No one has ever raised the charge that Robert E. Sherwood was anything less than diligent in his duties as an author, but still *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* suffers from not having its own individual identity as a work of art, even though it does provide a fine overview of the most interesting facts of Lincoln's life.

Source: *David Kelly, in an essay for Drama for Students, Gale Group*, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the essay, "Bob Sherwood in Illinois" John Mason Brown describes Abraham Lincoln as Sherwood's "hero," which was the reason for the creation of the play.

Why Abe Lincoln? Had Sherwood been a small man, he said he might, instead, have written a play about Napoleon. But Lincoln was a tall man outside and a giant within, and Sherwood a taller man who was growing inside year by year. This inner growth readied him for *Abe* this plus the fact that, with the challenges to freedom multiplying throughout the world, Lincoln moved into the present with a new timeliness as "a man of peace who had had to face the issue of appeasement or war."

We say much about ourselves in our choice of heroes. They are the mirrors not only of what we would like to be but a reflection in part of what we are. From his youth Lincoln had occupied a special place among Sherwood's idols. As early as 1909, when he was twelve, he submitted an essay to a nationwide school children's contest commemorating the centennial of the President's birth. For some weeks he haunted the Fifth Avenue jeweler's window in which the prize medals were on display, confident that one of them would be his. He was genuinely surprised to learn when the awards were announced that he had not received even an honorable mention.

He saw Lincoln then and for many years thereafter through the usual fog of reverence, saw him as the myth not the man, as a statue that had somehow been alive. No other hero in our history reached so deep into Sherwood's heart as this figure of sadness, suffering, homely humor, and compassion. There was a kinship between them of temperament and beliefs, of bafflement and courage, and loneliness and eloquence. Like many another, Sherwood had been stirred by John Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoin*, which he saw several times in 1920 and admired greatly as a "beautiful play." Two years later even the newsreel pictures of the opening of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington moved him, he confessed in *Life*, to a "state of maudlin lachrymosity."

He had read much on Lincoln, first learning the details of his early life from Ida M. Tarbell and of his period from Albert Bushnell Hart. His love for him grew as his knowledge increased. It was not, however, until he read Carl Sandburg's *The Prairie Years* that Sherwood "began to feel the curious quality of the complex man who, in his statement of the eternal aspirations of the human race, achieved a supreme triumph of simplicity." Sandburg introduced him to a new and human Lincoln and made him eager to know more about the forces, interior and external, which "shaped this strange, gentle genius."

For some fifteen years Sherwood had talked vaguely of writing a play about Lincoln's early life. *The Prairie Years* (1926), which he reread again and again during the next decade, eventually strengthened his determination to do so. "Can't open this wonderful book without feeling a rush of emotion to the imagination." Sandburg gave him an understanding he had not had before of the intricacies and contradictions of Lincoln's character and served as an invaluable guide to "the main sources of Lincoln lore."

This copious lore cracked for him the marble of Lincoln as a public statue, thereby permitting the man to emerge, flesh, blood, and fallibility, and all the greater for being human. Sherwood came to see, and state conqueringly in his episodic drama, the importance of Lincoln's frailties to his virtues. More and more he realized that, however heretical any admission of Lincoln's faults might seem to those who saw him only in Daniel Chester French or Gutzon Borglum terms, these faults were a part of his size. As he put it, the doubts and fears that tormented Lincoln "could not have occurred to a lesser man" and his ultimate triumph over them was "in many ways the supreme achievement of his life."

In the winter of 1936 Sherwood began to write a play on Lincoln. At a Child's Restaurant on 48th Street he wrote the prayer for the recovery of a sick boy (really a prayer for America) which Lincoln speaks in the seventh scene. But he could get no further. His play had not formed in his mind nor his Lincoln come into focus. He needed more time in which to brood and plan and absorb. And greater and more intimate knowledge, too. Accordingly, led by Sandburg, he went to work in earnest.

Earnest in his case meant furious application. Never a decent student at school or college, Sherwood was always a painstaking researcher when, as a writer, he dealt with history. Before taking the license to which he was entitled as a dramatist, he had to know the facts from which he was departing. Hannibal, Richard Coeur de Lion and the Crusades, and Periclean Athens all these he had read about with a scholar's zeal before handling them in his own unscholarly way. But never, until he wrote *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, did he immerse himself so deeply in history as when preparing to write *Abe Lincoln in Illinois.*

His supplementary notes, wisely printed not as an introduction but as a postscript to the play, are staggering in their thoroughness. Stephenson, Beveridge, Barton, Lord Charnwood, Evans, Baringer, the *Dictionary of American Biography,* Herndon and Weik (especially Herndon), and, above all, Lincoln himself as revealed in Nicolay and Hay's compilation of his *Complete Works* were among the sources upon which Sherwood drew with easy familiarity. He knew there were hundreds of other books which he could mention but did not, because, as he said in typical Sherwood fashion, "I haven't read them."

He had no desire in his notes to set himself up as a "learned biographer." But he was learned about Lincoln, drawn to his knowledge not only by the instinctive understanding he felt for him but by his theory of what a play about Lincoln should be. No one was more aware than Sherwood that "the playwright's chief stock in trade is feelings, not facts." A dramatist, he believed, was "at best, an interpreter, with a certain facility for translating all that he has heard in a manner sufficiently dramatic to attract a crowd." He felt, however, that in a play about the development of Lincoln's character a strict regard for the plain truth was both obligatory and desirable. "His life as he lived it was a work of art, forming a veritable allegory of the growth of the democratic spirit, with its humble origins, its inward struggles, its seemingly timid policy of 'live and let live' and 'mind your own business,' its slow awakening to the dreadful problems of reality, and its battles with and conquest of those problems."

His conviction was that, just as Lincoln's life needed no adornments to make it pertinent, his character needed "no romanticizing, no sentimentalizing, no dramatizing." To a reporter he said that, before he began, he made up his mind "not to have a line of hokum in the play. I love hoke in the theatre," he went on, "but this time I decided that, while they might say the play was dull, they couldn't say it was 'theatre.'"

To his Aunt Lydia he confided that he was "not concerned with Abraham Lincoln's position in history because no one needs to elaborate on that. It was his remarkable character. It seems to me that all the contrasted qualities of the human race the hopes and fears, the doubts and convictions, the mortal frailty and superhuman endurance, the prescience and the neuroses, the desire for escape from reality, and the fundamental, unshakable nobility were concentrated and magnified in him as they were in Oedipus Rex and in Hamlet. Except that he was no creation of the poetic imagination. He was a living American, and in his living words are the answers or the only conceivable answers to all the questions that distract the world today."

Sherwood's shadowing of Lincoln when he was pondering his play did not stop with history or biography. Language, Lincoln's language public and private, the language of his period and of the authors who, having fed the hungers of his mind, helped to shape his style, became Sherwood's natural concern. To give authenticity to the dialogue in his scenes about the young Lincoln, he bought an English grammar of 1816. For periods flavor he savored the *Pickwick Papers* and, to catch the swing and phraseology of common speech along the Mississippi, he reread *Huckleberry Finn*. Again and again he searched the Bible, Shakespeare, Jefferson, and Whitman for an appropriately somber passage with which the student Lincoln could conclude the opening scene. Finding none, he used Keats' "On Death" as being right in spirit even if there was no record of Lincoln's having read it. The poem contained a phrase in "his rugged path" which stuck in Sherwood's mind, For a while he considered *The Rugged Path* for the title of his Lincoln play, which earlier he had thought of calling *The First American*, then *An American*.

Source: John Mason Brown, "Bob Sherwood in Illinois," in *The Worlds of Robert E. Sherwood,* Harper & Row, 1965, pp. 367-71.

