

FLUENCY-BUILDING READER'S THEATER FOR GRADES 4 - 8

# Spies & Rebels

of the  
Civil War

Aligns to  
Common  
Core



An Original Play  
Based on Actual  
Events

BY SCHOLASTIC & STORYWORKS PLAYWRIGHT MACKOWIECKI LEWIS

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# President Lincoln's Spies & Rebels

An original play based on actual events  
By Mack Lewis for ReadAloudPlays.com



Abraham Lincoln's presidency was among the most eventful in U.S. history. After his election, just getting him to Washington required the services of the nation's greatest private detective, Allan Pinkerton.

## Cast:

### Narrators 1 & 2

**Allan Pinkerton** – head man at  
*Pinkerton's Detective Agency*

**Kate Warne, Hattie Lawton, Timothy**

**Webster** – *Pinkerton's top agents*

**President Lincoln**

**Advisor** – *to the President*

**Barber, Rebels 1 & 2** – *angry Confederate rebels*

**Watchman** – *train station employee*

BARBER: He is a tyrant and . . . and a baboon!

*A tyrant is a cruel leader. The barber is expressing his opinion of Lincoln.*

NARRATOR 2: The Southerners hate Lincoln because they believe he will do away with slavery.

NARRATOR 1: Rather than give up their slaves, they want to form a separate nation called the Confederate States of America. They know Lincoln will try to stop them.

REBEL 1: Where would the South be without her slaves? Our fore fathers had slaves. George Washington himself had slaves. Yet this Lincoln will deny us ours.

BARBER: I am willing to do *anything* to get rid of this Lincoln!

## Scene 1: A Barber Shop in Baltimore

NARRATOR 1: Abraham Lincoln is on his way to Washington to be sworn-in as the 16<sup>th</sup> President, but to get to the Capitol he must travel through Baltimore, a city loyal to the South and slavery.

NARRATOR 2: The rebels aren't aware that weeks earlier, Allan Pinkerton had been hired by the railroad to perform a secret mission.

NARRATOR 1: Going by the name Hutchinson, he has disguised himself and become friendly with these Southerners.

PINKERTON: This Lincoln, he's trouble for the South.

BARBER: It would be better to have the devil as president.

PINKERTON: He has said that the country cannot exist half slave and half free.

REBEL 1: Soon we will be a *separate* country. We will even go to war!

PINKERTON: And what of Lincoln? He has said Confederates are rebels against the Union.

BARBER: As surely as I cut the hairs upon your head, we will put a stop to this Lincoln.

NARRATOR 1: Meanwhile, he assigns Timothy Webster and Kate Warne the task of befriending some Southern officers.

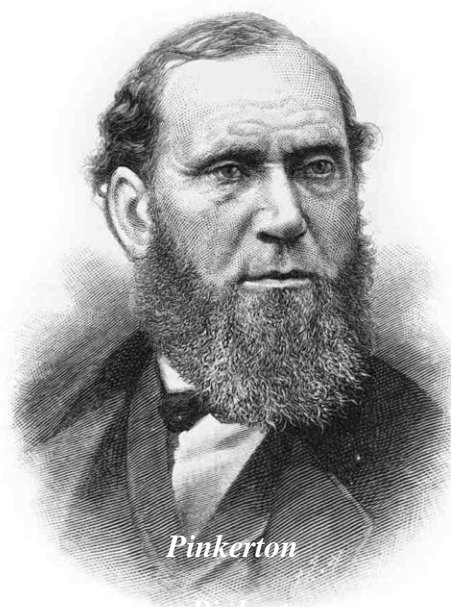
KATE: Allan, these young officers are plotting to kill the President!

WEBSTER: Their plan is to blow up Lincoln's train. Once he is killed, they will cut the telegraph wires and destroy bridges to keep Northern troops from storming the city.

PINKERTON: I have also uncovered something. I am to go to a secret meeting tonight. The barber and his friends have invited me to join them in *their* plot.

HATTIE: It could be a trap.

PINKERTON: It's a risk I must take. I must learn details. And so must you. Go back and find out all you can. The President's life depends on it!



