

GRADE  
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# Of America

Fourth Edition

# I

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A Beka Book



Reading Program



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\*This story could be read during black history month.

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\*This story could be read during black history month.

# Character

*Margaret Slattery*

What one is, that is the supreme thing. Sincerity, honesty, unselfishness, intelligence, the spirit of cooperation and justice, cheerfulness, courtesy, concentration and all the rest help make one what he is. What one is—that is Character. Strong, fine character stands the test of life with all its dangers and pitfalls—nothing else does.

Everyone has the power of making his character what it ought to be. The power lies in the little words “Yes” and “No.” Saying “Yes” to all that life offers which is good and right, and saying “No” to all that can weaken or defile, will form character strong, pure and fine.



# Lincoln and Lee

*Author Unknown*



Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.  
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

## Part 1

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### Young Abe Lincoln

On the twelfth of February, 1809, a boy was born in a cabin in Kentucky. He was named Abraham Lincoln.

His father, Thomas Lincoln, was an idle fellow who could neither read nor write. Sometimes he worked as a farmer, sometimes as a carpenter, but he did little as either.

When Abe was a few years old, Thomas Lincoln made up his mind to go west. He hoped to find rich land and better times.

So he loaded all his worldly goods in a wagon and made his way westward through the forest. In Indiana he stopped and built a house—if house it could be called. It was a room open on one side to the weather. It had no floor, no doors, no windows.

Here they lived a year and then Thomas Lincoln built a cabin. This had a loft in which Abe slept. But there was neither stairway nor ladder by which to mount. Abe

climbed up pegs driven in the wall, and slept on the floor on a pile of leaves.

Downstairs there was one bedstead. It was made of poles fastened on one side in a crack of the log wall. On the other side the poles rested on forked sticks driven in the earthen floor. Across the poles were laid boards covered with skins, leaves, and old clothes.

Instead of chairs, in this house there were three-legged stools. There was a rough table, a few dishes, an oven, and a skillet. These were all of the household goods.

When Abe was nine years old, his mother became ill. He and his little sister Sarah nursed her and did the housework. They hoped every day that she would grow better, but instead, she grew worse. No doctor came to see her. There was none within thirty-five miles.

One day Mrs. Lincoln called the children to the bedside. She told them she had not long to live. Laying her

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**bedstead**—*the frame of a bed that holds the mattress*



feeble hand on little Abe's head, she told him to be kind to his father and sister.

"Be good to each other, my children," she said. "Love your kin and your God."

A few hours later the children were motherless.

There followed a hard, sad winter. But the next year their father married again—a good, kind woman who took a mother's place. She was gentle and loving; she worked hard and made the best of things. Little Abe and Sarah were treated like her own children. Her love and care made the cabin a home.

Abe was now ten years old and could neither read nor write.

"He must go to school," said his new mother.

So he was sent to a teacher in a log cabin nearby. He studied hard and soon stood at the head of his class. He had few books, but these he read over and over. He did not own an arithmetic book nor a slate. With a piece of charcoal he ciphered on a broad wooden shovel. When it was covered with figures, he shaved them off and used it again.

His father thought it was a waste of time to study so much. He wished Abe to be at work helping him. And so the boy went to school "by littles."

Most of the time he worked barefoot in the field, grubbing, plowing, and mowing. No one his age could carry a heavier load nor strike a harder blow. When he came home he took a piece of cornbread in his hand and sat down to study.

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*kin*—relatives or family members  
*ciphered*—worked arithmetic problems

*"by littles"*—a little bit at a time  
*grubbing*—digging



So he grew to manhood, tall and strong, awkward and ugly. He was a strange figure with his homespun clothes and his squirrel-skin cap.

Thomas Lincoln now left the Indiana farm, for which he had never paid. Carrying his household goods in an ox wagon, he went west to Illinois.

A little dog trotted near the wagon. One day it fell behind and came up after they had broken the ice and crossed a stream. It was afraid to enter the water covered with floating ice. There it stood, whining and howling on the bank.

"I'll drive back for no dog," said Thomas Lincoln. "Come on! Leave it there."

But kindhearted Abe could not bear to leave the dog in distress. He pulled off his shoes and waded through the icy water. In his arms, he carried the dog across the stream. How it wagged its tail and yelped for joy!

In Illinois a new log cabin was built. Abe helped cut trees, hew timber, and clear away underbrush. He plowed with a team of oxen; he split rails to make a fence.

So passed the days. And now he was twenty-one, a man grown. From the school of the backwoods, he started out in the world for himself.

### **A Virginia Boy**

Let me tell you about a Virginia home, very different from the Lincoln cabin in Kentucky. This was a handsome old country house called Stratford. It was built in the shape of the letter H. On the roof were summer houses where bands played on summer evenings. Around it were broad grounds, sloping down to a beautiful river.

It was a grand old house, and when my story begins it was a happy home. Here lived General Henry Lee, called "Light Horse Harry."

His forefathers had held place and rank in England. They had come to Virginia in its early days, and in war and in peace they had been leaders.

