

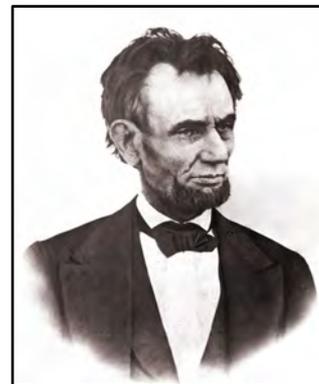
# Abraham Lincoln's Assassination

Two days after Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, Abraham Lincoln gave a speech detailing his plans for rebuilding the Union. John Wilkes Booth, a successful actor from Maryland, was in the audience. Booth believed in slavery and white supremacy. Upon hearing Lincoln's speech he said to his companion, "That is the last speech he will ever make."

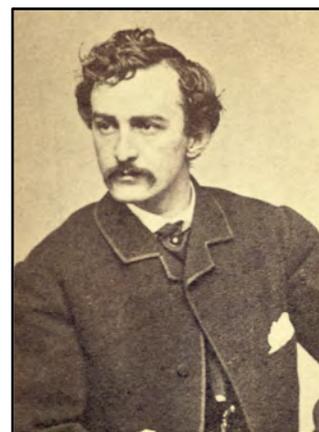
Earlier in the year, Booth had made failed attempts to kidnap the president. After hearing the speech, he planned Lincoln's assassination. With the help of his co-conspirators, he planned to kill President Abraham Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson, and Secretary of State William H. Seward all in the same night. They decided upon the evening of April, 14, 1865, when Lincoln would be attending a play at Ford's Theatre in Washington D.C.

The play was "Our American Cousin", a comedy. Lincoln was accompanied by his wife Mary Todd Lincoln, a young officer named Major Henry R. Rathbone, and his fiancé Clara Harris. John Wilkes Booth waited outside the presidential box for the lead actor to utter a very funny line. Amid the laughter, he barged into Lincoln's box with a dagger and a pistol. He fired the pistol six inches from Lincoln and slashed Rathbone with his dagger. He then jumped from the balcony onto the stage. Some witnesses said his foot caught on a flag

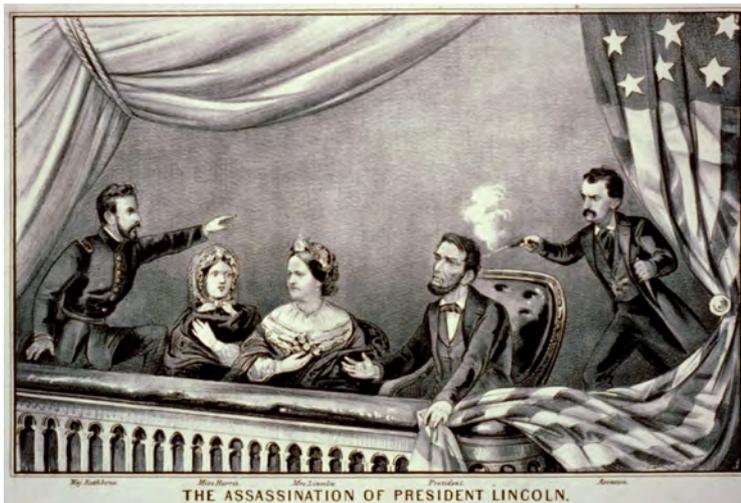
and he broke his leg. Some said that Booth declared, "Sic Semper Tyrannis" which is Latin for "Thus be it always for tyrants." Others reported that he said, "The South is avenged!" Booth ran off the stage and escaped by horse. Lincoln had been shot in the head. He was brought to a nearby boarding house where he died the next morning.



**Abraham Lincoln**  
March 1865



**John Wilkes Booth**



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Around the same time Lincoln was shot, Booth's accomplice, Lewis Powell, attacked Secretary of State William Henry Seward. He stormed into Seward's house and fought his way to the Secretary's bedroom where he stabbed him. Seward barely survived. The final target, Vice President Andrew Johnson, remained safe. His assassin, George Atzerodt, decided not to go through with the plan.

Two weeks later, John Wilkes Booth was found in a barn in Virginia by the Union Cavalry. They had orders to keep him alive. They set the barn on fire and before he escaped Sargent Boston Corbett shot and killed him. Booth's accomplices were tried in later months. Four of his accomplices, including Powell and Atzerodt, were hanged in July.

Several days after Lincoln's assassination, his body was put on a train that would travel 1,654 miles to Springfield, Illinois, where the President would be buried. The train stopped at several cities along the way where thousands of mourners gathered to view Lincoln's body. He was finally buried on May 3, 1865 seventeen days after his death! Abraham Lincoln was the first American president to be assassinated.



**Wanted poster for Booth and his accomplices**



**Lincoln's funeral train**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Abraham Lincoln's Assassination Comprehension Questions

## Within the Text

1. Who was John Wilkes Booth?
2. What was Booth's plan?
3. How was Abraham Lincoln killed?
4. What happened to Seward and Johnson?

## Beyond the Text

5. Why do you think the Lincoln family decided to have a funeral train?
6. Why is Lincoln's assassination important today?

## About the Text

7. Why do you think the author included photographs in this article?