

JOURNAL

Who do you consider to be a great person?
What qualities do you think are essential for
someone to be considered great?



"The Mysterious Mr. Lincoln" T-Chart

Strengths

Weaknesses

"The Mysterious Mr. Lincoln" Outline

I. Lincoln had a distinctive appearance

A. Tall with long legs

B.

"If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said, I am, in height, six feet, four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on average, one hundred and eighty pounds dark complexion, with coarse black hair and grey eyes—no other marks or brands recollected."

Abraham Lincoln wasn't the sort of man who could lose himself in a crowd. After all, he stood six feet four inches tall, and to top it off, he wore a high silk hat.

His height was mostly in his long bony legs. When he sat in a chair, he seemed no taller than anyone else. It was only when he stood up that he towered above other men.

At first glance, most people thought he was homely. Lincoln thought so too, referring once to his "poor, lean, lank face." As a young man he was sensitive about his gawky looks, but in time, he learned to laugh at himself. When a rival called him "two-faced" during a political debate, Lincoln replied: "I leave
10 it to my audience. If I had another face, do you think I'd wear this one?" **A**

According to those who knew him, Lincoln was a man of many faces. In repose,¹ he often seemed sad and gloomy. But when he began to speak, his expression changed. "The dull, **listless** features dropped like a mask," said a Chicago newspaperman. "The eyes began to sparkle, the mouth to smile, the whole countenance² was wreathed in animation, so that a stranger would have said 'Why, this man, so angular and solemn a moment ago, is really handsome!'" **B**

1. **repose** (rĭ-pōz'): the act of resting.

2. **countenance** (koun'tā-nəns): the face; expression of the face.

Lincoln was the most photographed man of his time, but his friends insisted
 20 that no photo ever did him justice. It's no wonder. Back then, cameras required
 long exposures. The person being photographed had to "freeze" as the seconds
 ticked by. If he blinked an eye, the picture would be blurred. That's why Lincoln
 looks so stiff and formal in his photos. We never see him laughing or joking.

Artists and writers tried to capture the "real" Lincoln that the camera
 missed, but something about the man always escaped them. His changeable
 features, his tones, gestures, and expressions, seemed to **defy** description.

Today it's hard to imagine Lincoln as he really was. And he never cared to
 reveal much about himself. In company he was witty and talkative, but he rarely
 betrayed his inner feelings. According to William Herndon, his law partner, he
 30 was "the most secretive—reticent—shut-mouthed man that ever lived."

In his own time, Lincoln was never fully understood even by his closest friends.
 Since then, his life story has been told and retold so many times, he has become
 as much a legend as a flesh-and-blood human being. While the legend is based on
 truth, it is only partly true. And it hides the man behind it like a disguise. **C**

The legendary Lincoln is known as Honest Abe, a humble man of the
 people who rose from a log cabin to the White House. There's no doubt that
 Lincoln was a poor boy who made good. And it's true that he carried his
 folksy manners and homespun speech to the White House with him. He said
 "howdy" to visitors and invited them to "stay a spell." He greeted diplomats
 40 while wearing carpet slippers, called his wife "mother" at receptions, and told
 bawdy³ jokes at cabinet meetings.

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Lincoln may have seemed like a common man, but he wasn't. His friends
 agreed that he was one of the most ambitious people they had ever known.
 Lincoln struggled hard to rise above his log-cabin origins, and he was proud
 of his achievements. By the time he ran for president he was a wealthy man,
 earning a large income from his law practice and his many investments. As for
 the nickname Abe, he hated it. No one who knew him well ever called him
 Abe to his face. They addressed him as Lincoln or Mr. Lincoln.

Lincoln is often described as a sloppy dresser, careless about his appearance. In
 50 fact, he **patronized** the best tailor in Springfield, Illinois, buying two suits a year.
 That was at a time when many men lived, died, and were buried in the same suit.

It's true that Lincoln had little formal "education," as he would have
 pronounced it. Almost everything he "larned" he taught himself. All his life he
 said "thar" for *there*, "git" for *get*, "kin" for *can*. Even so, he became an eloquent
 public speaker who could hold a vast audience spellbound, and a great writer
 whose finest phrases still ring in our ears. He was known to sit up late into the
 night, discussing Shakespeare's plays with White House visitors. **D**

He was certainly a humorous man, famous for his rollicking stories. But he
 was also moody and **melancholy**, tormented by long and frequent bouts of
 60 depression. Humor was his therapy. He relied on his yarns,⁴ a friend observed,
 to "whistle down sadness."

3. **bawdy** (bó'dē): vulgar.

4. **yarn**: an entertaining tale.

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He had a cool, logical mind, trained in the courtroom, and a practical, commonsense approach to problems. Yet he was deeply superstitious, a believer in dreams, omens, and visions. **E**

We admire Lincoln today as an American folk hero. During the Civil War, however, he was the most unpopular president the nation had ever known. His critics called him a tyrant, a hick, a stupid baboon who was unfit for his office. As commander in chief of the armed forces, he was **denounced** as a bungling amateur who **meddled** in military affairs he knew nothing about. But he also
70 had his supporters. They praised him as a farsighted statesman, a military mastermind who engineered the Union victory.

Lincoln is best known as the Great Emancipator, the man who freed the slaves. Yet he did not enter the war with that idea in mind. "My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union," he said in 1862, "and is *not* either to save or destroy slavery." As the war continued, Lincoln's attitude changed. Eventually he came to regard the conflict as a moral crusade to wipe out the sin of slavery.

No black leader was more critical of Lincoln than the fiery abolitionist⁵ writer and editor Frederick Douglass. Douglass had grown up as a slave.
80 He had won his freedom by

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Allan Pinkerton, President Abraham Lincoln, and Major General McClernand at Antietam Battle Site, Maryland. October 3



called him "preeminently the white man's president, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men."

escaping to the North. Early in the war, impatient with Lincoln's cautious leadership, Douglass called him "preeminently the white man's president, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men." Later, Douglass changed his mind and came to admire Lincoln. Several years after the war, he said
90 this about the sixteenth president:

"His greatest mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and, second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. . . . taking him for all in all, measuring the tremendous magnitude of the work before him, considering the necessary means to
100 ends, and surveying the end from the beginning, infinite wisdom has seldom sent any man into the world better fitted for his mission than Abraham Lincoln." 

Allan Pinkerton, President Abraham Lincoln, and Major General John A. McClernand at Antietam Battle Site, Maryland. October 3, 1862.



5. **abolitionist** (ăb'ə-ŭsh'ə-nĭst): one who advocated the end of slavery.