

# Abraham Lincoln Shorts

## Lincoln's Life Through Song

hosted by

Western Illinois folksinger & multi-instrumentalist

### Mr. Chris Vallillo

February 12, 2021

Dear Students, Educators, and Friends,

"Let us rally 'round the flag!!!" Today, we invite you to join us on a musical/historical trip through the roustabout early life, hopeful middle years, and courageous wartime leadership, of our nation's 16th President: **President Abraham Lincoln**. Authentic and engaging storytelling, stirring folksinging, and dynamic instrumental music, make-up the body of ten video "chapters", all presented by our musical host and "Lincoln Shorts" creator, Chris Vallillo.

Each short video details a different aspect or new challenge through the course of Abraham Lincoln's life...From the rolling farms and spreading rivers of his youth in Illinois, Kentucky and Indiana, to social dances and his courtship of **Mary Todd** in Springfield, IL, to his greatest achievement, holding the highest office in the USA during a time of national strife, civil war, and ultimately victory over those who believed that slavery and secession from our United States was the right path for our fledgling Democracy. Historically accurate narrative, authentic songs Lincoln himself enjoyed, and a teacher's in-class activity guide are important features of this unique, multi-disciplinary "experience".

**The New Harmony Music Festival & School** and its non-profit "parent organization", **The New Harmony Artist's Guild Inc.** are the proud sponsors of Mr. Vallillo's historical/musical project, and we want extend our deep thanks to Tim Piazza, for providing amazing technical support and also to the **Indiana Arts Commission** grant program, **Arts In The Parks**. Their grant funding was essential to the creation of this project, along with support from **Historic New Harmony, Indiana State Museum and New Harmony State Historic Site**.

Sincerely,

Christopher Layer  
Director, NHMF&S and NHAG Board member  
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## **Abraham Lincoln Shorts-Lincoln's Life Thru Song**

### **Teacher's Guide**

#### **Class Materials:**

-A page containing links to private 10 video chapters on youtube of approximately 3-5 minutes, featuring Western Illinois musician, folklorist and storyteller Chris Vallillo.

During each video "chapter" Mr. Vallillo introduces and performs one song or instrumental piece of music that is directly tied to the life of our 16th president, Abraham Lincoln. Each of the video chapters represents a period of Lincoln's life and/or an important issue Lincoln faced or considered during that period.

-The presentation as a whole seeks to use engaging storytelling, songs and folk music of the times, and accurate historical narrative in order to give each student a multifaceted pathway to understanding who Abraham Lincoln, the person was, and how his community, environment, and cultural experiences throughout his life made him the President he would become.

-Starting with "young Abe's" life in Kentucky through his Presidency, each video touches on a different theme. Vallillo uses a wide range of historical instruments, including slide guitar (a vintage "dobro") acoustic guitar, a hammered dulcimer, made in 1880, and the jaw or Jews harp.

#### **More materials:**

-Here below are some examples of "prequel or follow-up questions and statements". They are individualized for each of the lessons and could be used as talking points to stimulate student interaction, commentary and chat.

**Lesson One: Setting the scene**-Lincoln's time as a boy in Kentucky. Lincoln's time as a boy in Kentucky and the exuberance of the young nation through a song Lincoln himself knew and loved, El-E-Noy.

-Prequel Vocabulary exercise: Write the title of the song "El-E-NOY" on the chalkboard prior to viewing the lesson video. Ask the class what they see/what they think this hyphenated "word" is or possible means before showing the video.

-Follow-up questions: Did you notice or hear any other vocabulary words or names in Chris' song that were unusual? If so, which ones? The song EL-E-NOY tells of sickness and difficulty in Southern Illinois, where Lincoln lived: In terms of hardship and difficulty, do you think your life as a young person today is the SAME as Lincoln's in his day? Easier? Different?

**Lesson Two: Young life and early work experiences**-Lincoln's time as a young man in Southern Indiana, his work on a flatboat going to New Orleans and the impact that trip has on his life. The work song "Shawneetown" is performed.

-This piece is a good preamble to a larger discussion about water-travel in 19th century America, how the "semi-trucks" of olden times were flat boats, plying their trade on the Ohio, Mississippi and Missouri rivers, carrying essential goods like furs, grain, whiskey, wheat and rock-salt (essential for preserving food). It's good to point-out that young people were expected at that time to begin working in the adult world very early on in their young lives.

