

**TEACHER GUIDE**

# 1860 DOC. #1: Lincoln Douglas Debates Image (1858)

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In the middle of the 18th century the territory of the United States was still rapidly expanding. Between the elections of 1856 and 1864 five new states from the North and West were added to the union. In these years, before completion of the transcontinental railroad, candidates could not visit every state. Newspapers provided the best means to get the word out about a campaign.

One way to get the attention of the press was to create new forums for candidates that would spark voter interest. Newspaper reporters could be counted on to carry the news to voters in far-flung parts of the country. The elections of 1858 and 1860 provided a national platform to discuss key issues of the day, including slavery and state sovereignty.

The first presidential debates between candidates from different parties didn't occur until 1960. The famous Lincoln-Douglas debates actually took place during the 1858 campaign for the Illinois Senate. Lincoln, who was not as well known at the time, challenged Douglas to debate in order to increase his visibility, and Douglas accepted. Huge crowds gathered for the debates in seven Illinois cities between August and October. The debates were successful in attracting press coverage from across the country. Lincoln lost the Senate race but in the process he became known to a national audience which helped his campaign two years later when he again faced Douglas, this time for the presidency.

The main issue in the 1858 debates was the spread of slavery. Douglas argued that each new territory should be allowed to decide whether or not to accept slavery. Lincoln opposed the spread of slavery into new territories and argued that Douglas' proposal amounted to "squatter sovereignty" (Daniel 356).

This drawing was made by an artist named Beale at the time of the debates.

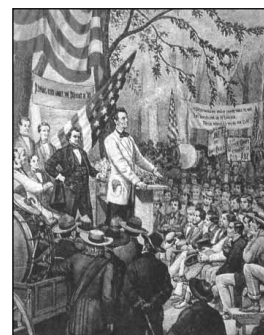
> **Project** the document.

QUESTION **What messages does this image suggest about Lincoln? Why do you think so?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is an able speaker with lots of support.

EVIDENCE Lincoln assumes a noble position, straight and tall, hand outstretched; audience seems to be paying deep attention to his words

**1860 DOC. #1**



Picture History

**Lincoln Douglas Debates Image (1858)**

**PowerPoint Slide**

QUESTION **Does this image favor Lincoln or Douglas? Give evidence to support your conclusion.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER It favors Lincoln.

EVIDENCE Lincoln’s image is the largest one, presented high and in the center of the frame; Douglas is smaller, behind and beneath Lincoln; Lincoln is the one speaking, others listening to him; 2 of the 3 signs favor Lincoln: “Abe the Giant Killer” and “The girls link on to Lincoln”

**SEE NOTE** →

QUESTION **Based on this image, who was the target audience for the debates? Explain your answer.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER White men were the target audience.

EVIDENCE audience is mainly male and all white; only white men could vote in 1860

**FURTHER QUESTIONS**

In modern elections it is common for candidates to debate the issues. What role can debates play in helping voters decide for whom to vote?

Some people have argued that debates should replace political advertisements as the primary means for candidates to communicate with the public. What do you think?

**NOTE**

Douglas, nicknamed “The Little Giant,” was 5 foot 4 inches tall. Lincoln, “the Giant Killer” or “The Rail Splitter,” was 6 foot 4 inches.

**ADDITIONAL INFO**

Lincoln proposed the idea of a debate to Douglas in a letter. He wrote: “will it be agreeable to you to make an arrangement for you and myself to divide time and address the same audiences during the present canvass?” (Daniel 356). Had Douglas turned him down one wonders whether Lincoln could have attained the name recognition sufficient to be nominated for President two years later.

The size of the crowds presented a special problem for the debaters in 1858, since microphones and amplifiers had yet to be invented. During the fourth debate in Charleston, Illinois on September 18, 1858, Lincoln began his speech in this way:

“Ladies and gentlemen: It will be very difficult for an audience so large as this to hear distinctly what a speaker says, and consequently it is important that as profound silence be preserved as possible” (Lincoln 145).

**CONNECTIONS**

(see thematic listing)

**Reaching Voters**

The Lincoln Douglas debates were carried to the national electorate through lengthy newspaper coverage of their words. Today’s candidates debate in front of the TV cameras, usually with a small live audience. How has this shift in medium influenced how candidates speak? See 1960 doc. #1 of the Nixon/Kennedy debates (first televised presidential debate) and 2000 doc. #10 the Bush/Gore debate.