

Name: _____ Class: _____

Assassination of the President

Attempted Murder of Secretary Seward and Sons.

By Evening Star
From Library Of Congress • 1865

This excerpt from an 1865 newspaper, Evening Star, contains multiple accounts of the night President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward were attacked. The attack came only five days after Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered his massive army at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, effectively ending the American Civil War. As you read, identify the overall mood and tone of the report, and what this suggests about Lincoln's popularity in the northern United States.

ASSASSINATION OF THE PRESIDENT

* * *

***Attempted Murder Of Secretary Seward
And Sons.***

* * *

Despatches from Secretary Stanton.¹



"The Last Hours of Abraham Lincoln" by Alonzo Chappel is in the public domain.

* * *

War Department,

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 15. 1.30 P.M.

Major General John A. Dix, New York:

[1] Last evening, at 10.30 p. m., at Ford's Theater, the President, while sitting in his private box with Mrs. Lincoln, Miss Harris, and Maj. Rathbun, was shot by an assassin who suddenly entered the box. He approached behind the President. The assassin then leaped upon the stage, brandishing a large dagger or knife, and made his escape by the rear of the theater. The pistol ball entered the back of the President's head. The wound is mortal. The President has been insensible² ever since it was inflicted, and is now dying.

1. **Edwin McMasters Stanton (1814-1869) was a lawyer and politician who served as Abraham Lincoln's secretary of war during the Civil War (1861-1865). Much of the information in this article comes from reports created by his office.**
2. **Insensible (adjective):** without one's mental faculties

About the same hour an assassin, either the same or another, entered Mr. Seward's³ house and, under pretence of having a prescription, was shown to the Secretary's sick chamber.⁴ The Secretary was in bed, a nurse and Miss Seward with him. The assassin immediately rushed to the bed, inflicting two or three stabs on the throat, and two in the face. It is hoped the wounds may not be mortal. My apprehension⁵ is that they will prove fatal. The nurse alarmed Mr. Frederick Seward, who was in an adjoining room, and hastened to the door of his father's room, where he met the assassin, who inflicted upon him one or more dangerous wounds. The recovery of Frederick Seward is doubtful.⁶

It is not probable that the President will live through the night.

Gen. Grant⁷ and wife were advertised to be at the theater this evening, but the latter started to Burlington at six o'clock last evening.

- [5] At a Cabinet⁸ meeting, at which Gen. Grant was present to-day, the subject of the state of the country, and the prospects of speedy peace was discussed. The President was very cheerful and hopeful, spoke very kindly of Gen. Lee⁹ and others of the Confederacy, and the establishment of Government in Virginia. All the members of the Cabinet, except Mr. Seward, are now in attendance upon the President. I have seen Mr. Seward, but he and Frederick were both unconscious.

E.M. Stanton, Secretary of War

* * *

War Department,

WASHINGTON, D.C., 3 A.M., April 15, 1865. ;

Lieutenant General Grant:

The President still breathes, but is quite insensible, as he has been ever since he was shot. He evidently did not see the person who shot him, but was looking on the stage, as he was approached behind.

Mr. Seward has rallied, and it is hoped he may live. Frederick Seward's condition is very critical. The attendant who was present was stabbed through the lungs, and is not expected to live. The wounds of Major Seward are not serious.

-
3. William H. Seward (1801-1872) was the United States Secretary of State from 1861 to 1869 throughout Lincoln's administration.
 4. Seward had been in a carriage accident the week before, and was confined to his bed.
 5. **Apprehension (noun):** anxiety or fear that something bad or unpleasant will happen; understanding
 6. Actually, no one in the Seward attack died. However, Seward's wife Frances died shortly after, having never fully recovered from the shock of the attack.
 7. General Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885) was the Commanding General of the United States Army, and worked closely with President Abraham Lincoln to lead the Union Army to victory over the Confederacy in the American Civil War. He would later become the 18th President of the United States.
 8. A "Cabinet," in this case, refers to a body of advisers to the president, composed of the heads of the executive departments of the government.
 9. General Robert Edward Lee (1807-1870) was an American general known for commanding the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia in the American Civil War from 1862 until his surrender in 1865.

Investigations strongly indicate J. Wilkes Booth as the assassin of the President. Whether it was the same or a different person that attempted to murder Mr. Seward, remains in doubt.

Chief Justice Cartter¹⁰ is engaged in taking the evidence. Every exertion has been made to present [sic]¹¹ the escape of the murderer. His horse has been found on the road near Washington.

Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War.

* * *

War Department,

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 15, - 4.10 A.M.

Major General Dix,¹² New York:

[10] The President continues insensible, and is sinking. Secretary Seward remains without change. Frederick Seward's skull is fractured in two places, besides a severe cut upon the head. The attendant is still alive, but hopeless.

Major Seward's wounds are not dangerous. It is now ascertained¹³ with reasonable certainty, that two assassins were engaged in the horrible crime – Wilkes Booth being the one that shot the President; the other, a companion of his, whose name is not known, but whose description is so clear that he can hardly escape.

It appears, from a letter found in Booth's trunk, that the murder was planned before the fourth of March, but fell through then because the accomplice backed out until Richmond could be heard from. Booth and his accomplice were at the livery stable at six o'clock last evening, and left there with their horses about ten o'clock, or shortly before that hour.

It would seem that they had for several days been seeking their chance, but for some unknown reason, it was not carried into effect until last night. One of them has evidently made his way to Baltimore, the other has not yet been traced.

Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War.

