

LINCOLN'S CHILDHOOD Reading Comprehension

Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky, to Thomas and Nancy Lincoln in their one-room log cabin on their farm known as Sinking Spring (near modern-day Hodgenville, Kentucky). Although Thomas lacked formal education, he was an excellent farmer and carpenter and oftentimes served as a member of the jury. Thomas and Nancy joined a small Baptist church in the area that had broken away from the larger church over the issue of slavery.

When Abe was two, the family moved to nearby Knob Creek Farm, where Abe's first memories of his childhood were formed. Because of difficulties his father had with the title to the farm, Thomas Lincoln moved his family to Pigeon Creek, Indiana, in 1816, where the seven-year-old Abraham helped him build a log cabin in the woods. Two years later, Nancy died of "milk sickness." Milk sickness is a rare disease caused by drinking the milk or consuming the meat of a cow that had fed on poisonous roots. In 1819, however, Thomas married Sarah Bush Johnston, whom Abraham would call "Mother." Sarah was a kind and warm woman who brought her three children, Matilda, Elizabeth, and John, to the Lincoln homestead to live with Abraham and his sister.

From an early age, Sarah recognized Abraham's quick wit and intellect and encouraged him to read. Abraham became an avid reader, gobbling up any book he could get his hands on from neighbors, clergymen, and traveling teachers. Abraham attended school on an inconsistent basis. At times, traveling teachers may have taught at a nearby rudimentary schoolhouse, and at other times Abraham walked several miles to the nearest school. Lincoln himself admitted that the total amount of schooling he received in his childhood was no more than twelve months; nevertheless, he became an excellent reader, learned to write, measure, and make division and multiplication calculations. Abraham took his studies very seriously. Without paper in the house to practice his writing and math, he often did arithmetic on the back of a wooden spoon using charcoal as a makeshift pencil. Lincoln described where he grew up and the opportunities for education in the following quote:

"It was," he once wrote, "a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so-called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin', and cipherin'" to the Rule of Three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard."

Abe's growing desire to attend school conflicted with his father's demands on him, which often made him appear lazy to his neighbors. His father often rented him out to perform manual labor tasks such as shucking corn, hoeing, gathering, and plowing. During the early 1800s, Abe's father was entitled to all of the money earned as a result of his son's labor. Abe's considerable strength was evident with his unusual skill and power with an axe. Abe was said to be able to chop more wood and split more rails than anyone around. Far larger and stronger than the other boys in the region, Abe could outrun and outwrestle all of them. Unlike most boys of his time, however, Abe avoided hunting because he took no pleasure in killing animals.

Although Abe gained a reputation as a prankster and for his storytelling abilities, he also gained a reputation for honesty. When he was nineteen years old, he was hired to co-steer a flatboat down the Mississippi River to unload produce to be sold at the plantations in the South and to return with the money earned. For these services, Abe was paid eight dollars a month. More importantly, these forays into the South opened Abe's eyes to the world beyond the Indiana frontier and likely began to shape his views toward the horrors of slavery as he witnessed the auctions and treatment of slaves firsthand.

1.) What did Abraham's father do for a living?

- a.) He was a farmer.
- b.) He was a teacher.
- c.) He was a doctor.
- d.) He was a judge.

2.) Why did the Lincoln family decide to join a new church?

- a.) The passage doesn't say.
- b.) Over the issue of slavery.
- c.) They became more religious.
- d.) They wanted to be in a smaller church.

3.) Where did Abraham live when he was 7?

- a.) Indiana
- b.) Sinking Spring Farm
- c.) Kentucky
- d.) Illinois

4.) What word or phrase would NOT describe Sarah Bush Johnston?

- a.) dishonest
- b.) kind
- c.) nurturing
- d.) caring

5.) How long did Abraham Lincoln go to school for?

- a.) Never
- b.) His whole life
- c.) About one year
- d.) Two years

6.) What did Abraham Lincoln use to write his arithmetic?

- a.) wooden spoon
- b.) his arm
- c.) pencil
- d.) Charcoal

7.) What do you think "cipherin" is closest to in the following quote:

"It was," he once wrote, "a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so-called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin', and cipherin" to the Rule of Three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard."

- a.) writing
- b.) reading
- c.) math
- d.) planning

8.) Which of the following was Abe NOT rented out by his father to do?

- a.) gathering
- b.) hoeing
- c.) plowing
- d.) shoveling

9.) Which of the following was NOT true about Abraham Lincoln?

- a.) He was the strongest and fastest boy around.
- b.) He gained a reputation for dishonesty.
- c.) He was a prankster.
- d.) He sometimes appeared lazy to others.

10.) Why did Abraham Lincoln refrain from hunting?

- a.) His family didn't need him to hunt.
- b.) His family didn't own a gun.
- c.) He was a terrible shot.
- d.) He didn't like killing animals.