

# Happy Birthday, Mr. President! New Books for Abraham Lincoln's Bicentennial

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**Stories about Abraham Lincoln** have captivated children for generations. The Lincoln story has taken on almost mythic proportions, making it difficult to separate fact from fiction or exaggeration. Young readers never tire of talking about Lincoln's early days— from his birth in a log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky to his childhood in Indiana—and his rise to national recognition as the nation's president. Many readers are intrigued by his reputation as a hard worker and a self-educated man.

Anniversaries are excellent reminders of men, women, and events from the past, and publishers are quick to capitalize on anniversaries, as noted in the flurry of books published near 1992 to celebrate the quincentennial of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas, and again in 2003 to honor Lewis and Clark's great expedition. Here we present 15 new books commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of the nation's sixteenth president, born February 12, 1809. Any one of these trade books would make an excellent addition to a classroom collection devoted to Lincoln, the Civil War or the nation's presidents. Since the books use different lenses to examine this complex individual, teachers may use them to point out that historians have different perspectives on events in history. The books offer varying classroom uses as well; for instance, *Chasing Lincoln's Killer* is perfect for independent reading by a strong gifted reader, while *Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek: A Tall, Thin Tale* would provide a delightful read-aloud for a young audience.

**Aylesworth, Jim. *Our Abe Lincoln*. Illustrated by Barbara McClintock. New York: Scholastic Press. 2009. 40 pages, \$16.99, Grades PK-2.**

In his author's note, Aylesworth explains that "Old Abe Lincoln Came Out of the Wilderness" was a Lincoln-era presidential campaign song sung to the tune of "The Old Gray Mare." The author's retelling introduces young children to the life and death of one of America's greatest, kindest, and wisest presidents. An example of the rhythmic rhymes follows: "Smart Abe



Lincoln read late by the firelight/ Late by the firelight/ Late by the firelight/ Smart Abe Lincoln read late by the firelight/ Many dark nights ago." McClintock's stylistic and colorful pen and ink drawings portray school children in costume presenting a delightful musical pageant celebrating Lincoln's life and accomplish-

ments. This book is sure to engage even the youngest school children in "singing history."

**Burleigh, Robert. *Abraham Lincoln Comes Home*. Illustrated by Wendell Minor. New York: Henry Holt. 2008. 40 pages, \$16.95, Grades 2-6.**

Luke and his father travel at night by horse and buggy to meet a train with a unique burden: the body of an assassinated president. Elegant words and stunning, somber gouache and watercolor images portray grieving Americans paying their last respects to their beloved president while giving today's readers a sense of being there as the funeral train makes its thirteen-day trek from Washington, DC to Springfield, IL. "Luke could see Abe Lincoln's picture above the cowcatcher. He felt the ground shiver under his feet. . . . In the eerie orange glow, tears were streaming down his father's cheeks. Luke had never seen his father cry before." As the train journeys through the hearts and lands of America, readers are left hopeful that the nation itself will endure even after the demise of its leader. An afterword

provides both a factual account of and interesting facts about the funeral train.

**Butzer, C. M. *Gettysburg, the Graphic Novel*. New York: HarperCollins. 2009. 80 pages, \$16.99 hardcover/\$9.99 paperback, Grades 5-9.**

Using the varied sizes of panels familiar to fans of graphic novels, the author/illustrator depicts the events leading up to “The Gettysburg Address,” including the horrific battles and lives lost. He also shows some of the town’s citizens, watching in fear as the troops from both sides of the conflict ride through, drawing the town into the Civil War. The stark black and white illustrations of the corpses of men and beasts and the sheer numbers of soldiers who lost their lives during these pivotal moments will make readers cognizant of war’s human toll. Butzer’s reliance on primary sources such as letters, diaries and speeches lends credibility to his efforts. In the two-page spread, when Lincoln states that this government “shall not perish from the earth,” the president’s presence is particularly evident (although many in the vast audience were unaware that his brief speech had occurred). The speech is illustrated over 18 different pages. Later, as he walks through the cemetery and notes the many tombstones, there is a palpable sense of sorrow. The author’s notes at the end provide explanations for the panels and offer additional detail for curious readers.

