

Lincoln's Cabinet: From Rivalry to Respect

Grade Level: 6–12

Illinois Learning Standards:

1C, Stage F; 4B, Stage F; 5A, Stage F; 5B, Stage F; 5C, Stage F; 5C, Stage G; 4B, Stage H, I, & J; 5A, Stage H, I, & J; 5B, Stage H, I, & J; 5C, Stage H, I, & J; 5C, Stage H, I, & J

Objectives:

- Recognize how individual emotions affect group dynamics
- Understand assets and liabilities of personality
- Comprehend individual contributions to team building
- Identify and appreciate the dynamism of Abraham Lincoln's presidential cabinet
- Demonstrate research skills by selection, organization and synthesis of materials
- Develop oral and visual presentation skills
- Give positive and negative examples of rivalry
- Gain an understanding of the merits and consequences of competition

Materials Needed:

Dictionary
Thesaurus
Computer with Internet access
Poster board
Variety of books, magazines, newspapers
Paper, pencil, pens
Glue
Assets vs. Liabilities Chart included in this lesson

Background:

Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860 marked the first time a Republican was elected president. Having no experience in national affairs and facing a crisis of enormous proportions, Lincoln strategically filled his cabinet with the men who had opposed him for the nomination and who were his political rivals. Formed from a disparate coalition of Whigs, Democrats, Free Soilers, easterners, westerners, northerners, radicals, and conservatives, the new Republican political party mirrored the men who served in Lincoln's cabinet.

Every president since George Washington has selected a cabinet to assist and advise him. But not every president knowingly selects cabinet ministers who will disagree with him/her. A variety of factors determine why someone is selected for a cabinet post including ability, political compatibility and geographical considerations. Lincoln, extremely self-confident, selected a team of political adversaries who were regularly at odds with each other. However, Lincoln looked beyond each man's foibles and competing egos and saw the talent and intelligence each man brought to his administration. Cabinet members were free to disagree with each other and Lincoln's unique personality ensured balance within his cabinet. Lincoln recognized the risks

Lincoln's Cabinet

involved in such a diverse cabinet, but concluded he “must risk the dangers of faction to overcome the dangers of rebellion.” According to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, it was Abraham Lincoln’s ability to effectively manage his Civil War cabinet that illustrated his political genius.

Members of Lincoln’s cabinet were:

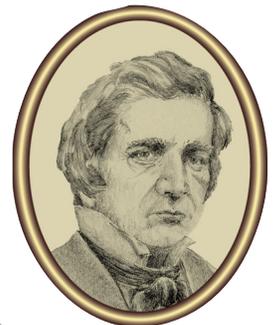
Secretary of State	William Seward, 1861
Secretary of the Treasury	Salmon P. Chase, 1861 William P. Fessenden, 1864 Hugh McCulloch, 1865
Secretary of War	Simon Cameron, 1861 Edwin M. Stanton, 1862
Attorney General	Edward Bates, 1861 James Speed, 1864
Postmaster General	Montgomery Blair, 1861 William Dennison, 1864
Secretary of the Navy	Gideon Welles, 1861
Secretary of the Interior	Caleb B. Smith, 1861 John P. Usher, 1863

Self assured, well educated, and formidable, each cabinet secretary thought he was better qualified than Lincoln. On the surface they were usually courteous to each other; however, beneath their polite exterior they were plagued by rivalry, disagreement, animosity, different temperaments, jealousy over access to the President, and differing political ideology. Lincoln, aware of the mutual dislike and ill will between his secretaries, who oftentimes did not speak to each other, diplomatically mediated squabbles that arose. Given almost limitless freedom over their departments, Lincoln respected his cabinet ministers and was confident in their abilities. “We needed the strongest men of the party in the cabinet,” Lincoln stated, “We needed to hold our own people together. I had looked the party over and concluded that these were the very strongest men....I had no right to deprive the country of their services.”

Lincoln’s Early Cabinet

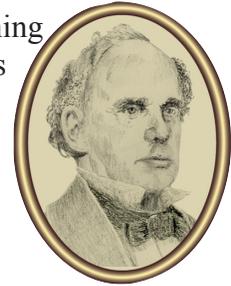
William H. Seward

William H. Seward, former Whig, elder statesman, and one time Senator and Governor of New York, was chosen to become Secretary of State. The most prominent 1860 presidential candidate, Seward was shocked when Lincoln won the nomination. He nevertheless accepted the cabinet position and then attempted to sway Lincoln’s decisions by using his own political experience and influence. Seward initially believed he would be the most influential member of the cabinet and that he would be able to sway Lincoln to his positions. But after the President decided against his advice on Fort Sumter, Seward realized that Lincoln was not a person easily controlled. Seward’s political identity was linked to his anti-slavery views and his “irrepressible conflict” rhetoric. Considered a radical by the general public, Seward was actually a political moderate. He had numerous political enemies and was an easy target when people wanted to indirectly criticize Lincoln. Despite his frustration at not being president, Seward slowly accepted Lincoln’s leadership, telling his wife that “the President is the best of us.” In time Seward became Lincoln’s closet cabinet friend and was also attacked in his sick bed on the night of Lincoln’s assassination. Seward survived the attack and continued as Secretary of State.



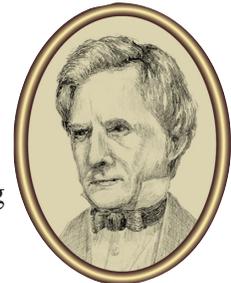
Salmon P. Chase

An early opponent of slavery and a founder of the Free Soil Party, Salmon P. Chase, former Governor and United States Senator from Ohio, was the leading radical in Lincoln's cabinet. Chase was very intelligent, but he was temperamental and had an inflated ego. His intrigues and political ambition landed him in hot water with Lincoln on numerous occasions. However, the President tolerated Chase's scheming because he thought Chase was an effective Treasury Secretary. Chase envied Seward's relationship with Lincoln. Eventually Chase's ambition got the best of him and he used his Treasury connections in a bid to replace Lincoln as the Republican nominee in 1864. Lincoln finally fired Chase writing they had "reached a point of mutual embarrassment." He later appointed Chase to be Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.



Simon Cameron

An ambitious politician, Cameron's career was marked with corruption. To protect himself as War Secretary from accusations of corruption and poor management, he sided with congressional radicals advocating the use of fugitive slaves for armed military service. This caused problems for a president trying to balance conflicting northern opinions. In 1862, Lincoln removed Cameron from the cabinet by appointing him to the post of Minister to Russia. A month later Congress censured him for corruption during his tenure in the War Department. Despite these scandals, Cameron restored his Pennsylvania political machine and won re-election to the U.S. Senate.



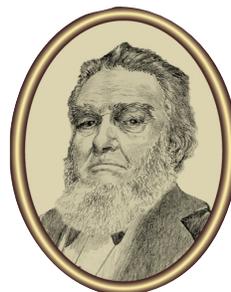
Edwin M. