

BILL O'REILLY

& MARTIN DUGARD

Killing Lincoln

The Shocking Assassination that Changed America Forever

A HENRY HOLT READING GROUP GUIDE

1. In the Prologue to *Killing Lincoln*, we read that John Wilkes Booth is “galvanized” by listening to Lincoln’s second inaugural address. What does this term mean? And what does it mean here? What do we learn about Booth, early in this book? What sort of man is he: smart or dim, vain or humble, high-strung or easy-going? What’s he passionate about? What’s he known for? What’s his family like?

2. In Chapter 1, making a point that will be underscored several times throughout this book, we see that President Lincoln “has instructed Grant to offer Lee the most lenient surrender terms possible. There will be no punishment of Confederate soldiers. No confiscation of their horses or personal effects.” Should Lincoln have been less lenient on the South? Should he have been tougher on the conquered rebels? Explain why you do or don’t think so.

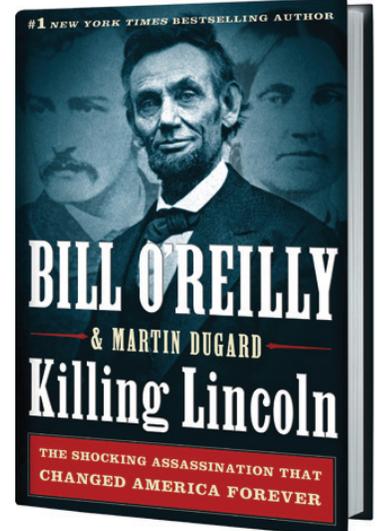
3. The “exact opposite” figures delineated in Chapter 3 are, of course, “Marse Robert” E. Lee and U.S. “Sam” Grant. Describe these two generals. How are they similar? Or different? In which war, or at what time, did Lee and Grant cross paths previously?

4. If Lucy Hale was, as we read in Chapter 4, the “love of [Booth’s] life,” then why did he walk away from her? Why was he “actually relieved” to be leaving her? And why (as we find later on, in the Afterword to this volume) did Hale spend “the afternoon of Lincoln’s assassination” with Robert Todd Lincoln, the president’s son and a former Union captain?

5. In Chapter 6, co-authors Bill O’Reilly and Martin Dugard introduce the minor yet important character of William Crook. Who was Crook? Why was he so crucial an ally to Lincoln? And what—briefly jumping far ahead in our tale—was so odd (or perhaps so telling) about how Lincoln said farewell to Crook on the evening of Friday, April 14th, 1865?

6. Paraphrase the “unspoken rivalry between infantry and cavalry,” as it is described in Chapter 9 vis a vis Union Generals Sheridan and Meade.

7. Compare and contrast the generals (and former West Point classmates) Thomas Lafayette Rosser and George Armstrong Custer. Which armies did they serve? What sort of flair, drive, or ambition did each soldier exhibit on the battlefield?



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8. “Although the battle is little remembered in history,” we read in Chapter 13, “witnesses will swear they have never seen more suffering, or a fight as desperate, as during the final moments of Saylor’s Creek.” Discuss this battle, its strategies and casualties and outcomes. What caused it to be especially vicious?
9. In Chapter 15, as Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox Court House, a great deal of attention is paid to the appearance of these two soldiers: what they are wearing or carrying, and how they are wearing or carrying such. Explain.
10. Part Two of *Killing Lincoln* is entitled “The Ides of Death.” Define the term “ides,” explaining why it applies to Lincoln’s assassination. Any why, furthermore, is the Shakespearean “Julius Caesar” echo particularly fitting? (Note that Booth appeared in this very play, as we learn in Chapter 22, some six months prior to April 1865.)
11. Why does Lincoln, standing before an impromptu rally of drunken merriment and postwar celebration unfolding on the White House lawn, request that a nearby U.S. Navy band play—of all songs—“Dixie”?
12. Define the term “black flag warfare.” Also, per Chapter 19, explain the origin of the term “assassin.”
13. Summarize the dream that Lincoln relates to his wife and others in Chapter 21. Did he, with this very dream, foresee his own demise? And what was the so-called “Baltimore Plot” of 1861? How was it averted? Also, why do O’Reilly and Dugard write, “Death is no stranger to Abraham Lincoln”? What are they referring to here?
14. When and why did Booth’s core objective move from simply kidnapping Lincoln to, rather, undertaking “a top-down destruction of the government of the United States of America” (as we read in Chapter 22)? Who, specifically, was targeted in this sweeping, top-down plan? And why do you think Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton was NOT among those whom Booth and his cronies planned to kill?
15. Who was Lafayette C. Baker, and how was he connected to the Confederate operative John Surratt, John Wilkes Booth, and Edwin Stanton? And looking ahead for just a moment, why do O’Reilly and Dugard confidently state, near the end of Chapter 58: “It’s as if [Baker] already knows Booth’s plan”?
16. Lincoln was “the first leader in world history to communicate immediately with his generals on the battlefield,” as we read in Chapter 23. He did so, of course, with telegrams. How did communicating via this new medium change things, not just technologically but militarily? How did telegrams alter the nature of warfare itself?
17. What do we learn, over the course of *Killing Lincoln*, about Sam and Julia Grant? How long were they married? How many children did they have? Describe their personalities and their relationship. Also, why did they decline the invitation to join Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln at Ford’s Theatre on April 14th?
18. Look again at the meeting in Chapter 25 of Booth, David Herold, Lewis Powell, and George Atzerodt? What was their plan of attack, at this point? (And why did that plan have to change?) Why did Atzerodt suddenly announce, at this meeting, that he wanted out of the plan? How did Booth get him to stay?
19. “It is Good Friday morning,” begins Chapter 27, “the day on which Jesus Christ was crucified, died an agonizing death, and was quickly buried.” And there are a few other instances in this book where Lincoln is compared to Christ—or, more generally, where the way in which Lincoln was killed is likened to the crucifixion. (Part 3 of *Killing Lincoln* is called “The Long Good Friday,” after all.) What did you, as a reader, make of these comparisons? Where they basically on the mark, in your view, or off? Explain your views, defending them with passages from the text itself.