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**Lesson Three: Lincoln The Lawyer**-Lincoln's time as a circuit riding lawyer in the 1830's, the musical instrument the Jaw Harp, and the song "Hoosen Johnny" that Lincoln used to perform on Jaw Harp

-This piece is a good way to intro to the idea of discussing "how to make your own fun at home" without a TV or computer, when you had to stay at home or lived a long way from your neighbors. Making your own fun with music often meant hand made instruments, or instruments like the Jaw Harp, that you could tuck in to your pocket.

-Multicultural connection: Jaw Harps, in one form or another can be found around the world. Like the flute and the drum, examples of Jaw Harps stretch from French Canada to Africa, to Mongolia. In Quebec, Canada it's called a "Guimbard" (pronounced GWIM-bard). In Mongolia, it's called a "Nugrush" (pronounced Nu-GRUSH).

-Computer search activity: "Jews Harp"

**Lesson Four: Courting Mary Todd**-In 1840, Lincoln moved to Springfield, Illinois.

There, he attended a social dance and it was there that Abe met his future bride, Mary Todd. This clip features an 1880 hammer dulcimer, made in IL. The instrument was restored and "we hear Vallillo perform a popular old waltz such as were played at social dances. Tune: "The Westphalia Waltz"

-A good discussion following this chapter might concern why folks in olden days often made "make-do" type repairs, rarely throwing-out items that could be repaired.

-Some customs change but never go away: Although the music and the beats today may have changed, social dancing is still popular and remains important to us as people today.

**Lesson Five:** Lincoln begins to form ideas about slavery in the United States, Lincoln's feelings on that subject, and shares the abolitionist song "Darlin' Nelly Grey"

-Class discussion point: What is slavery? Does slavery still exist on Planet Earth today?

-The lyrics(Text) of "Darling Nelly Gray" touches upon one of the essential (and horrific) aspects of enslaved peoples: That enslaved or indentured human beings are treated not as what they actually are, human beings born on our planet like all of us are, but rather as another person's "property", to be transported, traded, bought or sold at market like a dish or a tractor...With no regard for human life, family, education or healthcare.

**Lesson Six: Changing times, political campaign songs, and "new technologies".**

Lincoln moves into politics and Chris shares some campaign songs from the 1860 campaign. Songs: "Old Abe Lincoln Came Out Of The Wilderness" and "Lincoln and Liberty".

-Discussion point: What "new technologies" were coming about in the 1860's when Lincoln began running for political office? (For example, Photography, The Kerry Transatlantic Cable Stations, Telegraphy, Traffic light systems, The Gatling Gun, etc...)

-Campaign songs would continue to be a major part of political campaigns in to the 20th century. What replaced them today?

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**Lesson Seven:** Lincoln's early struggles with the civil war and includes the song "We Are Coming Father Abraham". It also talks about the song's connection to the Gettysburg Address.

-Class discussion: Does journalism today play a role in world affairs today? Does music/singing still play a role in liberation and human rights today? Example the "Singing Revolution" in Estonia: <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing\\_Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing_Revolution)>

-Class activity: As a group, decide upon a contemporary human rights "cause" (potentially by anonymous class "balloting") and write lyrics to a song or poem in support of that cause. (Woody Guthrie's Depression-Era songs, like "Dustbowl Refugee", are a good place to start as examples of such.)

**Lesson Eight:** Describes Lincoln's love of music, and how the South's musical call to arms "Dixie's Land" or "Dixie" by Dan Emmett, was one of Lincoln's favorite songs. Music helped Abe to overcome sad thoughts or "troubles" (depression) while in the Whitehouse.

-Musical composers, George Bruce and Dan Emmet, were employed by the US Government to write "camp duty music" for the army, but Ohio native, Dan Emmet, also wrote a sort of "parody" song evoking the nostalgic views Northerners held regarding the Old South. Like Yankee Doodle from revolutionary war times, the song "Dixie" was adopted by BOTH opposing forces as representative of better times. Each opposing side found inspiration in the songs lyrics, yet each side was bitterly opposed to one another's views during the conflict. Bio link to D. Emmet: <[https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Daniel D. Emmett](https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Daniel_D._Emmett)>

**Lesson Nine:** Chris introduces the slide or Dobro guitar and explains its evolution from an African slave instrument, called a "Didley Stick" or "Diddley Bo" into the instrument he plays on screen, featuring a performance of the civil war era song, "Hard Times Come Again No More". (by American composer, Stephen Foster)

-Black African slaves influenced and often created many of the popular musical instruments and musical styles and techniques used today in Rock and Roll, Jazz, and Popular Music: Two examples: The Slide or Dobro Guitar and The Banjo.