Critical Essay #3

Edith *J. R. Isaacs reviews Sherwood's style and language, linking it to the success of the play.*

Abe Lincoln in Illinois says what all Sherwood's other serious plays and serious prefaces have tried to say, and says it so well and so convincingly that audiences rise to their feet to applaud it. Much of *Abe Lincoln* is in Lincoln's own words his homely phrases, his anecdotes, his famous speeches; but the play is none the less Sherwood's creation. He has so immersed himself in Lincoln's style of simple, direct, rugged speech that you pass from Sherwood's words to Lincoln's with no sense of change. Every speech is in character as Sherwood has recreated Lincoln, and within that character a great man, a national hero with all of a nation's legend behind him, lives and moves as a man among men. To create such a figure out of history may seem an easier task than to mold a character out of a dramatist's own fresh clay. Indeed it is far harder, as the whole history of such endeavor shows. Great historic figures already live double lives, one of which is in the minds of their audience, and a dramatist who tries to put his own portrait of the man into words stands constantly at the edge of a precipice. Raymond Massey, who plays the part of Lincoln with a devotion to the character he represents almost equal to Sherwood's, and with a surprising personal likeness, deserves all the acclaim he has had for his performance. But you have only to read Sherwood's script before seeing the play to know that it is the dramatist who has given this Lincoln the spark of life.

Abe Lincoln in Illinois carries through three periods of Lincoln's life in and about New Salem, Illinois, in the 1830's; in and about Springfield, Illinois, in the 1840's; the years 1858 to 1861 to the day when Lincoln, as President-Elect, parted with his neighbors at the railroad station to go on his honored and lonely way:

'Let us live to prove that we can cultivate the natural world that is about us, and the intellectual and moral world that is within us, so that we may secure an individual, social and political prosperity, whose course shall be forward, and which, while the earth endures, shall not pass away.'

Which is a good speech for a dramatist to end on.

Source: Edith J. R. Isaacs, "Man of the Hour," in *Theatre Arts*, Vol. 23, 1939, pp. 3140.

Adaptations

Abe Lincoln in Illinois was adapted as a film in 1940, starring Raymond Massey in the title role, with Ruth Gordon and Gene Lockhart. Sherwood wrote the screenplay, which was adapted by Grover Jones; John Cromwell directed. Available from Turner Home Video's RKO Collection.

There is a 41-minute audio cassette version of the play entitled *Abe Lincoln in Illinois: Robert Sherwood's Political Drama of a Lincoln Few People Knew*. Released by the Center for Cassette Studies in 1971.

Topics for Further Study

Read the text of the Lincoln-Douglas debates and rate each speaker in terms of how well he argues his point.

Research the life of a rural postmaster in the 1830s and write out an agenda that would show what a typical day was like.

The tension between Lincoln and his wife, Mary, in Scene 9 is just a slight example of their tumultuous relationship. Write a scene that shows them arguing at home during the last year of his presidency, using historic facts to support your characterizations.

Write a brief report on the Underground Railroad, which helped blacks escape from slavery in the South into freedom.

Much is made in this play of how the Supreme Court's decision in the Dred Scott case changed the rights of slave owners and mobilized the opposition to slavery. Find testimony from people of the 1850s (besides Lincoln) stating what this decision meant to their lives.

Lincoln had less than a half year of formal schooling in his life. Find out what level of education has been attained by recent presidents, from the 1940s on.

The "milksick" that Lincoln's mother died of was later diagnosed as a disease that came from drinking the milk of cows that had ingested white snakeroot. Find out the story behind how this was discovered and how this illness affects the body.

Write a paper that imagines what the United States would have been like if Lincoln had allowed the Confederate states to secede from the Union.

Compare and Contrast

1837: Chicago is incorporated as a city.

1938: At a time when freight is moved by rail and barges, Chicago is the country's second largest city, only losing that title to Los Angeles in the 1990s.

Today: Although they are still in the same state, Chicago has little in common with rural down-state towns like New Salem and Vandalia.

1830s-60s: Most black people in Southern states are slaves. Blacks living in states that bordered the Southern states are sometimes kidnapped and forced into slavery. The Supreme Court rules in 1857 that blacks can never become U.S. citizens.

1938: Although slavery is technically over when the Civil War ends in 1865, a series of laws passed in the South, known as Jim Crow Laws, keep blacks from enjoying their rights as citizens. Difficult IQ tests are given at polls to keep blacks from voting, and the charade of offering "separate but equal" accommodations leave blacks with inferior housing, food, and education.