**Denberg, Barry. *Lincoln Shot: A President’s Life*. Illustrated by Christopher Bing. New York: Feiwel and Friends. 2008. 40 pages, \$24.95, Grades 5-8.**

Readers will be drawn to this striking biography for many reasons, including its size (18 inches tall) and newspaper format—composed in the style of a commemorative edition marking the first year anniversary of the president’s death. Readers are likely to feel as though they are opening the pages of a century-old newspaper complete with headlines with somber fonts that stretch across two pages in places. Bing’s variously shaded woodcut illustrations, along with archival photos on paper designed to look like yellowed newsprint, add to the appearance of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century newspaper that appears to have aged with time. Weaving Lincoln’s life story throughout the book, Denenberg takes readers back to the day of the Lincoln assassination, providing them with a sense of immediacy as if they themselves are experiencing those tragic events. In addition to accounts of the conspiracy and assassination, articles about the president’s family, and even faux advertisements provide readers with the experience of reading the news and trends of yesterday today.

**Fleming, Candace. *The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary*. New York: Schwartz & Wade Books/Random House Children’s Books. 2008. 196 pages, \$24.99, Grades 4-12.**

Most lives are filled with mundane details, but what once seemed pedestrian becomes intriguing when someone becomes famous.

This is certainly the case with Abraham and Mary Lincoln. Fleming’s brilliant scrapbook of their lives provides an intriguing visual and written history of this famous couple. Avid historians and history teachers will want to browse through at will, gleaning rarely revealed tidbits about the courtship between Abraham and Mary Todd and how their love match was almost not made. This is not necessarily a book that readers will want to plow through page by page, but rather savor slowly. Everything about the book is nostalgic, from the font chosen for the text to the many black and white illustrations and borders that separate the different entries. Turning through this scrapbook is akin to leaning over a family scrapbook lovingly maintained by proud parents. Fleming includes enough details and interesting information to please even the most ardent Lincoln scholar, such as the recipe for Lincoln’s favorite white cake, his love for dogs, and Mary’s early days as a schoolgirl. The scrapbook even follows Mary after the death of the President through the “betrayal” by her adult son Robert.

**Giovanni, Nikki. *Lincoln and Douglas: An American Friendship*. Illustrated by Bryan Collier. New York: Henry Holt. 2008. 40 pages, \$16.95, Grades 2-6.**

This colorful book opens with President Lincoln’s second inaugural reception as he awaits a special visit from abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The story then flashes back to scenes from each man’s humble beginnings—Douglass’ escaping from slavery and Lincoln returning five cents to a clerk who gave him too much change. Both learned how to read by kerosene light. A trip to New Orleans opened Lincoln’s eyes to the cruelty of slavery, and the men formed a bond over this shared hatred of human trafficking. The book then returns to the grand occasion at the White House where the richly painted pages open up to a large illustration of the Civil War with the words, “. . .the grimness of war hung over the festivities.” Finally Frederick Douglass arrives at the celebration and both men conclude that, “All journeys are long.” Their unique friendship definitely helped shape our country. Collier’s stunning watercolor and collage illustrations enhance to the author’s engaging text. Although the book will bring well-deserved additional attention to Douglass, it would be stronger if it included documentation.

**Hopkinson, Deborah. *Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek: A Tall, Thin Tale (Introducing His Forgotten Frontier Friend)*. Illustrated by John Hendrix. New York: Schwartz & Wade/Random House. 2008. 40 pages, \$16.99, Grades 1-4.**

This story, based on an actual event from Abraham Lincoln’s childhood, is told in a conversational tone, accompanied by illustrations in pen-and-ink and watercolor. Two best friends (Abe and Austin) follow some birds into the woods and forget Abe’s mother’s advice—“Don’t go too near the creek!” Even though neither boy can swim, they decide to attempt a crossing. Hopkinson asks questions of the reader as the story unfolds. “I mean, would Abe and Austin really have WALKED across a log over that whirlpool? They weren’t that foolish were they? No, I’m

almost sure they would have crawled! So let's try again." You can imagine what happens next, but to add a twist to this historical account, different versions are shared. Thankfully, there is only one ending—Benjamin Austin Gollaher rescues seven-year-old Abe, and our country benefits from his heroic act.

**Jackson, Ellen.** *Abe Lincoln Loved Animals.* Illustrated by Doris Ettlinger. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman. 2008. 32 pages, \$16.99, Gr. 2-4.

Tracing Lincoln's lifelong love for animals, the author shares several anecdotes that reveal the compassionate nature the president had for all living things. Each anecdote is brief and supported by a bibliography so that curious readers can find out more. Young readers will be intrigued to learn that Lincoln was the first to sign a presidential pardon for the Thanksgiving turkey, a tradition that lives on even now. Photography buffs may be interested to note that Fido, a beloved family dog whose photograph is on the title page, was the first presidential pet to be captured on film. In its brief pages, this picture book paints a sentimental image of the kindly, caring president that is complemented by the soft pastels of the artwork.

