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**ESSEX HISTORY INSTITUTE
ABRAHAM LINCOLN – FREDRICK DOUGLASS
SLAVERY**

Grade Level: 11

Time Span: Two lessons (55-minute periods)

Massachusetts History and Social Studies Frameworks: USI.31 Discuss Abolition movement. USI.35 Summarize the critical developments leading to the Civil War. USI.35 Analyze Abraham Lincoln's presidency, the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), his views on slavery, and the political obstacles he encountered.

Essential Objectives: Students will understand the differing views slavery held by Abraham Lincoln and Fredrick Douglass, and the question of Constitutionalism. They will develop a stronger understanding of the issue of race in the pre-Civil War years and post-Civil War years.

Questions:

- How did the views on slavery of Abraham Lincoln and Fredrick Douglass differ?
- Was Douglass' view of immediate abolition realistic, or was Lincoln's caution approach in wartime more realistic?
- Was Douglass's opinion of Lincoln fair and accurate?
- What does the Freedmen's Monument say to us?

Day 1

Write on the board "*An unjust law is no law at all*" (St. Augustine)

Divide students into groups of 3 or 4 and ask them to define the meaning of the phrase and answer the following:

- Do they agree with the statement?
- For the good order of society, should citizens obey laws they feel are unjust?
- Distribute Handout A, Lincoln's Letter to Joshua Speed and Handout B Douglass' July 4th Speech. Have the students read both handouts and answer the following question: How do Lincoln and Douglass interpret the Constitution regarding slavery?

Day 1: Homework: If more time is needed, students should finish the project for homework.

Day 2

Review previous night's homework. Discuss the points that students selected and write them on the board.

Distribute Handout C, Douglass' Oration at the Dedication of the Freedmen's Lincoln Memorial

Ask the students to summarize Douglass' speech. What does he say about Abraham Lincoln? Was his view of Lincoln correct? Be textual in your findings. At the bottom of the handout is a picture of the Memorial.

Ask the students to answer the following questions:

The statue of Lincoln and the emancipation of slavery was paid for by freed slaves, but designed by whites. What does the statue represent? How does the statue represent African Americans? Is the statue a good representation or is it racist?

Bring the students together and discuss their findings

Assessment: Upon completion of the lessons students will answer one of the following:

- Essay: Was Douglass correct in his portrayal of Lincoln as a “white man’s president” correct?
- Was Lincoln correct in his views of gradual emancipation?

HANDOUT A

Letter to Joshua Speed

Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Speed met in Springfield, Illinois, during the 1830s. Although Speed returned to his native Kentucky, they remained friends throughout life. In this letter, Lincoln expresses his thinking about slavery, which contrasted with Speed, who grew up on a plantation and owned slaves. The following is an excerpt only.

Springfield, Illinois
August 24, 1855

Dear Speed:

You know what a poor correspondent I am. Ever since I received your very agreeable letter of the 22nd. of May I have been intending to write you in answer to it. You suggest that in political action now, you and I would differ. I suppose we would; not quite as much, however, as you may think. You know I dislike slavery; and you fully admit the abstract wrong of it. So far there is no cause of difference. But you say that sooner than yield your legal right to the slave -- especially at the bidding of those who are not themselves interested, you would see the Union dissolved. I am not aware that *any one* is bidding you to yield that right; very certainly *I* am not. I leave that matter entirely to yourself. I also acknowledge *your* rights and *my* obligations, under the constitution, in regard to your slaves. I confess I hate to see the poor creatures hunted down, and caught, and carried back to their stripes, and unrewarded toils; but I bite my lip and keep quiet. In 1841 you and I had together a tedious low-water trip, on a Steam Boat from Louisville to St. Louis. You may remember, as I well do, that from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio, there were, on board, ten or a dozen slaves, shackled together with irons. That sight was a continued torment to me; and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio, or any other slave-border. It is hardly fair for you to assume, that I have no interest in a thing which has, and continually exercises, the power of making me miserable. You ought rather to appreciate how much the great body of the Northern people do crucify their feelings, in order to maintain their loyalty to the Constitution and the Union.

Yours friend forever
A. Lincoln

HANDOUT B

The following is an excerpt from a speech made by Frederick Douglass commemorating the fourth of July in Rochester, NY.

What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?

