

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT – 2009-2012

***Lesson Title – Abraham Lincoln Snake Hunting in Connecticut  
From Karen Cook***

**Grade - 11**

**Length of class period – 45 minutes**

**Inquiry – (What essential question are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)**

How did Abraham Lincoln express his view towards slavery and black citizenship on the eve of his presidential campaign? How did his views change throughout the course of his presidency?

**Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)**

- Students will identify characteristics of effective orators
- Students will analyze Lincoln’s speech in Hartford and an account of his speech in Norwich.
- Students will examine Lincoln’s expression of personal views in a public and politically charged environment.
- Students will create metaphors to describe viewpoints on slavery in 1860.

**Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?) – (please attach)**

Document 1: Norwich Free Academy Students hear Lincoln Speak

*A Modern History of New London County Connecticut.* Ed. Benjamin Marshall. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1922.

Document 2: Lincoln’s Speech in Hartford

“Abraham Lincoln Speech at Hartford, Connecticut” [Online] Available [http://www.ageoflincoln.com/ageoflincoln/notes/files/Chapter9/Lincoln\\_Speech\\_Hartford\\_CT\\_03051860.pdf](http://www.ageoflincoln.com/ageoflincoln/notes/files/Chapter9/Lincoln_Speech_Hartford_CT_03051860.pdf) 5 March 1860; June 10, 2011.

Document 3: Young America Rising at the Ballot Box Cartoon (optional)

Dallas, Jacob(?) “Young America Rising at the Ballot Box and Strangling the Serpents of Disunion and Secession.” *Harper’s Weekly.* 1 September 1860: 560. [Online] Available < <http://elections.harpweek.com/1860/cartoon-1860-medium.asp?UniqueID=3&Year=>> 10 June 2011.

**Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)**

Begin by offering students some background on Lincoln's visit to Connecticut. Discuss how presidential campaigns differed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lincoln was not yet a candidate in March of 1860, the year he won election.

Abraham Lincoln visited Connecticut days after delivering his famous Cooper Union Address in February of 1860. This visit had two purposes, to campaign for local Republicans including Norwich native, Governor Buckingham, and to test the waters for a presidential bid. As a well-known figure from his Senatorial debates with Stephen Douglas and a popular stump speaker, Lincoln addressed enthusiastic crowds in Meriden, New Haven, Hartford and Norwich on the theme of slavery in new territories acquired by the United States government. In visiting Connecticut he understood that most of his audiences would be familiar with his Cooper Union Address of February 27th and he would need to experiment with some 'new material.' The new material included a snake metaphor that went directly to the heart of the moral question of slavery.

Ask students to read document 1: Norwich Free Academy Students Hear Lincoln Speak and answer some basic questions:

1. When was this account printed? When do you think it was first recorded? How could this address be used by historians?
2. Why were the students interested in attending the speech?
3. What did Mr. Leavens remember about the speech?
4. What does this account reveal about Lincoln's oratory skills? Does this description support your prior knowledge?
5. Why do you think Connecticut was important to Lincoln's presidential campaign?

Ask students to speculate how Mr. Lincoln used the snake metaphor to illustrate his views on slavery in the territories. Then have students read Document 2- Mr. Lincoln's speech in Hartford. You may have them read the entire speech or the snake excerpt. Lincoln's speeches are lengthy, but the metaphors he uses are highly accessible to struggling readers. If you read the entire text, you may feel it necessary to discuss the use of the 'n' word in the text prior to reading it with your students.

Ask students to explain how the snake metaphor illustrates Lincoln's views on slavery in the territories and ask the following follow up questions to the whole class or smaller groups:

1. What does Lincoln assume/suggest about the morality of slavery?
2. Was Lincoln an abolitionist?
3. How was this speech tailored to a Connecticut audience?

4. How would northern and southern democrats react to this speech? Other perspectives?

In conclusion ask students, “Did Lincoln’s personal views on slavery and black citizenship change, or just his public expression of those views?” “What other sources would you need to examine to truly answer this question?”

### **How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?**

The questions posed throughout this lesson can be used to informally or formally assess student learning. In addition, students will be asked to create metaphors for other perspectives on slavery during this time. They may wish to present them in brief ‘stump style’ speeches. Students may guess the perspectives of their classmates, place them on a continuum or illustrate them.

