



*Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse*

## **Ovation's Educational Activities for the documentary *Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

**Grade Levels – Middle School and High**

**School Discipline**

- Theatre Arts
- Also supports Social Studies and English Language Arts

**Materials for teacher**

- Program clips from the documentary, *Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse*
- Educational activities and websites related to program content

*Note: It is recommended that teachers review all selected programming clips contained in these activities prior to using them in class. Some program clips contain images related to the American Civil War and the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.*

**Standards**

**National Core Arts Standards – Theatre**

Middle School and High School

Activities and resources contained in this document support the areas of:

- Responding
- Connecting

**National Standards Theatre Arts Education**

**American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE)**

**Grades 9-12**

**Content Standards**



## ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

5. Researching by evaluating and synthesizing cultural and historical information to support artistic choices.
6. Analyzing, critiquing, and constructing meanings from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.

### **Overview of Documentary and Activities**

These activities explore a documentary entitled *Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse*.

April 2015 marked the 150th anniversary of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre. In honor of the historical milestone, Ovation proudly presented *Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse*, an in-depth look at the theater's earliest beginnings, where it is now, and its goals for the future.

Using rare footage, photographs and interviews with historians, as well as directors and actors from the theater itself, this program takes viewers on a journey that spans over a century.

Students will view an historical account of the playhouse building. They will make connections to the transformation of the building from its earliest structure and purpose to its current design and purpose. Students will gain understanding of the Ford's Theatre association with President Abraham Lincoln's legacy. Students will participate in discussions and write observations in journals.

**The following educational activities are divided into two parts.**

#### **PART I**

This activity encompasses two class periods, in which students will view select program clips, discuss and analyze program segments, and the venue, events, and individuals featured in the program. As motivational and inspirational exercises, students will be provided with related website links for research and exploration.

#### **PART II**

This activity guides teachers to the Ford's Theatre Education website where they will find a robust offering of materials for use in classrooms, in association with the subjects, historical events, and individuals associated with Ford's Theatre.



## ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

### **Length of Unit:**

**PART I – Two – 45 minute class periods**

**PART II - Number of class periods to be determined by teacher**

### **Instructional Objectives**

#### **Students will:**

- Explore and understand the history of a landmark building
- Understand the significance of maintaining the legacy of an iconic national leader
- Develop skills for creating an historical timeline
- Enhance discussion skills and note-taking skills
- Enhance research skills

#### **Supplies:**

- computers with Internet access
- white board, or
- laptop computer, screen and speakers
- journals in binder format for each student
- program clips from *Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse*

### **Related Websites**

#### **Ford's Theatre**

Ford's Theatre – Ford's Theatre History

<http://www.fords.org/home/explore-lincoln/learn-story/fords-theatre-history>

Ford's Theatre – About Ford's

<http://www.fords.org/home/about-fords>



***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

Ford's Theatre – Education

<http://www.fords.org/home/education>

**Abraham Lincoln**

Ford's Theatre – Explore Lincoln

<http://www.fords.org/home/explore-lincoln>

*Encyclopedia Britannica* – Abraham Lincoln – biography

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/341682/Abraham-Lincoln>

Civil War Trust – Abraham Lincoln – biography

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/biographies/abraham-lincoln.html>

U.S. History.org - Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

<http://www.ushistory.org/us/34f.asp>

*SCHOLASTIC*

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/unit/abraham-lincoln-everything-you-need>

**John Wilkes Booth**

*Encyclopaedia Britannica*

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/73713/John-Wilkes-Booth>



***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

**John T. Ford**

Ford's Theatre – The John T. Ford Society

<http://www.fords.org/home/support-us/donor-programs-and-benefits/-john-t-ford-society>

**Frankie Hewitt**

*The New York Times* – article about Hewitt

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/03/arts/frankie-hewitt-71-catalyst-for-revival-of-ford-s-theater.html>

*PLAYBILL* – article about Hewitt

<http://www.playbill.com/news/article/frankie-hewitt-instrumental-in-relighting-fords-theatre-for-shows-dead-at-7-111841>

**American Civil War**

The Civil War Trust – Brief Overview of the Civil War

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/civil-war-overview/overview.html>

*Encyclopedia Britannica* – American Civil War

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/19407/American-Civil-War>



## ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

### **Part I – Activity 1**

#### **Homework**

#### **Introduction & Motivation exercise**

#### **Subject Related Words**

The teacher will relate the following list of words and definitions to the students for use during class discussions and in their note-taking activities. This information was selected specifically for its correlation to words used in association with these activities, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> The students can obtain additional meanings for these words, and usage, from this website.