Frederick Douglass

July 5, 1852

Fellow-citizens! there is no matter in respect to which, the people of the North have allowed themselves to be so ruinously imposed upon, as that of the pro-slavery character of the Constitution. In that instrument I hold there is neither warrant, license, nor sanction of the hateful thing; but, interpreted as it ought to be interpreted, the Constitution is a **GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT**. Read its preamble, consider its purposes. Is slavery among them? Is it at the gateway? or is it in the temple? It is neither. While I do not intend to argue this question on the present occasion, let me ask, if it be not somewhat singular that, if the Constitution were intended to be, by its framers and adopters, a slaveholding instrument, why neither slavery, slaveholding, nor slave can anywhere be found in it. What would be thought of an instrument, drawn up, legally drawn up, for the purpose of entitling the city of Rochester to a track of land, in which no mention of land was made? Now, there are certain rules of interpretation, for the proper understanding of all legal instruments. These rules are well established. They are plain, common-sense rules, such as you and I, and all of us, can understand and apply, without having passed years in the study of law. I scout the idea that the question of the constitutionality or unconstitutionality of slavery is not a question for the people. I hold that every American citizen has a right to form an opinion of the constitution, and to propagate that opinion, and to use all honorable means to make his opinion the prevailing one. Without this fight, the liberty of an American citizen would be as insecure as that of a Frenchman. Ex-Vice-President Dallas tells us that the constitution is an object to which no American mind can be too attentive, and no American heart too devoted. He further says, the constitution, in its words, is plain and intelligible, and is meant for the home-bred, unsophisticated understandings of our fellow-citizens. Senator Berrien tell us that the Constitution is the fundamental law, that which controls all others. The charter of our liberties, which every citizen has a personal interest in understanding thoroughly. The testimony of Senator Breese, Lewis Cass, and many others that might be named, who are everywhere esteemed as sound lawyers, so regard the constitution. I take it, therefore, that it is not presumption in a private citizen to form an opinion of that instrument.

Now, take the constitution according to its plain reading, and I defy the presentation of a single pro-slavery clause in it. On the other hand it will be found to contain principles and purposes, entirely hostile to the existence of slavery.

HANDOUT C

Speech by Frederick Douglass, delivered on the occasion of the unveiling of the freedmen's monument in memory of Abraham Lincoln, in Lincoln Park, Washington, D. C., April 14th, 1876.

Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man. He was pre-eminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country. In all his education and feeling he was an American of the Americans. He came into the Presidential chair upon one principle alone, namely, opposition to the extension of slavery. His arguments in furtherance of this policy had their motive and mainspring in his patriotic devotion to the interests of his own race. To protect, defend, and perpetuate slavery in the States where it existed. Abraham Lincoln was not less ready than any other President to draw the sword of the nation. He was ready to execute all the supposed constitutional guarantees of the United States Constitution in favor of the slave system anywhere inside the slave States. He was willing to pursue, recapture, and send back the fugitive slave to his master, and to suppress a slave rising for liberty, though his guilty master were already in arms against the Government. The race to which we belong were not the special objects of his consideration. Knowing this, I concede to you, my white fellow-citizens, a pre-eminence in this worship at once full and supreme. First, midst, and last, you and yours were the objects of his deepest affection and his most earnest solicitude. You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children; children by adoption, children by force of circumstances and necessity. To you it especially belongs to sound his praises, to preserve and perpetuate his memory, to multiply his statues, to hang his pictures high upon your walls, and commend his example, for to you he was a great and glorious friend and benefactor. Instead of supplanting you at this altar, we would exhort you to build high his monuments; let them be of the most costly material, of the most cunning workmanship: let their forms be symmetrical, beautiful, and perfect: let their bases be upon solid rocks, and their summits lean against the unchanging blue, overhanging sky, and let them endure forever! But while in the abundance of your wealth, and in the fullness of your just and patriotic devotion, you do all this, we entreat you to despise not the humble offering we this day unveil to view; for while Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose.