### **Possible Extensions**

1. The class may continue to explore Lincoln’s public expression of his views on slavery and black citizenship throughout his presidency and analyze the shifts and changes in an essay. Suggestions include these easily found documents:

Letter to Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* August 22, 1862  
Gettysburg Address November 19, 1863  
Second Inaugural Address March 4, 1865  
Last Public Address April 11, 1865

2. Examine the cartoon Document 3, “Young America Rising at the Ballot Box”. How is the snake metaphor used here, by whom is it used? What is the overall message of the cartoon? How effective is this cartoon?
3. Connect this lesson to the study of world history. Visit the cast of Laocoon in the Slater Museum (not yet built at the time of Lincoln’s visit) and connect the snake metaphor in Lincoln’s speech and the Young America cartoon with Greek myth.

### **Connecticut Grade Level Expectations- Grades 9-12**

- 1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in United States History.
12. Evaluate the role and impact significant individuals have had on historical events
- 1.2 Describe the importance of significant events in local and Connecticut history and their connection to United States history.

13. Analyze how events and people in Connecticut reflect and have contributed to developments in United States history.

2.2 Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources.

2.4 Demonstrate an ability to participate in social studies discourse through informed discussion, debate and effective oral presentation.

3.1 Use evidence to identify, analyze and evaluate historical interpretations.

### **Document 1: Norwich Free Academy Students Hear Lincoln Speak**

“The following account of Lincoln’s visit to Norwich prepared by Mr. Francis J. Leavens, has never been published:

One morning in March, 1860, I was standing with three or four of my classmates of the junior class in the Norwich Free Academy when one of the older boys of the senior class came up to us and said, “Boys, if you want to hear a regular western stump speaker, go down to the Town Hall tomorrow night.” “Who is he?” we asked, and the answer came, “A man from Illinois named Lincoln, and they say he is great.”

A man from Illinois named Lincoln meant nothing to us. We had never heard of him, but we had heard of stump speakers, though we had not seen or heard one. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show had not begun to make its annual visits to New England, and none of us had been west. “Stump speaker” sounded good to us and we decided to go.

Boys are not apt to be late at anything likely to interest them, and four of us were among the earliest arrivals at the Town Hall. We seated ourselves on the front bench, and when Mr. Lincoln took his place behind the bar that ran along the front of the platform he was not six feet away from us. In fact, when he leaned forward and swung his long arms in gestures it seemed as if we were in danger of being struck.

I will not attempt to describe his appearance; that has been done by many who were intimately associated with him, while artists and sculptors have faithfully portrayed his form and features. I remember that he was dressed in a black suit and that he wore a wide turnover collar and a black silk sailor’s tie, both which were striking and unusual in this region.

At this distance of time I cannot undertake to report what he said, but we four boys sat on the front bench till ten o’clock, our eyes never leaving him, notwithstanding we had to keep our heads raised at an uncomfortable angle as he towered above us. I have heard many famous orators since, but never have I listened to one with such rapt attention, and no one ever made such a deep and lasting impression on me.

His speech was richly illustrated with stories and was frequently interrupted by vigorous applause. One story I remember was about a young farmer who in some way opened up a nest of large and active black snakes, and as Mr. Lincoln described the terrible combat that followed his body swayed, his long black arms and his fingers were writhing and

twisting till even the Laocoon itself was not more realistic. That picture is as plain in my mind's eye today as it was fifty-seven years ago.

The next morning two of us on our way to school reached a cross street and looking down saw two other boys approaching who had also been there. In an instant, without a word, four pairs of us were writing in the air and any stranger who had seen us would have surely thought us crazy. All that day, and for many days, those writing arms were the countersign, and "snakes" the password for the boys who had heard Abraham Lincoln..."

**Document 2: Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Hartford, Connecticut- Snake Excerpt**

March 5, 1860

[*Daily Courant* Version]

"For instance, out in the street, or in the field, or on the prairie I find a rattlesnake. I take a stake and kill him. Everybody would applaud the act and say I did right. But suppose the snake was in a bed where children were sleeping. Would I do right to strike him there? I might hurt the children; or I might not kill, but only arouse and exasperate the snake, and he might bite the children. Thus, by meddling with him here, I would do more hurt than good. Slavery is like this. We dare not strike at it where it is. The manner in which our constitution is framed constrains us from making war upon it where it already exists. The question that we now have to deal with is, "Shall we be acting right to take this snake and carry it to a bed where there are children?" The Republican party insists upon keeping it out of the bed."