## Scene 2: Pinkerton's Office

NARRATOR 2: Pinkerton assigns his best agents to the case. He and Hattie Lawton work out of an office near the barber shop.

## Scene 3: A Secret Meeting Place

REBEL 2 (*singing stupidly*): Oh I wish I were in Dix-ie, hoo-ray, hoo-ray!

REBEL 1 & BARBER: Here's to Southern independence!

REBEL 2: To Dixie!  
To the  
Confederacy!

*The Confederacy  
was the eleven  
Southern states that  
joined together and  
tried to "quit" the  
United States.*

NARRATOR 2: Pinkerton, using the name Hutchinson, joins a group of men planning an attack on Lincoln.

REBEL 1: Lincoln will have to change trains in Baltimore. Since the train to Washington will be at a different station, he'll have to take a carriage through the city.

BARBER: Some of our men will begin a fake fight to draw away the police. Others will throw bricks and rotten eggs to start a riot.

REBEL 1: The rest of us will attack the carriage with our pistols and daggers!

BARBER: But only one of us will strike the tyrant down.

REBEL 2 (*shouting*): Lincoln will never make it out of this city!

BARBER: Quiet, you fool!

NARRATOR 1: The men are told to reach into a box and choose a small piece of paper called a *ballot*.

BARBER: All the ballots are white except one. Whoever draws the red ballot will strike the President down.

NARRATOR 2: Each man steps up to draw. Before reaching into the box, each swears an oath of secrecy. No one is to know who has the red ballot.

REBEL 1: Your turn, Hutchinson.

NARRATOR 1: Pinkerton draws, then moves away. He checks his ballot.

NARRATOR 2: It's red!



## Scene 4: A Few Days Later in Philadelphia

NARRATOR 1: A few days later, Pinkerton meets with Lincoln and his advisor.

LINCOLN: It is good to see you again, Allan. I understand you have some disturbing news.

PINKERTON: Yes, Sir, Mr. President.

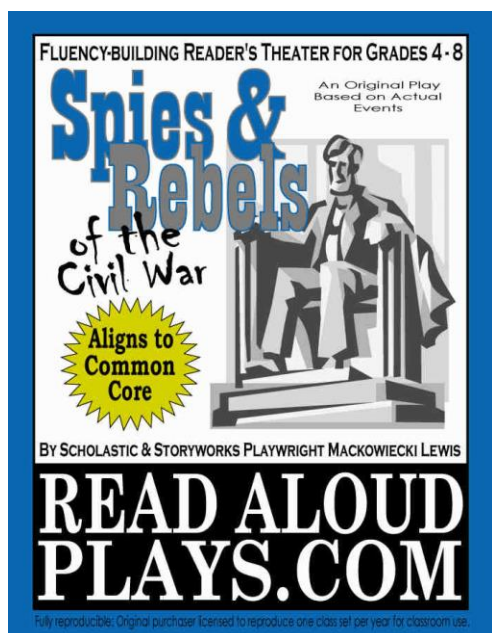
LINCOLN: Please, Allan. I'm not the president until my inauguration. Besides, we've known each other too long for that. Call me Abraham.

*The inauguration is  
the ceremony in  
which the President  
swears his oath of  
office.*

NARRATOR 2: Pinkerton explains the Southern plots but Lincoln is not convinced.

(continued)





From the moment **Abraham Lincoln** was elected, his life was in danger. In fact, it took a team of the nation's best detectives just to get him to his inauguration! This classroom play script is based on the real event historically known as "**the Baltimore Plot.**" It reveals Lincoln's character and quirky personality, as well as the **attitudes** that led to the Civil War. It also introduces readers to Allan **Pinkerton**, the famed detective who started **The Secret Service**. Imagine how engaged your students will be playing actual spies! But this play also comes with a strong warning: because the content is about an assassination plot and the cast includes students playing the part of rebels, the play requires pre-teaching and significant discussion. It's aimed at grades 4 through 8 but is best suited for 5<sup>th</sup> grade and up. Use is as reader's theater, either in small groups or as a whole class.