**actor** *noun* :a person who acts in a play, movie, etc. 2 *a*: one who represents a character in a dramatic production *b*: a theatrical performer *c*: one who behaves as if acting a part

**assassinate** *transitive verb* 1 :to injure or destroy unexpectedly and treacherously 2 :to murder (a usually prominent person) by sudden or secret attack often for political reasons

**context** *noun* :the words that are used with a certain word or phrase and that help to explain its meaning :the situation in which something happens :the group of conditions that exist where and when something happens

**expression** *noun*: the act of making your thoughts, feelings, etc., known by speech, writing, or some other method: the act of expressing something: a word or phrase: the way someone's face looks that shows emotions and feelings

**emancipate** *transitive verb*: to free from restraint, control, or the power of another; especially: to free from bondage

**icon** *noun*: a person who is very successful and admired: a widely known symbol

**interpretation** *noun* 1: the act or the result in interpreting: EXPLANATION 2: a particular adaptation or version of a work, method, or style 3: a teaching technique that combines factual with stimulating explanatory information <natural history interpretation program>

**legacy** *noun*: something that happened in the past that comes from someone in the past



## ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

**monologue** *noun*: a long speech given by a character in a story, movie, play, etc., or by a performer (such as a comedian): a long speech made by one person that prevents anyone else from talking

**motivation** *noun*: the act or the process of giving someone a reason for doing something: the act or process of motivating someone: a force or influence that causes someone to do something

**narrative** *noun* 3: the representation in art of an event or story: also: an example of such representation

**scenery** *noun*: the walls, furniture, trees, etc., that are used on a stage during a play or other performance to show where the action is taking place 1: the painted scenes or hangings and accessories used on a theater stage

**traitor** *noun*: a person who is not loyal to his or her own country, friends, etc. :a person who betrays a country or group of people by helping or supporting an enemy

**tribute** *noun*: something that you say, give, or do to show respect or affection for someone

## **PART I**

### **Day 1**

#### **Class work**

The teacher will guide the students to the Ford's Theatre – Education website to review in class the history of Ford's Theatre over the past 180 years.

Ford's Theatre – Ford's Theatre History

<http://www.fords.org/home/explore-lincoln/learn-story/fords-theatre-history>

# # #

The teacher will show students selected clips of the documentary, *Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse*. Each clip is two to three minutes in length. After viewing each clip it is suggested that the teacher engage the students in a discussion, utilizing some or all of the discussion points listed below.



## ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

It is also suggested that students have journals for notes, observations and for use in developing a timeline of the topics, events and individuals examined in the program sequences.

### Clip 1

#### Discussion Points

Throughout the viewing of the following program clips, make notes about key dates, historical events, and individuals associated with the building which is now known as Ford's Theatre.

As you view landmarks, portraits of Abraham Lincoln, the theater's interior and exterior, begin to discuss, make notes and list words summarizing and conveying the history of this building. (The teacher may decide to use a more formal timeline structure, based on the information and images in the program clips being provided.)

### Clip 2

#### Discussion Points

As you view the program clips and hear comments about Abraham Lincoln, begin to list the characteristics and ideals associated with him.

Discuss the relevance of President Barack Obama's tribute, in particular his remarks about President Abraham Lincoln, the man who authored the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves.

It is noted here that Lincoln was an admirer of the arts and that he could even quote portions of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* by heart. Learning about his part of his nature, what characteristic do you believe this conveys about Lincoln?

Begin to make notes as you view these program clips about the visual images, externally and internally at Ford's Theatre, and in the classic black and white photos as well as the current state of the building shown in the documentary.





## ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

A statement is made that being so close to history, brings an energy to the theater. In your opinion, what might this energy be?

### Clip 3

#### Discussion Points

Here the actor and director speak about the significance of performing and directing in this historic site. In your opinion what emotional connections might they be feeling as they work in this playhouse?

Make notes and discuss what you see as you view the on stage and behind stage images. Note specifically the scenery and the details, accessories and materials that are assembled on stage and behind it.

Observe and discuss, throughout these program clips, key elements of the interior of Ford's Theatre. Focus on the scale, colors, design elements, fabrics, and in particular note the details associated with the box where President Lincoln sat the night he was assassinated.

Discuss and make notes about the historical photos in these sequences, focusing on the humanity, buildings, bridges, and the original structure of the venue, which in the 1833 was the First Baptist Church.

In your opinion and from what you view here, do you believe it was fitting for a church to be transformed into a playhouse theater? If so, or if not, expand on your ideas.

The fact that Lincoln visited Ford's Theatre 10 times demonstrates his interest in the arts. In your opinion, what might his presence at the theater likely have meant to the theater owners, and actors performing there?

Discuss the significance of John Wilkes Booth, a famous Shakespearean actor, being present at Lincoln's address and vowing that would be the last speech that Lincoln would ever write.

Imagine you were attending the theater that night, just following the end of the Civil War, with the president and his wife in attendance. Discuss and describe the energy, formalities, and precautions that you would likely have experienced.



## ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

Shortly after 10:00 p.m. John Wilkes Booth made his way to the place where the President Lincoln and his wife were watching the play with friends. Understanding Booth's intention to assassinate the president, discuss the emotions and motivations Booth was likely to be experiencing at this time.

It is stated that it was April 14, 1865 and chaos reigned at Ford's Theatre.

Discuss the significance of the statement "Nothing would ever be the same." Imagine you were writing a news article the following morning. Begin the article with those words, and describe in the fullest sense the statement that "Nothing would ever be the same."