**Speech at Hartford, Connecticut- Full text**

[*Daily Courant* Version]

Whether we will have it so or not, the slave question is the prevailing question before the nation. Though it may be true, and probably is true, that all parties, factions and individuals desire it should be settled, it still goes on unsettled---the all-prevailing and all pervading question of the day. Hardly any other great question, however important it may have appeared, has been before the country several years, that had the power so to excite the public mind as this question of slavery. It has been so for six years, and before this received considerable consideration. It is in reality, older. It was rife before the Revolution, even. But it was settled, apparently. It has been settled many times; but each time it has risen it has come higher and higher. It has been coming up and going down. Its last rise was in January, 1854; it rose then higher than any former time, but this has never subsided. Otherwise than this, it grows more and more in magnitude and importance. Two years ago, I said in a speech in Illinois, "We are now in the fifth year of an inauguration of a policy which was to settle this question satisfactorily, but we have not seen the end." It may now be added that since the winter of 1857-8, when the Lecompton imbroglio was created, those who then brought up the question have never been able to see the end. It characterized all the speeches, that the policy they had adopted "was working well, and we were just at the end of it, notwithstanding the efforts of Abolitionists to continue it along. We are just getting rid of this vexed question; and the tail of this hideous creature is just going out of sight."

Now we hear no more of this; and the question arises, "Why can't this question which we all desire so much to be settled, be satisfactorily arranged?" The reason is, that while we all agree that we want it settled, one faction wants to settle it one way, a second has a different plan, and a third still another. Each pulls in a different direction. All desire its settlement, but differ in the method of doing it; and none of them being in a decided majority have ever been able to accomplish the object.

I think one great mistake is made by them all. I think our wisest men have made this mistake. They underrate its importance, and a settlement can never be effected until its magnitude is properly estimated. Until we do this, the means of settlement will never be properly estimated. Now what is the difficulty? One-sixth of the population of the United States is slave. One-sixth of the population of the United States is slave. One man of every six, one woman of every six, one child of every six, is a slave. Those who own them look upon them as property, and nothing else. They contemplate them as property, and speak of them as such. The slaves have the same "property quality," in the minds of their owners, as any other property. The entire value of the slave population of the United States, is, at a moderate estimate, not less than \$2,000,000,000. This amount of property has a vast influence upon the minds of those who own it. The same amount of property owned by Northern men has the same influence upon their minds. In this we do not assume that we are better than the people of the South---neither do we admit that they are better than we. We are not better, barring circumstances, than they. Public opinion is formed relative to a property basis. Therefore, the slaveholders battle any policy which depreciates their slaves as property. What increases the value of this property, they favor. When you tell them that slavery is immoral, they rebel, because they do not like to be told they are interested in an institution which is not a moral one. When you enter into a defence of slavery, they seize upon it, for they like justification. The result is, that public opinion is formed among them which insists upon the encouragement or protection, the enlargement or perpetuation of slavery---and secures them property in the slave. Now this comes in conflict with this proposition that we at the North view slavery as a wrong. We understand that the "equality of man" principle which actuated our forefathers in the establishment of the government is right; and that slavery, being directly opposed to this, is morally wrong. I think that if anything can be proved by natural theology, it is that slavery is morally wrong. God gave man a mouth to receive bread, hands to feed it, and his hand has a right to carry bread to his mouth without controversy.

We suppose slavery is wrong, and that it endangers the perpetuity of the Union. Nothing else menaces it. Its effect on free labor makes it what Seward has been so roundly abused for calling, an irrepressible conflict. Almost every man has a sense of certain things being wrong, and at the same time, a sense of its pecuniary value. These conflict in the mind, and make a riddle of a man. If slavery is considered upon a property basis, public opinion must be forced to its support. The alternative is its settlement upon the basis of its being wrong. Some men think it is a question of neither right or wrong; that it is a question of dollars and cents, only; that the Almighty has drawn a line across the country, south of which the land is always to be cultivated by slave labor; when the question is between the white man and the nigger, they go in for the white man; when it is between

the nigger and the crocodile, they take sides with the nigger. There is effort to make this feeling of indifference prevalent the country, and this is one of the things, perhaps, that prevents the sudden settlement of the question. Is it possible that a national policy can be sustained because nobody opposes or favors it? It may answer to serve the ends of politicians for a while, but it falls at last. There may be one way, however, to make it stand, and that is to make the opinion of the people conform to it; must be made to conclude that those who want slavery shall have it, and that it is simply a matter of dollars and cents. I do not believe a majority of the people of this nation can be made to take this view of it.