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**Bubble Test Comprehension Activity** (*CCSS Literature items 1, 4, 10*). Have students cite evidence from the text when completing and reviewing. 1. D; 2. A; 3. D; 4. C; 5. B; 6. C; 7. C; 8. C; 9. Answers will vary: Lincoln's insistence on raising the flag suggests he valued keeping his promises. His story of the turkey shows he was compassionate. His jokes and riddles demonstrate he had a sense of humor.; 10. Pinkerton's role protecting the president gave birth to the Secret Service, while private detectives today usually investigate crimes against the citizenry.

**Extension Activities:**

- Read Lincoln's inauguration speech aloud.
- Map the states based on their position during the Civil War: Blue and Gray
- Research the historical event known as "The Baltimore Plot," the birth of Pinkerton's Detective Agency (and its motto, "We Never Sleep"), and Allan Pinkerton's role during the Civil War.
- Enact alongside other plays based on mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century history including "Freedom for the First Time," which depicts the end of the Civil War from a slave's perspective, or Box Brown's Freedom Crate.

Visit [ReadAloudPlays.com](http://ReadAloudPlays.com) for original play scripts about African-American history, Civil Rights, and more.

# Spies & Rebels - Comprehension Activity

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

Select the best answer for each question. Be prepared to support your answers by locating evidence in the text. (CCSS Literature items 1, 4, 10)

**1. Why was Baltimore a dangerous place for the new president?**

- ☐ A. At that time in history Baltimore had a problem with gang violence.
- ☐ B. The Confederacy had its headquarters there.
- ☐ C. Baltimore was on the side of the Union.
- ☐ D. Baltimore was loyal to the South and wanted to keep slavery going.

**2. Why were the Southerners so upset with Lincoln?**

- ☐ A. They thought he would end slavery and stop the South from becoming its own country.
- ☐ B. They thought he wanted to rejoin the U. S. with England.
- ☐ C. They thought he was likely to be a "tax and spend" president.
- ☐ D. Lincoln was in favor of slavery.

**3. How did the rebels in this story justify slavery?**

- ☐ A. Their fathers and grandfathers had had slaves
- ☐ B. George Washington had had slaves
- ☐ C. The South would struggle without slaves
- ☐ D. All of the above.

**4. In which of the following statements is the character expressing an opinion?**

- ☐ A. KATE: I will arrange a news blackout so that no one will find out.
- ☐ B. PINKERTON: The barber lied. There were actually eight red ballots.
- ☐ C. ADVISOR: But, Sir, if you were to be killed, war would be certain.
- ☐ D. HATTIE: It could be a trap.

**5. Who hired Allan Pinkerton?**

- ☐ A. The U.S. Government
- ☐ B. The railroad
- ☐ C. Abraham Lincoln
- ☐ D. The Confederacy

**6. What was Pinkerton's plan for getting Lincoln safely to Washington?**

- ☐ A. By pretending to be Hutchinson he would help the rebels in Baltimore.
- ☐ B. They would use a stagecoach for the journey instead of the train.
- ☐ C. They would use a regular passenger train instead of the special train everyone expected.
- ☐ D. They would get protection for Lincoln from the Baltimore police.

**7. Why wouldn't Pinkerton let Lincoln have a gun?**

- ☐ A. Lincoln would shoot himself in the foot.
- ☐ B. Carrying a weapon would make him feel cowardly.
- ☐ C. It wasn't proper for the President to be armed.
- ☐ D. Weapons were not allowed on the train.

**8. The play concludes with Pinkerton saying it was the beginning of a terrible time for America. What did he mean?**

- ☐ A. Lincoln was going to be a terrible president.
- ☐ B. They were going to have to protect the president everywhere he went.
- ☐ C. The North and the South would probably be going to war.
- ☐ D. It was going to be difficult without slaves.

Use complete sentences and evidence from the play to answer the following on a separate sheet.

**9. From his actions and words in this story, how would you describe Abraham Lincoln's character traits?**

**10. How do you think Pinkerton's job as a detective back in the Civil War era differs from a modern private detective's job? What do you think his job title would be today?**