Lincoln - Douglas Debates: How It All Began
by Nicole Cox

Through studying and analyzing correspondence between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas regarding the debates of the 1858 election, students will understand why the debates occurred, where the debates occurred, and the significance of the debates. This lesson is presented in the form of a powerpoint presentation with a follow up activity that assesses the students' understanding of the locations and chronological order of the debates.

Overview

Subject: Language Arts/Social Sciences
Time Required: One 50 minute class periods
Grade Range: K - 5
Understanding Goal: The students will learn the locations, dates, and significance of the Lincoln-Douglas debates
Investigative or Essential Question: How did the Lincoln-Douglas debates come to happen? Where were they held, and why were they important?
Purpose of Library of Congress Items: Primary sources are used to introduce students to the importance of the political debates. Also, they show the tensions between Lincoln and Douglas on the campaign trail.

Library of Congress Items: Bibliographical Information attached.

Additional Materials: 
- Blank Illinois Map (attached)
- Example PowerPoint (attached)

Required Vocabulary: debate, candidate

Prior Content Knowledge: This lesson would be a part of a unit about Abraham Lincoln’s life and the politics of Illinois's history. The students would have prior knowledge of Lincoln’s life in Illinois politics.

Technology Skills: None


For information on specific Illinois Learning Standards go to www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/
Description of Teacher Actions:

Build Prior Knowledge

2. Present the PowerPoint which introduces the letters written between Lincoln and Douglas leading to the debates.
3. Lead the class discussion based on the material and questions in the presentation.
4. Present Library of Congress primary sources in the PowerPoint and help the class analyze the items through discussion of the material.

Student Investigative Activity

1. Students plot the locations of the debates on a map of Illinois and order of the debates based on a color code.

Best Instructional Practices:

Teaching for Understanding

Students are encouraged to use critical thinking skills in this lesson with the “Think about it” questions throughout the slides. The questions address various levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy to ensure that higher levels of thinking skills are used. The assignment will assess the knowledge gained in the lesson about the order and locations of the debates.
### Library of Congress Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Collection or Exhibit</th>
<th>Media Type</th>
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<tr>
<td>Abraham Lincoln to Stephen A. Douglas, Saturday, July 24, 1858 (Debates)</td>
<td>Abraham Lincoln Papers</td>
<td>Unpublished Text</td>
<td><a href="http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&amp;fileName=mal1/010/0102700/malpage.db&amp;recNumm=0">http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&amp;fileName=mal1/010/0102700/malpage.db&amp;recNumm=0</a></td>
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<td>Abraham Lincoln Papers</td>
<td>Unpublished Text</td>
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<td>Unpublished Text</td>
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<td>Lincoln Douglas debate : Du Page County Centennial, August 27th, West Chicago.</td>
<td>By the People, for the People: Posters from the WPA, 1936.1943</td>
<td>Published Text</td>
<td><a href="http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/wpapos:@field(NUMBER+@band(cph+3f05233))">http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/wpapos:@field(NUMBER+@band(cph+3f05233))</a></td>
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<td>Monument on the site of famous debate. Dedication exercises held yesterday on anniversary of Lincoln and Douglas meeting.</td>
<td>An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and other Printed Ephemera</td>
<td>Published Text</td>
<td><a href="http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/rbpebib:@field(NUMBER+@band(rbpe+0180630d))">http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/rbpebib:@field(NUMBER+@band(rbpe+0180630d))</a></td>
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1. Lincoln-Douglas Debates 1858

How it all began

2. What do we know?

- In 1858 Abraham Lincoln ran for Senate against Stephen A. Douglas. During this election, Lincoln and Douglas met in a series of 7 debates.

3. What do we want to know?

- Why did Lincoln and Douglas debate?
- Where and when did the debates happen?
- Why were the debates so important?

4. Why did Lincoln and Douglas debate?

- Abraham Lincoln requested a series of debates with Stephen A. Douglas on July 24, 1858 through a letter written by his campaign manager, Mr. Norman B. Judd.
- It is thought that Mr. Douglas was upset with Lincoln because he followed his campaign trail speaking after Douglas about the topics that Douglas had spoken about.
- Lincoln proposed the debates so that both candidates could be heard on the topics important to the voters.

5. Lincoln's letter to Douglas

July 24, 1858

My Dear Sir

Will it be agreeable to you to make an arrangement for you and myself to divide time and address the same audiences during the present canvass? Mr. Judd who will hand you this is authorized to receive your answer; and if agreeable to you to enter into the terms of such arrangement.

Your Obt. Servt

A. Lincoln

Delivered the original of which the above is a true copy to the Hon. S. A. Douglass at Chicago on the 24 July 1858 and received for answer that he would send me down an answer when he sent down his mail

N. B. Judd

[Note 1 For over a month after his nomination for the United States Senate on June 16, 1858, Lincoln was content to follow Senator Douglas on the latter's speaking tour, frequently answering his speeches after their conclusion or the next day. Because Democrats seldom stayed to listen to him, and because of Douglas's inclination to attack his Republican Senatorial colleague Lyman Trumbull rather than Lincoln, Lincoln and his manager Norman Judd concluded to challenge Douglas to a series of joint debates. The challenge is contained in this note, which is a copy Judd made of the original in Lincoln's hand.]