### **PART I**

#### **Day 2**

#### **Class work**

The teacher will show students selected clips of the documentary, *Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse*. Each clip is two to three minutes in length. After viewing each clip it is suggested that the teacher engage the students in a discussion, utilizing some or all of the points listed below.

#### Clip 5

#### Discussion Points

Imagine you were a student during the immediate days following Lincoln's

assassination, with means to today's social media resources. Discuss the types of messages you might be sending and reading during that period, and throughout the ensuing time while the assassin and his co-conspirators were apprehended, shot and executed.

Discuss the impact and images of the photos you are viewing in these sequences, most importantly the sketch of Booth being shot, and the scene of the hanging.

It is stated that three months following Lincoln's assassination John T. Ford announced the production of a new show and began selling tickets. He received threats to burn the theater down if he dared desecrate this site by putting on fanciful theatrical performances.



## ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

It is stated here that people thought the theater was damned. Discuss the significance of this and in your opinion how many ways might this theater have been damned?

Following the tragedy in 1893, discuss the assertion that the original building, a church, transformed into a theater, resulted in the loss of a president, and loss of many other people.

### Clip 6

#### Discussion Points

In the next half century Ford's Theatre became a Lincoln Museum. In your opinion, was this a fitting and appropriate venue to showcase artifacts of Abraham Lincoln? If so, or if not, expand on your opinion.

In the 1960s socialite Frankie Hewitt made the assertion that "If the theater reopens it should be a playhouse, not simply a monument to Lincoln's assassination." In your opinion, what other message points might she have used to convince others to support this goal?

It is stated here that with Hewitt's guidance, Ford's Theatre became a beacon of the arts in D.C. It is noted that Hewitt's tenure stretched through eight U.S. presidents, and each of them visited Ford's Theatre. Discuss the significance of the presence of these presidents at the theater.

Compare and contrast the speaking points by two American presidents. President Ronald Reagan is featured in this program clip. President Barack Obama is featured in an earlier program clip. Focus on the spirit, tone and themes in their comments, as they both paid tribute to President Abraham Lincoln. In your opinion, were these tributes fitting testaments to the original goal set by Frankie Hewitt? Expand on your opinion.

### Clip 7

#### Discussion Points



## ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

In your opinion, what characteristics, skills, and social and political connections must Frankie Hewitt have possessed to have realized the goal of bringing Ford's Theatre back to life and restoring it to its standard as a landmark?

Observe and discuss the energy, tone, and spirit displayed in those you see in these program sequences.

Imagine you were present to hear the stirrings of the audience and the crowds, and those who wrote about theater. Discuss the types of phrases, statements, and commemorations you would likely have heard during this period.

It is stated in this program clip, that in everything done at Ford's, it is always asked "What is our connection to Lincoln's legacy?" This applies to theatrical on stage, education programs, and the museum.

In your opinion, and from what you observed and discussed about the events, and historical figures, how does theatre, education, and museum relate to Abraham Lincoln's legacy?

If you were asked to feature a classic play that would relate to Lincoln's legacy, discuss which one you would select. Describe your reasons for selecting this play.

If you could have selected the three most significant artifacts representing Abraham Lincoln, his ideals, and his presidency, what would they be? Expand on your reasons for selecting these artifacts.

Continue making notes about key dates, milestones, and events in the timeline of the Ford's Theatre building.

Clip 8

Discussion Points

It is stated here that the qualities Lincoln displayed during this time were **creativity**, **courage**, **tolerance**. Further, it is stated these are things we want to carry on as his legacy, as guideposts for helping young leaders understand the direction they need to head.

Discuss some critical national and international issues facing our country today, and align how and why a leader possessing Lincoln's qualities continues to be needed in our nation's leaders.



### ***Ford's Theatre: America's Playhouse***

In closing, a statement is made, "It's important to say, it happened, we lived this, but we don't forget."

Discuss as a group, during your own lifetime in the United States, other tragic national events of monumental importance about which you would say...

***It happened, we lived this, but we don't forget.***

### **PART II – Ford's Theatre Education website**

The teacher is encouraged to explore and utilize resources available on the Ford's Theatre Education website offering a robust collection of materials related to the subjects, themes, historical events, and individuals associated with Ford's Theatre.

Ford's Theatre – Education

<http://www.fords.org/home/education>

Following are some examples of the resources

- School Programs
- Teacher Programs
- Learning Online
- Resources for Teacher
- Resources for Students

### **Related Websites**

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Ford's Theatre – About Ford's

<http://www.fords.org/home/about-fords>

Ford's Theatre – Education

<http://www.fords.org/home/education>

### **Abraham Lincoln**

Ford's Theatre – Explore Lincoln

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*Encyclopaedia Britannica* – Abraham Lincoln - Biography

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Civil War Trust – Abraham Lincoln - Biography

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U.S. History.org - Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

<http://www.ushistory.org/us/34f.asp>

*SCHOLASTIC*

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/unit/abraham-lincoln-everything-you-need>



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*Encyclopaedia Britannica*

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### **PLAYBILL**

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### **American Civil War**

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