Is there any man of the Democratic party, especially the "Douglas wing," but will say that in his opinion the Declaration of Independence has no application to the negro? I have asked this question many times during the past three years, and no Democrat has yet denied that this was his belief, though I have asked it always where people are in the habit of answering their speakers when they please. So I assume this to be their belief today; and I tell you, you are safe to offer a premium to any man who will show you a Democrat who said so five years ago. I avow I never heard it from any man until I heard it from the lips of Judge Douglas. I had, to be sure, in certain portions of the country, heard men say something to this effect, but they didn't sneak around it with any statement like this. They took the bull by the horns, and said the Declaration of Independence wasn't true! Judge Taney might have first broached the doctrine. Perhaps he did; but I heard it first from Judge Douglas, though it was after Taney's Dred Scott decision. If so, Douglas possibly got it from him. Here's half the people of this nation saying what they would not have said five years ago; taking man from his kind and placing him among the brutes. This is a long stride towards bringing about this feeling of indifference in the minds of the people of this country. One more such stride and the object would be reached.

The proposition that there is a struggle between the white man and the negro contains a falsehood. There is no struggle between them. It assumes that unless the white man enslaves the negro, the negro will enslave the white man. In that case, I think I would go for enslaving the black man, in preference to being enslaved myself. As the learned Judge of a certain Court is said to have decided---"When a ship is wrecked at sea, and two men seize upon one plank which is capable of sustaining but one of them, either of them can rightfully push the other off!" There is, however, no such controversy here. They say that between the nigger and the crocodile they go for the nigger. The proportion, therefore, is, that as the crocodile to the nigger so is the nigger to the white man.

They tell us that they desire the people of a territory to vote slavery out or in as they please. But who will form the opinion of the people there? The territories may be settled by emigrants from the free States, who will go there with this feeling of indifference. The question arises, "slavery or freedom?" Caring nothing about it, they let it come in, and that is the end of it. It is the surest way of nationalizing the institution. Just as certain, but more dangerous because more insidious; but it is leading us there just as certainly and as surely as Jeff. Davis himself would have us go.

If, then, we of the Republican party who think slavery is a wrong, and would mould public opinion to the fact that it is wrong, should get the control of the general government, I do not say we would or should meddle with it where it exists; but we could inaugurate a policy which would treat it as a wrong, and prevent its extension.

For instance, out in the street, or in the field, or on the prairie I find a rattlesnake. I take a stake and kill him. Everybody would applaud the act and say I did right. But suppose the snake was in a bed where children were sleeping. Would I do right to strike him there? I might hurt the children; or I might not kill, but only arouse and exasperate the snake, and he might bite the children. Thus, by meddling with him here, I would do more hurt than good. Slavery is like this. We dare not strike at it where it is. The manner in which our constitution is framed constrains us from making war upon it where it already exists. The question that we now have to deal with is, "Shall we be acting right to take this snake and carry it to a bed where there are children?" The Republican party insists upon keeping it out of the bed.

Again: I met Mr. Cassius M. Clay in the cars at New Haven one day last week, and it was my first opportunity to take him by the hand. There was an old gentleman in the car, seated in front of us, whose coat collar was turned far down upon the shoulders. I saw directly that he had a large wen on his neck. I said to Mr. Clay, That wen represents slavery; it bears the same relation to that man that slavery does to the country.

That wen is a great evil; the man that bears it will say so. But he does not dare to cut it out. He bleeds to death if he does, directly. If he does not cut it out; it will shorten his life materially.

This is only applicable to men who think slavery is wrong. Those who think it right, of course will look upon the rattlesnake as a jewel, and call the wen an ornament. I suppose the only way to get rid of it is, for those who think it wrong, to work together, and to vote no longer with the Democracy who love it so well.

Do you who think slavery is wrong, but still vote with the Democracy, act towards it as you do towards any other thing you consider wrong? I think not; on the contrary, you find fault with those who denounce it. In your view of the case it must not be discussed at all. In your view it must not be spoken of in the free States, because slavery is not there; nor in the slave States, because it is there; you do not want it brought into politics because it stirs up agitation; you do not want to hear of it from the pulpit because it is not religion; you do not want to take it into your Tract Societies because it creates disturbance there. Are you consistent in this? You say that if the South themselves desire to stir the question, you wish them God-speed in it. Are you certain of that? In 1858 Frank P. Blair of Missouri did just this thing for his State. He went into the fight, and was a candidate for Congress. He was beaten; and when you heard of his defeat did you hang your heads in sorrow? I reckon not! I guess, that you threw your hat into the air and shouted, "Hurrah! for Democracy!" (Mr. Lincoln then proceeded to speak of the provision in the constitution which permitted the slave trade to continue 20 years. Although it was not expressly so stated, it was understood by the framers of that instrument that it was to have been abolished at the end of that time. He argued that if they had not considered slavery a

wrong, they would not have thus limited the time of supply.) He continued:  
I think the Democracy are pretty generally getting into a system of bushwhackery in this controversy. You all know how Seward has been abused for his "irrepressible conflict" doctrine. The Democracy have repeated it over, and over, and over again; I call this bushwhackery because they have been reminded time after time, but could never be made to admit, that the old fathers said the same thing. They dare not deny it because they know the proof is ready at your hands to meet their denial. Jefferson said it; Washington said it. Before Seward said it, the same statement was made by Pryor of Virginia in his Richmond Enquirer, the leading paper of his State. Pryor is sent to Washington and Douglas hugs him to his bosom, but goes into fits of hydrophobia at Seward's enunciation of the same doctrine which was preached by his Virginia friend.

