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Lesson Plan: Close Reading of a Primary Source

- Grade level: high school
- Subject: This lesson, focusing on some of the primary documents of Abraham Lincoln, is geared toward history classes, but the skills of close reading are applicable in most any class.
- Purpose:
 - *Model* the historian's craft of engaging in the close reading of a primary source, which entails integrating research from other primary and secondary sources. Use a mentor text--in this case, a blog post and YouTube video close reading of a letter Lincoln sent to his friend Eliza Browning.*
 - *Guided practice* with a primary source.
 - *Independent practice*: Begin the process of producing close readings independently.
 - Note: while this lesson in close reading is designed around the primary sources of Abraham Lincoln, it could easily be shifted to any primary sources of interest to the teacher or students.
- Common Core Standards:
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1](#): Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2](#): Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3](#): Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.
 - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9](#): Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.
- Materials:
 - Copies of Lincoln's letter to Eliza Browning:
<http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/lincoln/letter-to-eliza-browning-april-1-1838/>
 - Computer, projector, internet for teacher
 - For subsequent lessons, time in a computer lab would be especially helpful, so that students can engage in digital research. In particular, students will need to access primary sources from the House Divided Project's list of 150 most teachable Lincoln documents:
<http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/lincoln/top-150-lincoln-documents/>
 - Note that these are searchable by topic, among other methods.
- Introduction:
 - Today we will explore what it means to do a *close reading* of a primary source. We'll read a letter from Abe Lincoln, ask some preliminary questions about it, and then read a mentor text which offers a close reading of the document. Then, we'll do some guided practice on a different primary source. Over the next few days, you will begin the process of doing your own close reading of a primary source, which will culminate in well-researched multi-media product.
- Hook:
 - Did you ever had a crush on someone for awhile, and then couldn't believe you *ever* liked that person in the first place? Have you ever made a promise that, later, you really, *really* didn't want to keep? Can you imagine that those things happened to Abe Lincoln, before he became president?

- Your multi-media project might take the form of a blog post on Quora, video podcast on YouTube, annotations on Genius, a Storify presentation, or Prezi, among other options.
- Note that this may be done with a partner, and that we will spend several days in the library to give you time to collaborate, research, draft, and ask lots of questions.
- Select one of Lincoln's writing from <http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/lincoln/top-150-lincoln-documents/>
 - Annotate the document with questions, observations, ideas, connections.
- Research:
 - Use other primary sources, e.g., from the House Divided project, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Gilder Lehrman
 - Use secondary sources, e.g., the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Society*
- Draft, confer, revise.
- Publish your work via one of the venues discussed above (e.g. YouTube, Quora, Genius, Storify, etc.)
- Reflection after today's lesson:
 - In your Writer's Notebook, reflect on the experience of working through a close reading today. What value did you find in it? Why do historians engage in close reading? What was frustrating or confusing? What ideas do you have for pursuing your own close reading?
- Reflection after completing a draft of the independent writing:
 - What questions do you still have about this document? What resources do you need to continue your work? What are you doing, in terms of style or organization or content, to produce a compelling close reading? How will you enhance the final product with images?

*There are many excellent close readings of primary sources that can serve as mentor texts for this project:

- Multi-media close reading options: Documents 1-25 of the House Divided Project's list of 150 most teachable Lincoln documents contain multi-media close readings by the historian Matthew Pinsker; other documents contain close readings by students in the course taught by Professor Pinsker, Understanding Lincoln. They are available here: <http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/lincoln/top-150-lincoln-documents/>
- Textual close reading options: *Great Lincoln Documents: Historians Present Treasures from the Gilder Lehrman Collection (2009)* offers a number of important primary sources, as well as a close reading essay of each primary source by a respected historian.