1864

Abraham Lincoln vs George B. McClellan

A 20-minute lesson on the 1864 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Civil War	ELECTORAL VOTES 233 total
WINNER Abraham Lincoln (Republican) · 212 EV	RUNNER-UP George B. McClellan (Democratic) · 21 EV
KEY ISSUE Continuation of the Civil War; emancipation; terms of Southern reconstruction	TURNOUT 76.3%

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1864

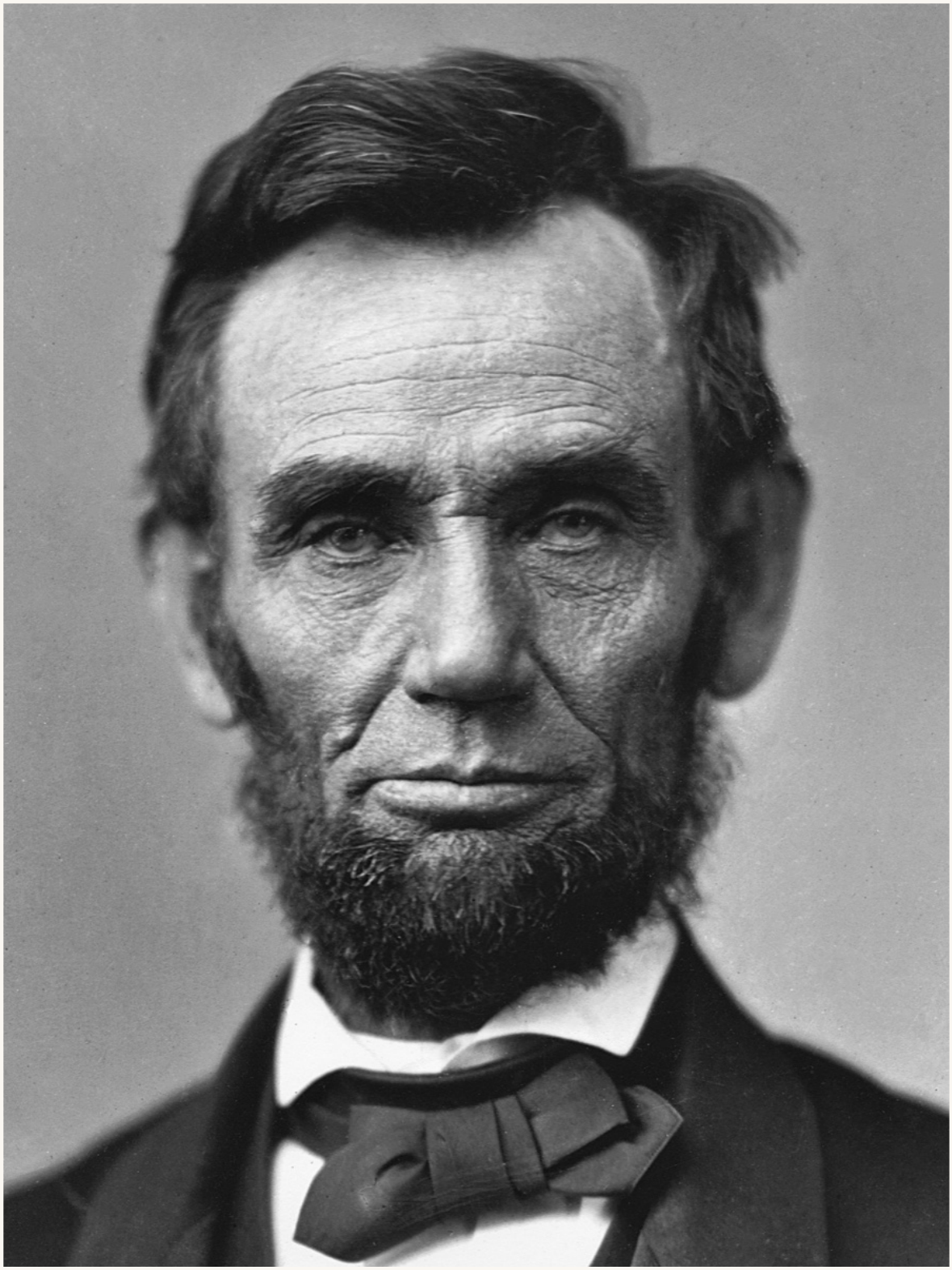
The Civil War had been going on for three years by 1864. So many soldiers had died. The Union was tired. Some Northerners wanted to make peace with the South even if it meant slavery would continue.

In the summer of 1864, things looked bad. The Union army had not won big victories. Many people said President Lincoln could not win re-election. Lincoln himself wrote a secret note saying he probably would lose.

The Democrats picked General George McClellan as their candidate. McClellan had been the Union army's top general until Lincoln fired him for being too cautious. The Democratic Party platform said the war was a failure and the country should make peace.

Then everything changed. In September 1864, General William Tecumseh Sherman captured the city of Atlanta. The Union army was winning! Suddenly Lincoln looked like he might win after all.

Look at the picture. That is President Lincoln during the war. The 1864 election was the first time U.S. soldiers in the field could vote. Most of them voted for Lincoln. Lincoln won 212 electoral votes. McClellan got only 21. Lincoln was re-elected.



Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. He won re-election in November 1864 after General Sherman captured Atlanta in September. The 1864 election was the first wartime presidential election in U.S. history.

ALEXANDER GARDNER (1821-1882), VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who won the 1864 presidential election?

2.

What Union army victory in September 1864 rescued Lincoln's re-election campaign?

3.

What happened to President Lincoln just five days after the Civil War ended?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1864 the Civil War was still going on. President Abraham Lincoln had to run for re-election while the country was fighting. Many people thought he would lose!

Answer key

1.

Abraham Lincoln. He won re-election with 212 electoral votes to George McClellan's 21.

Lincoln was the first U.S. president to win a wartime re-election. The 1864 election demonstrated that constitutional government could survive even during civil war.

2.

The capture of Atlanta. Union General William Tecumseh Sherman captured Atlanta, Georgia on September 2, 1864. The victory transformed Lincoln's political situation from likely defeat to likely victory.

The Atlanta campaign is widely considered one of the most consequential military operations in U.S. political history. Lincoln himself credited the victory with saving his re-election.

3.

President Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC, on April 14, 1865 - just five days after the April 9 Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House. Lincoln died the next morning, April 15. Vice President Andrew Johnson became the seventeenth U.S. president.

Lincoln was the first U.S. president to be assassinated. Three more presidents would be assassinated in the next century: Garfield (1881), McKinley (1901), and Kennedy (1963).