

Mr. Lincoln and the Time Train

Meg Galante DeAngelis

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Review

DeAngelis, Meg Galante

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WeWrite Kids *Mr. Lincoln and the Time Train*. University of Illinois at Springfield, \$8.95 ISBN 938943219

Life without Lincoln?

Children's book imagines American culture without the influence of the 16th President

Mr. Lincoln and the Time Train is a delightful time travel adventure written by children for children. Written for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Center for Governmental Studies, this simple story examines the importance of Abraham Lincoln to American history. Three children, about to visit the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library to do research, meet the real Mr. Lincoln who has traveled through time to the year 2003 after falling asleep on the train to Gettysburg in 1863. The children explore with Lincoln's speeches with him, including The Emancipation Proclamation, as an academic exercise until one of their number, a young black girl, notices changes in her clothing and her ability to read. They realize that without Mr. Lincoln in 1863, the world is changing for the worse. Working together, they successfully send Mr. Lincoln back and their lives return to normal.

It is easy to see how useful a book like **Mr. Lincoln and the Time Train** will be in the classroom or home use. The text is filled with good information simply stated. Concepts that are thought to be unknown to the readers are explained in special sidebars featuring Lincoln's dog Fido who digs deeper into those facts.

It is impossible to review **Mr. Lincoln and the Time Train** without highlighting the very special process that makes this book work on multiple levels. Written by fourteen children in a workshop sponsored by WeWrite Kids and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Center for Governmental Studies, the book's process used research done by the children, an illustrator who worked

directly with the children in the writing process and interaction between the children and a skilled Lincoln interpreter.

The book also includes the text of the Gettysburg Address, information about the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Center for Governmental Studies, a recounting of the children's interactions with Fritz Klein, the Lincoln interpreter, and the drawings and comments of the child authors. Interesting but a bit out of place is a two page spread containing the story of and letters from Grace Bedell and Abraham Lincoln about Mr. Lincoln's beard, or at first, lack thereof. Perhaps it was included because it shows Mr. Lincoln's fondness for children but no explanation is offered.

Many of the best teachers of our young children use the very techniques celebrated by **Mr. Lincoln and the Time Train** and the WeWrite project. The idea of children researching and interacting with history is crucial to exciting an appetite for learning about history. Past methods of banal recitation of facts and dates flies in the face of all we know about how children learn. The teaching of history and the making of future historians have suffered from the use of these tactics. The interactive methods used in **Mr. Lincoln and the Time Train** will inspire children to do their own research and write their own books. Among these children are the historians of the future. And most of us who love history know that it started for us when we were young.

Meg Galante-DeAngelis teaches at the University of Connecticut. As a social historian, her search for a glimpse at our ancestors as people has led her to study the lives of the soldiers of the Civil War and their families.