

Lincoln in Richmond

Compiled by the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Target Grade Level: 4–12 in United States history classes

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be better able to:

- Identify and analyze key components of a portrait and relate visual elements to relevant historical context and significance
- Analyze the purpose, meaning, and significance of Abraham Lincoln’s visit to Richmond, Virginia, in April 1865.

Portrait

Lincoln in Richmond

By Lambert Hollis

Ink wash over graphite, 1865

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Alan and Lois Fern Acquisition Fund

NPG.2008.33

[Link >>](#)

Background Information for Teachers

This drawing by sketch artist Lambert Hollis is an eyewitness account of one of the most electrifying moments of the Civil War. After the Confederate government evacuated Richmond on April 2, 1865, Union forces moved quickly to secure both nearby Petersburg and the capital city. The 1861 battle cry of “On to Richmond!” had finally been achieved. Lincoln, sensing the war’s end, wanted to be in at the finish, so he traveled to Petersburg on April 3, and then on April 4 he sailed up the James River in a group commanded by Admiral David Porter. With only a small escort of Marines, Lincoln disembarked with his son Tad in hand. Once he stepped off the boat, he went unnoticed until a workman shouted, “Bless the Lord, there is the great messiah! Glory, Hallelujah!” As Lincoln walked from the waterfront through the defeated city to the Virginia statehouse, his escort feared for his life. The sound of slamming shutters was heard as unreconciled white Confederates shunned the president. Yet the now-freed black population rallied to his side. A crowd quickly gathered as the shout went up of “bless the Lord, Father Abraham’s come!”

Lesson Procedures

Portrait Activity

Students analyze the “Lincoln in Richmond” portrait in order to discuss the significance of Abraham Lincoln’s visit to Richmond, Virginia, in April 1865.

Questions to consider with your students:

- What do you see?
- Who is our focus in this image?

- Who is the child in the drawing? What is his relationship to the man who is holding his hand?
- Describe the other people in this image.
- In what direction is the man walking?
- What is the building in the background of this portrait?
- Describe the houses along the street? Do you see people? If so, what are they doing? Why?

Writing Activity

Create three newspaper articles told from three perspectives.

Have the students consider answering Who? What? When? Where? Why?

Representatives from three newspapers witnessed this event in April 1865. They are:

- An African American from the *New Orleans Tribune* (the first black daily newspaper, founded in 1864) in the foreground with the group
- A southern white man from *Richmond Daily Dispatch* in one of the row houses on the street
- A writer from *The National Intelligencer* (the main Washington, D.C., newspaper) walking with President Lincoln.