6. Douglas to Lincoln

July 24, 1858

Stephen Douglas quickly responded to Lincoln's request for a series of debates. He agreed to debates as long as they were done according to his conditions.

7. Questions to think about.

- Why do you think that Lincoln requested to debates?
- Do you think Douglas was upset about Lincoln following him on the campaign trail?
- What conditions would you have made about the debates?

8. Douglas to Lincoln

July 24, 1858

- Stephen Douglas quickly responded to Lincoln's request for a series of debates.
- He agreed to debates as long as they were done according to his conditions.
Learning with Lincoln Institute
Sponsored by Teaching with Primary Sources at
Eastern Illinois University and
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
Endorsed by the
Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission

Douglas to Lincoln
July 29, 1858

Dear Sir,

I was not aware that you had answered my note, nor do I believe that any of your friends have informed me that you had done so. I am, therefore, at a loss to know how to conclude, as you insinuate, that I was mistaken in supposing that you would agreeable to me to make an arrangement with you for the purpose of contesting against each other the Democratic nomination for the Senate of the United States, in the State of Illinois.

Recent events have increased difficulties in the way of such an arrangement. I went to Springfield the other day and found that the Democratic State Central Committee had already made their appointments by which the Democratic candidates for Congress, for the judges, and other offices will be present and address the people. It is evident, therefore, that I would be out of the question to divide time with any candidate, unless it should be understood at the same time, that the questions of time and place should be arranged by the Democratic State Central Committee at any of these places I must insist upon having the right of addressing the people. If I should make this arrangement with you, it is more than probable, that this canvass was handed me by Mr. Judd.

I cannot refrain from expressing my surprise, if it was your original intention to divide time with me. I have been made acquainted with the whole of the appointments as far as I can now get at them, with surprise and regret. Besides, there is another consideration which should be kept in mind. It has been suggested recently that an arrangement had been made to divide time with you, and the people of the several localities have been notified of the time and places of the meetings. As to your surprise that I did not sooner make the proposal to divide time with you, I can only think that you did not intend to make an arrangement with me. If you did, then I am surprised that it was not sooner made. If not, I cannot understand how it has come about that you are supposed to be in agreement with me.

If you are not disposed to make this arrangement, I am well satisfied that you will state the reason in a clear and candid manner.

I am, Your Obedient Servant,

Very Respectfully,

J. G. Dix

P. S. As matters now stand I shall be at no more of your exclusive meetings; and for about six days to prepare, and concluded on me again at Bloomington on the 16th; twenty-four hours after I made a hasty conclusion on yours of the 9th; you had another conclusion on me at Springfield, which I did not hear, and of the contents of which I knew nothing when I spoke; so that your speech made in day-light, and mine at night of the same subject, in opposition to me &c. It was suggested by Lincoln in his letter dated July 29, 1858.

Questions to think about.

- What did Douglas think about Lincoln requesting the debates?
- What did Douglas accuse Lincoln and his political party of doing?
- Why do you think that Douglas set the conditions that he did?
- If you were Lincoln would you agree to the conditions?

Lincoln to Douglas July 29, 1858

Lincoln responded to Douglas's letter on July 29, 1858.

Lincoln resented to implications that he was involved in a plan to take over the debates with a third candidate.

Lincoln explains why he didn't propose the debates at an earlier time.

Lincoln to Douglas July 29, 1858

Douglas wrote to Lincoln on July 30, 1858 in response to his letter of the 29th.

He sets the locations and the dates of the seven debates.

He also agrees to the debate set up suggested by Lincoln in his letter dated July 29, 1858.

Questions to Think About

- How did Lincoln respond to the accusation that he was "tricking" Douglas into debating to divide the Democratic party?
- Why did Lincoln not propose the debates earlier?
- Lincoln agreed to the seven debate sites, but what were his conditions?
The Lincoln-Douglas debates were such an interesting point in history that they were re-enacted many times. This poster advertises one such debate held in West Chicago. The poster shows the busts of Lincoln and Douglas in profile.

The debates have become such an important part of Illinois history that monuments were set up at debate sites. This article from the Aurora Beacon News tells of one such monument.

The Lincoln-Douglas debates were very important in Illinois history. The candidates debated to let their viewpoints be heard by the voters in all of the districts. There were seven debates, each held in a district where the candidates had not spoken in before. The debates have been remembered through re-enactments and monuments throughout the state of Illinois.

On the map of Illinois, plot the location of the seven Lincoln-Douglas debates. Complete the key of the map by color coding the order of the debates. You may use a current map of Illinois to find the location of the cities where the debates were held.

The debates drew in huge crowds. People came on horseback, buggies, wagons and walked to the debates.

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