Fellow-citizens, ours is no new-born zeal and devotion--merely a thing of the moment. The name of Abraham Lincoln was near and dear to our hearts in the darkest and most perilous hours of the Republic. We were no more ashamed of him when shrouded in clouds of darkness, of doubt, and defeat than when we saw him crowned with victory, honor, and glory. Our faith in him was often taxed and stained to the uttermost, but it never failed. When he tarried long in the mountain; when he strangely told us that we were the cause of the war; when he still more strangely told us to leave the land in which we were born; when he refused to employ our arms in defense of the Union; when, after accepting our services as colored soldiers, he refused to retaliate our murder and torture as colored prisoners; when he told us he would save the Union if he could with slavery; when he revoked the Proclamation of Emancipation of General Fremont; when he refused to remove the popular commander of the Army of the Potomac, in the days of its inaction and defeat, who was more zealous in his efforts to protect slavery than to suppress rebellion; when we saw all this, and more, we were at times grieved, stunned, and greatly bewildered; but our hearts believed while they ached and bled. Nor was this, even at that time, a blind and unreasoning superstition. Despite the mist and haze that surrounded him; despite the tumult, the hurry, and confusion of the hour, we were able to take a comprehensive view of Abraham Lincoln, and to make reasonable allowance for the circumstances of his position. We saw him, measured him, and estimated him; not by stray utterances to injudicious and tedious delegations,

who often tried his patience; not by isolated facts torn from their connection; not by any partial and imperfect glimpses, caught at inopportune moments; but by a broad survey, in the light of the stern logic of great events, and in view of that divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew then how we will, we came to the conclusion that the hour and the man of our redemption had somewhat met in the person of Abraham Lincoln. It mattered little to us what language he might employ on special occasions; it mattered little to us, when we fully knew him, whether he was swift or slow in his movements; it was enough for us that Abraham Lincoln was at the head of a great movement, and was in living and earnest sympathy with that movement, which, in the nature of things, must go on until slavery should be utterly and forever abolished in the United States.

When, therefore, it shall be asked what we have to do with the memory of Abraham Lincoln, or what Abraham Lincoln had to do with us, the answer is ready full and complete. Though the Union was more to him than our freedom or our future, under his wise and beneficent rule we saw ourselves gradually lifted from the depths of slavery to the heights of liberty and manhood: under his wise and beneficent rule, and by measures approved and vigorously pressed by him, we saw that the handwriting of ages, in the form of prejudice and proscription, was rapidly fading away from the face of our whole country; under his rule, and in due time, about as soon after all as the country could tolerate the strange spectacle, we saw our brave sons and brothers laying off the rags of bondage, and being clothed all over in the blue uniforms of the soldiers of the Good States; under his rule we saw two hundred thousand of our dark and dusky people responding to the call of Abraham Lincoln, and with muskets on their shoulders, and eagles on their buttons. Under his rule we saw the Confederate States based upon the idea that our race must be slaves, and slaves forever, battered to pieces and scattered to the four winds; under his rule, and in the fullness of time we saw Abraham Lincoln, after giving the slaveholders three months grace in which to save their hateful slave system, penning the immortal paper, which, though special in its language was general in its principles and effect, making slavery forever impossible in the United States. Though we waited long, we saw all this and more.

Nor shall I ever forget the outburst of joy and thanksgiving that rent the air when the lightning brought to us the emancipation proclamation. In that happy hour we forgot all delay, and forgot all tardiness, forgot that the President had bribed the rebels to lay down their arms by a promise to withhold the bolt which would smite the slave-system with destruction; and we were thenceforward willing to allow the President all the latitude of time, phraseology, and every honorable device that statesmanship might require for the achievement of a great and beneficent measure of liberty and progress

Fellow-citizens, there is little necessity on this occasion to speak at length and critically of this great and good man, and of his high mission in the world. That ground has been fully occupied and completely covered both here and elsewhere. The whole field of fact and fancy has been gleaned and garnered. Any man can say things that are true of Abraham Lincoln, but no man can say anything that is new of Abraham Lincoln. His personal traits and public acts are better known to the American people than are those of any other man of his age. He was a mystery to no man who saw him and heard him. Though high in position, the humblest could approach him and feel at home in his presence. Though deep, he was transparent; though strong, he was gentle; though decided and pronounced in his convictions, he was tolerant towards those who differed from him, and patient under reproaches. Even those who only knew him through his public utterances obtained a tolerably clear idea of his character and his personality. The image of the man went out with his words, and those who read them, knew him

I have said that President Lincoln was a white man, and shared the prejudices common to his countrymen.

**Summarize Douglass' speech. What does he say about Abraham Lincoln?
Be textual in your findings.**

**The statue of Lincoln and the emancipation of slavery was paid for by freed slaves,
but designed by whites. What does the statue represent? How does the statue
represent African Americans? Is the statue a good representation or is it racist?**

