

Name _____

Date _____

Fixed On Lincoln

Washington D.C., March 4th, 1865—the Inauguration Day of President re-elect Abraham Lincoln was cold and windy, just as it had been four years earlier. But the U.S. Capitol building was now complete; its great iron dome now in place, crowned by a bronze liberty. Just before the president began to speak, the clouds parted, flooding the stands with brilliant sunlight. Lincoln rose and gave his speech.

"I'm a tired man," Lincoln said afterwards. "Sometimes I think I'm the tiredest [*sic*] man on earth."

In the crowd just a few yards from Lincoln was the young actor, John Wilkes Booth. His vantage point on the balcony, Booth said afterwards, had offered an excellent chance to kill the president, "If [he] had wished."

John Wilkes Booth was a fervent believer in slavery and white supremacy. He enthusiastically supported the Confederate notion that African Americans were unequal to whites and should remain slaves. But during the four years of war, he had not been able to bring himself to actually fight for the Southern cause. "I have begun to deem myself a coward, and to despise my own existence," he wrote. His mind fixed on Lincoln as the tyrant responsible for all the country's troubles and his own. Booth hatched a scheme to kidnap Lincoln, and he gathered a worshipful band of dubious conspirators willing to help out. This included: Lewis Paine, a wounded Confederate who had recently sworn allegiance to the union; David E. Herold, a druggist clerk who was thought by some to be mentally handicapped; George Atzerodt, a German-born wagon painter, barely able to make himself understood in English; and John H. Surratt, a sometime Confederate spy, whose widowed mother, Mary, kept a Washington boarding house where Booth and his admirers sometimes met. In paragraph 1, the author writes, "Washington D.C., March 4th, 1865—the Inauguration Day of President re-elect Abraham Lincoln was cold and windy, just as it had been four years earlier."