-Further exploration of the "Diddley Bow" or "Diddley Stick" <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diddley\\_bow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diddley_bow)>, and a contemporary master of the instrument: <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lonnie Pitchford](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lonnie_Pitchford)>

**Lesson Ten: Chris Vallillo and creating the Lincoln Shorts Program:** Mr. Vallillo wraps up the series discussing the creative process of writing the show "Abraham Lincoln In Song" and by sharing insights into Lincoln the man through the final song "Let The Band Play Dixie".

-Class discussion: When a war reaches its conclusion, how do we as a people on BOTH sides of a nationwide military conflict reconcile, reconstruct, forgive and move on to a better future together and free of the conflicts that led to war?

# Abraham Lincoln Shorts

## YouTube Links

**LESSON 1:** <https://youtu.be/DsX-q0Pdbng> Lincoln's time as a boy in Kentucky and the exuberance of the young nation through a song Lincoln himself knew and loved, *EI-E-Noy*.

**LESSON 2:** <https://youtu.be/8r3Oeeogvkk> Lincoln's time as a young man in Southern Indiana, his experiences working as a deckhand on a flatboat, and the song *Shawneetown*.

**LESSON 3:** <https://youtu.be/Ds645dCiCO0> Lincoln's time as a circuit riding lawyer in the 1830's, the Jaw Harp and Lincoln, and a song he used to perform on jaw harp, *Hoosen Johnny*.

**LESSON 4:** [https://youtu.be/wqbDM\\_ku15c](https://youtu.be/wqbDM_ku15c) Lincoln's early days in Springfield, meeting Mary Todd at a dance there in 1840, and an 1880 hammer dulcimer dulcimer from rural Illinois.

**LESSON 5:** [https://youtu.be/DBTg\\_4EZHpk](https://youtu.be/DBTg_4EZHpk) Lincoln's early attempts to address the national issue of slavery, his feelings on slavery, and the abolitionist song *Darlin' Nelly Grey*.

**LESSON 6:** [https://youtu.be/HLocTa\\_Rclg](https://youtu.be/HLocTa_Rclg) Lincoln's move into politics, The Lincoln/Douglas debates, songs from his 1860 campaign including *Old Abe Lincoln* and *Lincoln and Liberty*.

**LESSON 7:** <https://youtu.be/jMy6UHejTdo> Lincoln's early struggles with the civil war, the song *We Are Coming Father Abra'm*, and that song's connection to the Gettysburg Address.

**LESSON 8:** <https://youtu.be/9P-q2pY1h0> Lincoln's love and use of music, and the South's musical call to arms "Dixie", ironically enough, one of Lincoln's favorite songs too!

**LESSON 9:** <https://youtu.be/OWVixPUKi5U> Introduces slide guitar, it's evolution from a slave instrument called a "Didley Stick" and a slide performance of *Hard Times Come Again No More*.

**LESSON 10:** <https://youtu.be/RpCTqLSUs4s> Wraps up the series discussing the creative process of writing a show and shares insights into Lincoln through *Let The Band Play Dixie*.



## BIO:

Chris Vallillo is a singer/songwriter and roots musician who makes the people and places of “unmetropolitan” America come to life in song. Having spent the last 30 years in the rural Midwest, he has a natural affinity for American roots music. Performing on six-string and bottleneck slide guitars and harmonica, Vallillo weaves original, contemporary, and traditional songs and narratives into a compelling and entertaining portrait of the history and lifestyles of the Midwest. Dirty Linen magazine described the music as, “vivid, original story songs” delivered with an “eye for detail and a sense of history” while Folk Wax Magazine Editor, Arthur Wood said “Vallillo’s guitar playing flows like warm honey and is a true aural delight.”

Vallillo’s music has a timeless quality about it, with one foot in the past and one foot in the future. Perhaps the archaeology degree Vallillo earned at Beloit College (BA Anthropology, 1976) helped him see the important little details of life which imbue his songs with a sense of history. His prairie poet style has been compared to Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay and you can hear the strains of the Carter Family and Jimmy Rogers reflected in his writing. It’s roots based original and contemporary folk with the rich acoustic textures of bottleneck slide, finger style and flatpicked guitars that echo the influences of Mississippi John Hurt, Norman Blake, Doc Watson and John Fahey.