* * *

-
10. David Kellogg Cartter (1812–1887) was the Chief Justice of the newly established Supreme Court of the District of Columbia (which would later become the United States District Court for the District of Columbia).
 11. The term "sic" is used to highlight places where mistakes or typos were made by the original author. It is likely that they meant "prevent."
 12. **John Adams Dix (1798–1879) was Secretary of the Treasury, Governor of New York and Union major general during the Civil War.**
 13. **Ascertain (verb):** to find (something) out for certain; make sure of

Associated Press Account:

President Lincoln and wife, together with other friends, last evening visited Ford Theater for the purpose of witnessing the performance of the American Cousin.¹⁴ It was announced in the newspapers that Gen. Grant would also be present, but that gentleman, instead, took the late train of cars for New Jersey. The theater was densely crowded, and everybody seemed delighted with the scene before them.

- [15] During the third act, and while there was a temporary pause for one of the actors to enter, a sharp report of a pistol was heard, which merely attracted attention, but suggesting nothing serious, until a man rushed to the front of the President's box, waving a long dagger in his right hand, and exclaiming "Sic Semper Tyrannis,"¹⁵ and immediately leaped from the box, which was of the second tier, to the stage beneath, and ran across to the opposite side, thus making his escape, amid the bewilderment¹⁶ of the audience, from the rear of the theater, and, mounting a horse, fled.

The screams of Mrs. Lincoln first disclosed¹⁷ the fact to the audience that the President had been shot, when all present rose to their feet, rushing toward the stage, exclaiming, "Hang him!" "Hang him!"

The excitement was of the wildest possible character, and, of course, there was an abrupt termination¹⁸ of the theatrical performance.

There was a rush towards the President's box, when cries were heard. "Stand back!" "Give him air!" "Has anyone stimulants!" etc.

On a hasty examination it was found that the President had been shot through the head, above and back of the temporal bone, and that some of the brain was oozing out. He was removed to the private residence of Mr. Peterson, opposite to the theater, and the Surgeon General of the Army and other surgeons sent for to attend to his condition.

- [20] On examination of the private box blood was discovered on the back of the cushioned rocking chair in which the President had been sitting, also on the partition and on the floor.

A common single barrelled pocket pistol was found on the carpet.

A military guard was placed in front of the private residence to which the President had been conveyed.¹⁹

An immense crowd was in front of it, all deeply anxious to learn the condition of the President. It had been previously announced that the wound was mortal, but all hoped otherwise.

14. The name of the play was actually "Our American Cousin."

15. "Sic Semper Tyrannis" is a Latin phrase meaning "thus always to tyrants." It is a shortened version of the phrase "Sic semper evellit mortem tyrannis" ("Thus always I bring death to tyrants"). The phrase was in the pro-Confederate Civil War song "Maryland, My Maryland," which was popular at the time with Southern sympathizers in Maryland, like Booth.

16. **Bewilderment (noun):** a state of being confused and puzzled; complete mystification

17. **Disclose (verb):** to make (secret or new information) known

18. **Termination (noun):** the action of bringing something or coming to an end

19. **Convey (verb):** to transport or carry to a place

The shock to the community was terrible.

- [25] At midnight the Cabinet, with Messrs. Sumner, Colfax, Farnsworth, Judge Cartter, Gov. Oglesby, General Meigs, Major Hay, and a few personal friends, with Surgeon General Barnes and his medical associates, were around his bedside. The President was in a state of syncope,²⁰ totally insensible, and breathing slowly, the blood oozing from the wound at the back of his head. The surgeons were exhausting every possible effort of medical skill, but all hope was gone. The parting of his family with the dying President is too sad for description.

Assassination of the President by Evening Star is in the public domain.

20. Syncope is a medical term referring to a temporary loss of consciousness and posture, often described as “fainting” or “passing out.”

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: How does the collection of multiple accounts of the night of President Lincoln's assassination contribute to the central idea of the article? [RI.2]
 - A. They demonstrate the confusion and conflicting information surrounding the night of Lincoln's assassination.
 - B. They argue, collectively, for increased diligence on the part of security and police surrounding the victims.
 - C. They demonstrate the critical need for national unity during a time of unthinkable loss.
 - D. They illustrate the unanimous national feeling that the loss of Lincoln will be tragic for the country.

2. PART B: Which TWO quotations from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "My apprehension is that they will prove fatal." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "It is not probable that the President will live through the night." (Paragraph 3)
 - C. "He evidently did not see the person who shot him, but was looking on the stage, as he was approached behind." (Paragraph 6)
 - D. "The theater was densely crowded, and everybody seemed delighted with the scene before them." (Paragraph 14)
 - E. "...when all present rose to their feet, rushing toward the stage, exclaiming, 'Hang him! Hang him!'" (Paragraph 16)
 - F. "The shock to the community was terrible." (Paragraph 24)

3. PART A: What does the word "accomplice" mean as it is used in paragraph 12? [RI.4]
 - A. the victim of a crime
 - B. a person who helps another commit a crime
 - C. a person who accuses someone else of committing a crime
 - D. a person who is slow to act

4. PART B: Which clue from the text best supports the answer for Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "Every exertion has been made to present [sic] the escape of the murderer." (Paragraph 9)
 - B. "...the murder was planned before the fourth of March..." (Paragraph 12)
 - C. "It would seem that they had for several days been seeking their chance..." (Paragraph 13)
 - D. "...but for some unknown reason, it was not carried into effect until last night." (Paragraph 13)

5. Using evidence from the text, how do you expect the newspaper's readers to have responded to the news of Lincoln's assassination? Why? [RI.2]