20. Chapter 27 concludes with an interesting account from a member of Lincoln's cavalry detail. He writes, in part: "It is probable that the only man in Washington who . . . did not think that Mr. Lincoln was in constant and imminent danger, was Mr. Lincoln himself." What do you make of this? Was Lincoln ultimately foolish, or careless, to go out in public so often with little or no bodyguard protection? Was he acting recklessly (or even irresponsibly) by attending a crowded, excitable, and very public space such as Ford's Theatre?
21. As a group, define or explain the terms "sockdologizing" and "Dundrearyisms" --- both of which stem from the play, "Our American Cousin." Do some outside research in order to come up with your answers, if need be.
22. On the morning of April 14th, 1865, at 11am, Lincoln attends a cabinet meeting. Only about half of his cabinet is present, and the gathering "feels more like a collegiate debating club than a serious political gathering. Lincoln guides the dialogue, which jumps from elation at the war's end to other topics and back. . . . His behavior is that of a first among equals rather than the ultimate decision maker." Let this description be your starting point for a discussion of Lincoln's leadership style.
23. Why do you think Abraham and Mary Lincoln were especially tender and affectionate with each other during the private, afternoon carriage ride that they shared on April 14th? Why were both so interested in turning a corner, so to speak, in terms of their marriage, their dispositions, their plans for the future, and so forth?
24. Identify the D.C. policeman named John Parker. What sort of person was he? And to what extent, in your own view, can he be blamed for Lincoln's death? Also, why do you think Parker was never reprimanded for his terrible derelictions of duty?
25. Why wasn't Vice President Andrew Johnson attacked on the night of April 14th, as had been so clearly planned? And what became of Secretary of State William H. Seward and his family?
26. Describe the heroic efforts of Dr. Charles Leale, after Booth shot Lincoln. How was Dr. Leale able to arrive on the scene so quickly, and what sort of background did he have in medicine? Why was Lincoln's wound not readily apparent to Dr. Leale, when he was initially examining the fallen president?
27. Who was Laura Keene? Why did she end up cradling the president in her arms moments after he'd been shot? And how did the assassination affect the remainder of her life and career?
28. In Chapter 48, O'Reilly and Dugard ask, "Why does Stanton call for Baker, of all people"? Why, indeed? (That is, how would you, as a reader, answer this question?) Also, a few pages later, in Chapter 50, the co-authors note: "At a time when Baker could have been anywhere in the world, Stanton knew exactly where to find the fired spy so that he could be summoned to the capital." How did Stanton know this?
29. Who was Thomas Jones? Dr. Samuel Mudd? Mary Surratt? Ned Spangler? Samuel Arnold? And Michael O'Laughlen? How did each of these individuals contribute to Booth's plan or its aftermath?
30. When time finally ran out on John Wilkes Booth—just before he was fatally shot in the neck while hiding out in a Virginia barn owned by one Richard Garrett, and just after said barn was set aflame—Booth cried out: "One more stain on the old banner!" What do you think he meant by this?
31. Perhaps just as riveting and juicy as the assassination saga itself, the Afterword for *Killing Lincoln* offers a number of genuine surprises and parting insights. For example, who was Ray Neff, and how have his scholarship and articles changed (or at least challenged) our understanding of the events of April 1865? Also, why do you think Edwin Stanton chose to withhold the diary of John Wilkes Booth? And what do you think became of that diary's bygone eighteen pages? And whatever became of Boston Corbett?

32. Finally, looking at the multi-page “Harper’s Weekly” facsimile that appears as this book’s Appendix, we find a journalistic time-capsule of sorts, a detailed, eye-witness testimony to both the mood and mindset of America in the nightmarish days following Lincoln’s death. As a group, share a passage or two from this publication that particularly resonated with you as a reader. And who was Horace Greeley, by the way—and why were the writers/editors at “Harper’s Weekly” so ticked off at him?