

RS#10.1

Teacher Guide to the Resources

Document I: John Wilkes Booth

Background Information:

- John Wilkes Booth was born on May 10, 1838 in Harford County, Maryland.
- After his father's death in 1852, Booth left his studies at the prestigious military school St. Timothy's Hall. In 1855 he followed his older brothers, Junius Jr. and Edwin, into the acting profession.
- In October 1859, Booth – who, like other Marylanders, supported slavery – was shocked and galvanized by John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia. Booth briefly enlisted in the Richmond militia and witnessed Brown's hanging in December.
- Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, Lincoln declared martial law in Maryland as part of an effort to keep the state from seceding. Even though angry and frustrated, Booth did not enlist in the Confederate Army as a promise to his mother.
- For some six months in 1864–65 Booth laid plans to abduct the president and carry him to Richmond. The March 20, 1865 scheme failed when Lincoln did not appear at the spot where Booth and his six fellow conspirators lay in wait.
- On Good Friday, April 14, 1865, Booth, having learned that Lincoln planned to attend Laura Keane's performance of *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theater in Washington on that evening, plotted the simultaneous assassination of the President, Vice President Andrew Johnson, and Secretary of State William H. Seward. Lewis Thornton Powell, who called himself Payne, guided by David E. Herold, seriously wounded Seward and three others at Seward's house. George A. Atzerodt, assigned to Johnson, lost his nerve and did hurt the Vice President.

Guided Questions/Teaching Suggestions:

Ask students:

- Where was John Wilkes Booth born? What was his chosen profession?
- What did Booth do on April 14, 1865?
- What do think Booth meant by, "Sic simper tyrannis! The South is avenged!"
- Why do think Booth's body is still in an unmarked grave?
- Based on these sources, is Maryland more Northern, more Southern, or represents the middle ground?

Teachers may want to use the *Five Most Important Words* strategy for this document. This strategy is designed to help students become aware of the value of key concepts/events in developing content knowledge. It fosters an understanding of the importance of prior knowledge and helps students see connections among topics within a subject. The strategy can be used prior to reading and then again at the conclusion for reflection and true understanding.

1. Introduce the topic (John Wilkes Booth) and activate prior knowledge.
2. Predict and list what the five most important words will be.
3. Read/Analyze the document – visually scan the portrait and obelisk, read/analyze the 1865 broadside, then read the passage.
4. Revise the list of words.
5. Provide a justification for each word.