Another species of bushwhacking is exhibited in their treatment of the John Brown and Harper's Ferry affair. They insist upon it that the Republican party incites insurrections. Did they, can they ever prove their statement? They tried it in the Senate Investigation Committee and failed, but they keep saying it. We have not been fairly dealt with in this matter. We need not [have] expected that we would have been. There was some State elections to come off soon afterwards. They had just passed through elections in other States, and been whipped out. They were glad this occurred at Harper's Ferry. They said to each other---"Jump in---now's your chance!" They were sorry there were not more killed; but taking it as they found it, they howled over it. The elections came off, but they did not result as the Democracy had expected. Each Republican knew that the charge that his party had incited the insurrection was, so far as he was concerned, a slander upon him. That is my philosophy of the result of the elections which ensued. The Democracy is still at work upon John Brown and Harper's Ferry, charging the Republicans with the crime of instigating the proceedings there; and if they think they are able to slander a woman into loving them, or a man into voting with them, they will learn better presently. Now they are going to work at the shoe strike. I don't know that it comes into Connecticut. It goes into New Hampshire. A Democratic Senator gets up in the Senate Chamber and pompously announces that "I cannot dawat thot this strike is the thresult of the onforchunit wahfar brought about boy this sucktional controvussy!" Now whether this is so or not, I know one thing---there is a strike! And I am glad to know that there is a system of labor where the laborer can strike if he wants to! I would to God that such a system prevailed all over the world.

Now this strike is caused by a withdrawal of Southern trade, or it is not. If it is, what can you do to help it? Have you ever made war upon the South? No. Then how can you help yourselves? They withdraw their trade on a false accusation, because you never warred upon them, and consequently cannot stop the war they charge you with. You can, however, conform to their idea that slavery is right. This will satisfy them, but what is the effect on you? Why slavery comes in upon you! Public opinion against it gives way. The barriers which protected you from it are down; slavery comes in, and white free labor that can strike will give way to slave labor that cannot!

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The Republicans want to see all parts of the Union in harmony with one another. Let us do our duty, but let us look to what our duty is, and do nothing except after due

deliberation. Let us determine, if we can, what will satisfy the South. Will they be satisfied that we surrender the territories to them unconditionally? No. If we promise never to instigate an invasion upon slavery? No. Equally without avail is the fact that they have found nothing to detect us in doing them any wrong. What then? We must say that slavery is right; we must vote for Douglas's new Sedition laws; we must withdraw our statement that slavery is wrong. If a slave runs away, they overlook the natural causes which impelled him to the act; do not remember the oppression or the lashes he received, but charge us with instigating him to flight. If he screams when whipped, they say it is not caused by the pains he suffers, but he screams because we instigate him to outcry. We do let them alone, to be sure, but they object to our saying anything against their system. They do not ask us to change our free State constitutions, but they will yet do that. After demanding what they do, and as they do, they cannot stop short of this. They may be justified in this, believing, as they do, that slavery is right, and a social blessing. We cannot act otherwise than we do, believing that slavery is wrong. If it is right, we may not contract its limits. If it is wrong, they cannot ask us to extend it. Upon these different views, hinges the whole controversy. Thinking it right, they are justified in asking its protection; thinking it wrong, we cannot consent to vote for it, or to let it extend itself. If our sense of duty forbids this extension, let us do that duty. This contrivance of a middle ground is such that he who occupies it is neither a dead or a living man. Their "Union" contrivances are not for us, for they reverse the scriptural order and call the righteous, not sinners to repentance. They ask men who never had an aspiration except for the Union, to swear fealty to the Union. Let us not be slandered from our duties, or intimidated from preserving our dignity and our rights by any menace; but let us have faith that Right, Eternal Right makes might, and as we understand our duty, so do it!

[1] Hartford *Daily Courant*, March 6, 1860; Hartford *Evening Press*, March 6, 1860. Typographical errors have been corrected by the editors, but the reports are otherwise unchanged.

Source: Lincoln Speech at Hartford, Connecticut, March 5, 1860, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. IV, pp. 2-13.

**Document 3: Young America at the Ballot Box**

