Lincoln's Changing Words

Trace how Lincoln's views and the war's purpose changed.

6-12.US1.38 "Trace the evolution of Lincoln's political thought on slavery, equality and rights for blacks, and the meaning of the war from the 1857 Dred Scott decision through the Lincoln Douglas debates, the First Inaugural Address..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline Lincoln's views on slavery or equality, then number three phrases in time order that show how his stated purpose for the war grew.

From Union to a New Birth of Freedom

1. In 1857, the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision said Black people could not be citizens of the United States and that Congress could not ban slavery in federal territories. Abraham Lincoln opposed the ruling. He argued that the Declaration of Independence's promise that "all men are created equal" included Black people in basic rights. Yet in the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates, he denied that this meant equal voting or social rights at that time. He called slavery wrong and opposed its spread west. Unlike Stephen Douglas, Lincoln rejected letting settlers decide to allow slavery in a territory.

2. By March 1861, Lincoln faced a different danger: Southern states had left the Union. In his First Inaugural Address, he said he had no plan to end slavery in states where it existed. He insisted the Union was permanent and warned that secession could lead to war. Once war began, Lincoln initially fought to preserve the Union, not to free every enslaved person. But the war made slavery a military and moral issue. The 1863 Emancipation Proclamation declared enslaved people free in areas still rebelling against the United States. It did not free enslaved people in loyal border states.

3. In November 1863, Lincoln stood at Gettysburg, where thousands had died. His Gettysburg Address described the war as a test of whether a nation founded on equality could survive. He called for a "new birth of freedom," giving Union victory a purpose beyond reunion. In his Second Inaugural Address in March 1865, Lincoln said slavery was a cause of the war and suggested the suffering of both sides might be judgment for that wrong. He urged Americans to act "with malice toward none" and care for those hurt by the war. His words now linked freedom, national survival, and healing.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Lincoln's response to Dred Scott and his words in the debates show both support for equality and a limit to that support?

2. What changed between Lincoln's First Inaugural Address and the Emancipation Proclamation? What limit remained in 1863?

3. How did the Gettysburg Address give the war a purpose beyond the one Lincoln first pursued?

4. How did the Second Inaugural Address add to Lincoln's explanation of the war at Gettysburg?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence museum label titled "What Changed?" Trace Lincoln's thinking about slavery, Black Americans' rights, and the war across at least four moments in the passage. Include a limit in one of his earlier views and explain how his later words expanded an earlier goal.

ANSWER KEY

Lincoln's Changing Words

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.US1.38

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline Lincoln's views on slavery or equality, then number three phrases in time order that show how his stated purpose for the war grew. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Lincoln's response to Dred Scott and his words in the debates show both support for equality and a limit to that support?	**He said Black people shared basic rights under the Declaration's promise of equality, but he did not support equal voting or social rights at that time.**
2	What changed between Lincoln's First Inaugural Address and the Emancipation Proclamation? What limit remained in 1863?	**In 1861, he said he had no plan to end slavery where it existed. In 1863, he declared enslaved people free in rebelling areas, but not in loyal border states.**
3	How did the Gettysburg Address give the war a purpose beyond the one Lincoln first pursued?	**Lincoln first fought to preserve the Union. At Gettysburg, he also described the war as a test of equality and called for a new birth of freedom.**
4	How did the Second Inaugural Address add to Lincoln's explanation of the war at Gettysburg?	**At Gettysburg, he linked the war to equality and freedom. In the Second Inaugural, he also named slavery as a cause, considered the suffering it brought, and called for healing.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

What Changed?
In 1857, Lincoln rejected Dred Scott because he believed Black people had basic rights, but in the 1858 debates he still rejected equal voting rights. In 1861, he promised not to end slavery where it existed and focused on keeping the Union together. The Emancipation Proclamation made freedom a Union war goal, though it did not free people in loyal border states. At Gettysburg, he expanded his earlier goal: saving the Union now meant seeking a new birth of freedom. In 1865, he named slavery as a cause of the war and urged the country to heal.

Accept labels that trace at least four moments and accurately distinguish basic rights from equal voting or social rights in Lincoln's earlier views. Students should explain a shift in the war's meaning, not claim that the Emancipation Proclamation freed all enslaved people.