**Pascal, Janet.** *Who was Abraham Lincoln?* Illustrated by John O'Brien. New York: Penguin. 2008. 112 pages, \$4.99, Grades 3-6.

In this clear and simple biography, children will learn about Lincoln's childhood, political ambitions, marriage, family and presidency. There are over 100 black-and-white illustrations and maps that add a pictorial account. Sidebars on important topics ranging from Whigs and Democrats to abolitionists appear throughout the book. There are many anecdotes that will appeal to young readers such as, "By the time he was eight, he could pick up an ax and split wood as well as any man" (p. 7). Another, "He was famous for practical jokes. He once managed to have two men who were getting married on the same day delivered to the wrong brides" (p. 12). And last, Lincoln's son "Tad once made a sled out of a chair and had a goat pull him right through the middle of an elegant party" (p. 59). This text will bring history alive and expand all readers' knowledge of this beloved American president.

**Rabin, Staton.** *Mr. Lincoln's Boys: Being the Mostly True Adventures of Abraham Lincoln's Trouble-making Sons, Tad and Willie.* Illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline. New York: Viking. 2008. 40 pages, \$16.99, Grades 3-5.

Most of us think of Abraham Lincoln as being solemn, weighted down by the burdens of a union being split in half, concerned about the battles raging around him. But Lincoln was also the father of four boys, two of them mischievous spirits who loved to tease the White House staff and distract their father from his presidential responsibilities. This picture book biography shows the human side of Lincoln as he plays with his two sons, Willie and Tad, and even issues a pardon for their toy soldier, punished and buried continuously in the rose garden. The text reveals

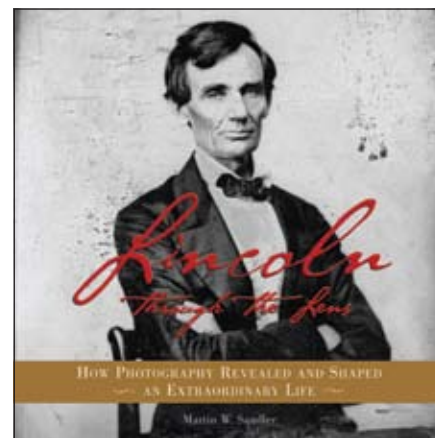
the patience Lincoln had for his boys, while the glowing acrylic and gouache illustrations seem to spread sunbeams around the White House mansion. With a slight curve of his mouth, Lincoln welcomes his children's escapades for the sheer joy of life they bring. Back matter includes a cast of characters and additional resources for readers to explore. The fact that Willie would die in 1862, not long after the events described in the book, offers a poignant reminder of the fleetingness of time.

**Rappaport, Doreen.** *Abe's Honest Words: The Life of Abraham Lincoln.* Illustrated by Kadir Nelson. New York: Hyperion Books for Children. 2008. 48 pages, \$16.99, Grades 2-5.

Abraham Lincoln loved reading books and listening to storytellers, lawyers, and preachers—he loved voices and words. "He stored these different voices in his heart and wove them into his own words." Likewise Rappaport weaves Lincoln's own words into this free-verse biography describing the life of one who overcame many obstacles and challenges to become an icon of honesty, integrity, hard work, and compassion. "The moment came when I felt that slavery must die that the nation might live!" Nelson's powerful watercolor paintings spill across the pages, equal visual companions to Rappaport's inspiring text and Abraham Lincoln's noble life. Back matter includes a Lincoln timeline, recommended readings for youth wanting to learn more about Lincoln, selected research sources, and the text of "The Gettysburg Address."

**Sandler, Martin.** *Lincoln Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Shaped an Extraordinary Life.* New York: Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008. 96 pages, \$19.99, Grades 5-9.

Filled with more than 100 archival photographs of Lincoln and the ravages of the Civil War, this book examines how photography both revealed the president's personality and shaped the public's perception of the man. There are many presidential photos and full-page shots of Civil War battlefields. The text offers insight into Lincoln, whose somber visage was partly the



result of the slowness of early camera work. This book is as much about photography as it is about Lincoln. His love for his family is particularly evident in a photograph of Lincoln taking time to read with his son Tad. Photographs taken by Matthew Brady

and Alexander Gardner offer vivid proof that pictures are worth much more than words. Especially chilling is the photograph of

Lincoln's second inauguration with several conspirators standing nearby.