Today: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 threatens serious federal punishment for anyone who discriminates on the basis of race.

1830s: The economic depression, which begins in 1837, is eventually overcome with new resources acquired by expanding the nation westward.

1938: The economic depression, begun in 1929, is eventually overcome by an increase in manufacturing when America enters World War II in 1941.

Today: The economic recession of the 1980s is eventually overcome, in part by the new business resources made available by the growth of the Internet.

1830s: A message going from rural Illinois to Washington, D. C. has to be carried by train or horseback, and takes more than a week.

1938: Telephones are common in most households; verbal messages can span the continent almost immediately. A written message takes a few days, unless sent by airplane with a special courier.

Today: A message can be sent via fax or e-mail attachment almost immediately.

1830s: Food has to be eaten fresh or else preserved with salt, limiting how far people can live from farms.

1938: Precooked frozen meals become available from Birdseye, which has been offering frozen vegetables since 1931.

Today: Foods are sealed in packages so that they can be kept fresh in cabinets or desk drawers without refrigeration.

What Do I Read Next?

Critics consider *The Petrified Forest* to be Sherwood's most successful play. It is about an intellectual war veteran facing a dangerous gangster in a diner out in the desert. It is available from the Dramatist's Play Service.

Much of Sherwood's information about Lincoln comes from the poet Carl Sandburg's thorough biography, *Lincoln: The Prairie Years,* which is often bound with the other volume of his biography, *The War Years.*

Lincoln was very secretive about his family life. The source that most historians begin with for biographical information is the writings of William Herndon (who appears in the play as Billy Herndon). His biography is available as *Herndon's Life of Lincoln: The History and Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln. A 1997 collection called Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews and Statements about Abraham Lincoln* explores Herndon's own sources of information.

One of the few book-length studies of Sherwood is John Mason Brown's critical biography *The Worlds of Robert E. Sherwood: Mirror to His Times, 1896-1939.* Missing from this work is Sherwood's career during World War II.

This play presents the formation of Lincoln's sense of responsibility. The resultant sensibilities are examined in Mark E. Neely, Jr.'s 1992 Pulitzer Prize-winning study *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties.*

Gore Vidal's novel Lincoln is like Sherwood's version in that it is an entertaining, speculative work, based in fact but stretched to tell an interesting story. It was reissued in a 1998 paperback edition.

Historians have long relied on Harvey Lee Ross' book *The Early Pioneers and Political Events of the State of Illinois*, first published in 1899. It was reprinted in 1970 by Stevens Publishing Co. of Astoria, II.

Further Study

Drennan, Robert E., *The Algonquin Wits*, Replica Books, 2000.

As a member of the famous Algonquin Round Table, a group of literary wits who met at the Algonquin Hotel in New York in the 1920s and 30s, Sherwood was engaged in intense intellectual competition.

Fehrenbacher, Don E., ed., *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, Library of America, 1989.

The Library of America editions are painstakingly researched, checked for authenticity and thoroughness. This edition covers the same years as the play and gives Lincoln's own words to compare to Sherwood's portrayal.

Holzer, Harold, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The First Complete, UnexpurgatedText*, HarperCollins, 1993.

Edited and introduced by Harold Holzer, one of the leading historians in the field of Lincoln studies, this text gives a sense of drama that is like that of the play.

Smith, Wendy, *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940*, Grove Press, 1992.

The Playwrights Company, which had its debut with *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, was patterned on the Group Theater.

Wilson, Douglas, *Lincoln Before Washington: New Perspectives on the Illinois Years*, University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Covering the same period of Lincoln's life as Sherwood, this scholarly work is particularly concerned with the historical truth of William Herndon's biography.

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Fergusson, Francis, "Noteson the Theatre," in *The Southern Review*, Winter 1940, p. 560.

Flexner, Eleanor, *American Playwrights, 1918-1938*, Simon and Schuster, 1938, pp. 272-82.

Meserve, Walter J., *Robert E. Sherwood: Reluctant Moralist*, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970, pp. 221-222.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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