

Blast to the Past #1: Lincoln's Legacy

Carolyn P. Yoder

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Review

Yoder, Carolyn P.

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Deutsch, Stacia, Cohen, Rhody, and Wenzel, David (Illustrator). *Blast to the Past #1: Lincoln's Legacy*. Aladdin Paperbacks, Simon & Schuster, \$3.99, softcover ISBN 689870248

Time-hopping for history

Kids persuade the president to issue the Emancipation Proclamation

The title says it all! In this time-travel book for readers aged seven to ten, four clever school kids blast to the past to Washington, D.C., September 22, 1862. Sent by their teacher, this is no pleasure trip. The school kids--one smart, one curious, one athletic, and one a computer whiz--are on a mission. Their assignment: to rescue Abraham Lincoln. The only problem: they have two hours to do it.

Abraham Lincoln is in desperate shape. Trapped in a what if situation, President Lincoln is about to quit his job, give up on unifying the nation, and give up on issuing the Emancipation Proclamation.

Traveling, not by time machine, but with the help of a computer cartridge, the third-grade rescue team lands in D.C. of the past. Without too much trouble, they make their way to the White House, to a meeting of Lincoln's cabinet (the smart one recognizes everyone), and finally to the War Department and Lincoln. But this is not the Lincoln most kids know today. He's not standing tall, looking dignified and serious. Instead he's slumped in a corner, despondent over how the war is going. Lincoln is convinced that the North is set to lose and that he needs to resign.

The kids go into full gear. To the rescue! They tell Lincoln that he is about to win at Antietam and that he can't resign and give up on his important work. To prove their point, they take Lincoln on a side trip to the future--back to the present--where Lincoln is bombarded with skateboards and cars and the Lincoln

Memorial. Of course mishaps ensue, but finally Lincoln is convinced of the power of the united country. He sees a world where African Americans are free.

Back to the past--with minutes to spare--the team makes sure Lincoln doesn't resign and issues the Proclamation. In just two hours, the team have given Abraham Lincoln back his confidence and also saved history.

In less than 100 pages, authors Stacia Deutsch and Rhody Cohen cover a lot of territory. Combining fact and fiction, they introduce young readers to the importance of history and how much fun it can be. The school kids are in a sense history superheroes! (Besides solving a problem, they also consider bigger issues such as Lincoln's assassination, but realize that they can't really change history, only keep it on track.) By concentrating on Lincoln, the authors also point out how much the country owes to him and his beliefs.

Illustrator David Wenzel also helps out in this mission. His black and white drawings put faces on the four main characters; Mr. Caruthers, their teacher; and Abraham Lincoln and his cabinet.

While **Blast to the Past: Lincoln's Legacy** will certainly excite kids--it is mostly an adventure story--I'm not so sure how much history they will take away from it. Lincoln is not really the most human of characters--easy to relate to--and it's not really clear why he was the way he was. What's also missing is the climate of the times, which the authors only briefly touch on. Why was it so important for Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation and what was at stake? Exactly why was our country fighting the Civil War? In the back of the book, the authors do include the engraving *The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation Before the Cabinet* and copies of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address, but I wonder how many young readers will actually read the documents.

But that's not the authors' point. They want young readers to take an adventure and encounter Lincoln, and to help him. Perhaps they also want to encourage young readers to know more about Lincoln and to seek other sources. Or perhaps they also want kids to take more adventures (read the next book in the series) and learn a bit more history. Both of these goals are worthwhile. Both spark an interest in history!

Serious students might object to the combination of fact and fiction. But for those readers who want a good adventure story with a history setting, this book and others in the series are for them. **Lincoln's Legacy** is number one in the series. For their next what if someone quit assignments, the team meets Walt Disney (#2) and Alexander Graham Bell (#3).

Carolyn P. Yoder is the editor of Calkins Creek Books, the U.S. history imprint of Boyds Mills Press, Honesdale, Pennsylvania.