**St. George, Judith. *Stand Tall, Abe Lincoln*. Illustrated by Matt Faulkner. New York: Philomel Books/Penguin Young Readers Group. 2008. 48 pages, \$16.99, Grades K-3.**

There are moments in everyone's lives that are turning points, moments when individuals rise or fall based on a single choice or influence. Abraham Lincoln faced many pivotal moments throughout his life, one of the most important being the death of his beloved mother Nancy when he was ten. Had it not been for his new stepmother, who brought love and books into the household, who knows what might have happened to the young Abe? Filled with smiling images of a young boy torn between



obedience to his father and his desire to learn more, this picture book depicts a loving, inquisitive Abraham Lincoln living, learning, and playing in the backwoods of Kentucky and Indiana. Readers will feel warmed by the author's account of Abe reading stories by the fire to his family, and will be inspired that a poor farm boy could rise to be

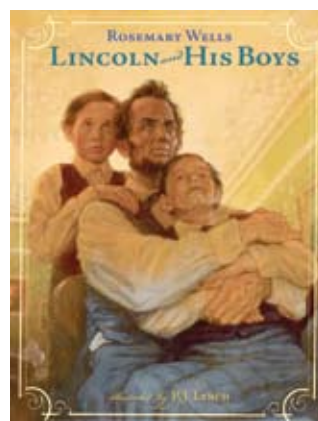
president of the United States. Faulkner's gouache illustrations skillfully capture the dramatic events in the life of the youth who would become the leader of his nation.

**Swanson, James. (2009). *Chasing Lincoln's Killer: The Search for John Wilkes Booth*. New York: Scholastic Press. 208 pages, \$16.99, Grades 5-9.**

How the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln managed *not* to get caught for twelve days is the real mystery in this book for young readers. From John Wilkes Booth's botched attempt to kidnap Abraham Lincoln to his opportunistic assassination of the president at the Ford Theatre to his somehow getting lost as he tried to escape across the river to Virginia, the assassin and his fellow conspirators seem determined to be caught. When Booth makes his last stand in a farmhouse set on fire by government agents, the reader is somewhat relieved to have the whole sordid episode draw to a close with Booth's death. The book describes vividly how Booth drew together a ragtag collection of men who would help him undermine Lincoln's administration. Readers may shudder at the justice that was meted out in those days with four conspirators hanged, including Mary Surratt, whose guilt was never actually proved. The use of fonts that complement the somber tone of the book as well as the inclusion of photographs of the men at the heart of the conspiracy add to the compelling quality of this historical page-turner.

**Thomson, Sarah L. *What Lincoln Said*. Illustrated by James E. Ransome. New York: HarperCollins. 2009. 32 pages, \$17.99, Grades K-3.**

Lincoln's actual words are woven into this simple biographical account of key events in his life. His spoken words are always printed in red or yellow to distinguish them from Thomson's own text, but the book lacks source information for these direct quotations. The author highlights Lincoln's values and positive traits: "Leave nothing for tomorrow that can be done today," and "Resolve to be honest at all events." In response to the plight of nearly four million slaves in the United States, Lincoln stated, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." Yet, Thomson emphasizes that to Lincoln, the Civil War was more about holding the Union together than about ending slavery. James Ransome's humorous, winsome acrylic paintings emphasize Lincoln's long legs, warm smile, and folksy charm. The book includes a Lincoln timeline and an afterward on "Lincoln and Slavery."



**Wells, Rosemary. *Lincoln and His Boys*. Illustrated by P.J. Lynch. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. 2009. 96 pages, \$16.99, Grades 3-7.**

In *Lincoln and His Boys*, the author creates dialog to support her impeccable research on the relationship between the famous president and his two youngest sons. (The eldest, Robert, is a student at Harvard.)

The three chapters are written from the viewpoints of his boys, Willie and Tad. In the first chapter, Willie tells the story of his first train trip and about his father's decision to run for president. "Father smiles that big grin that changes his whole face, and his eyes come back to me. 'Next year I will skunk Senator Douglas!'" (p. 25). Willie and Tad then recount their early days in the White House, interrupting Cabinet meetings, and trying to raise their father's spirits during the early days of the Civil War. Finally, Tad recounts his train trip to Richmond after the South's surrender. Back in Washington, "Papa-day tells the crowd there is no room for anger or hatred in our land" (p. 90). The book covers 1859 through 1865, ending on April 11, only three days before Lincoln's assassination. P.J. Lynch's beautiful, evocative oil paintings lovingly portray Abraham Lincoln and his family members from different angles and lightings. 📖

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