A recipient of a 1986 Illinois Arts Council Artist Fellowship Award for music composition, Chris was a nominee for the Illinois Arts Council’s 1987 Governor’s Award for Individual Artist. In 1987 he conducted the Schuyler Arts Folk Music Project to document the last of the pre-radio generation. These recordings were accepted into the American Folklife Collection at the Library of Congress. From 1990 through 1998 he served as the performing host and co-producer of the nationally distributed, award-winning public radio performance series *Rural Route 3* where he performed next to (and with) a virtual who’s who of contemporary and traditional folk musicians.



Always a project oriented artist, in the early 2000’s Vallillo began creating one man shows using music as the vehicle to explore a subject or theme. His 2008 project, *Abraham Lincoln in Song*, received the endorsement of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and the accompanying CD of music reached **#10 on Billboard’s Bluegrass Album Chart**. In 2016, his latest recording, *Oh Freedom! Songs of the Civil Rights Movement* charted at # 6 on the folk charts and 2018 the show was produced as a fully theatrical performance featuring a band and a live choir.

He twice served as the Illinois State Scholar for the **Smithsonian Institution’s** traveling exhibit on roots music *New Harmonies*. In 2013 he released *The Last Day of Winter*, (#14 on the Folk DJ Charts) and produced the double CD set “Midwest Folklife Festival” for the Illinois Arts Council. He also scored and recorded the music for the documentary film “Witness to History” all while maintaining a full touring schedule. In 2016, his latest recording, *Oh Freedom! Songs of the Civil Rights Movement* charted at # 6 on the folk charts. He produced the sound track for a series of videos for the *The Illinois Freedom Project* for the Lincoln Home National Historic Site and the music for the nationally syndicated radio program *Lincoln in Words and Letters* for the WFMT radio network. He is currently touring the theatrical version of *Oh Freedom!*, most recently performed at the *Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum on Juneteenth of 2019*. In 2020 the video recording of the WIU performance of *Oh Freedom!* was syndicated on Illinois Public Television.

# Abraham Lincoln Shorts

*“Chris Vallillo takes the audience on a musical journey, making history come alive with his excellent blending of music and storytelling.”*

**Phil Funkenbusch, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum**

“On February the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1809, Abraham Lincoln came into this world in a dirt floored log cabin on the big south fork of Nolan’s Creek in Kentucky” says folk singer Chris Vallillo as he launches into the combination of narrative, storytelling and music that is his one man show **Abraham Lincoln in Song**. Vallillo, a former archaeologist turned musician and folklorist, created the show using period music Lincoln was directly associated with to tell the story of Lincoln’s life and times.

With **Abraham Lincoln Shorts** Vallillo has modified that show into a ten part video series that combines Lincoln’s own words and stories with contemporary folk music and period folk songs to shed light on one of our nation’s most beloved historical figures -- not only as a remarkable leader, but as a man who knew and loved this very music himself. The videos average 5 to 6 minutes in length and feature a live performance and historically accurate content presented in an engaging, storytelling style. Skillfully presenting both well known and obscure songs from Lincoln’s time, Vallillo tells Lincoln’s story -- from his birth 200 years ago on the Big South Fork of Nolan’s Creek in Kentucky through his death in 1865 at the hand of John Wilkes Booth. From an old jew’s-harp tune Lincoln used to play, to political songs like *Lincoln and Liberty*, Vallillo’s show uses the music to tell the tale in a way that words alone can’t match.

Extensively researched and historically accurate, the original show was endorsed by the **National Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission** and the **Commissions of Illinois, Kentucky and Pennsylvania**. When first released, the CD of music from the show charted at **#10 on the Billboard Charts**.

Vallillo himself is a performer with an affinity for American roots music and a gift for translating historic topics into modern day understanding without losing the bedrock from which they surface. A former archaeologist turned folksinger/songwriter, he is a skilled six-string and bottleneck slide guitarist whose love of the past evolved into a love for old music.

With **Abraham Lincoln Shorts**, Vallillo has transformed his highly regarded theatrical performance into a new, short form video format, perfect for virtual or hybrid learning experiences.

*“An astonishing piece of work... enlightening, exciting and entertaining!”*

**Rick Kogan, The Chicago Tribune, WGN Radio**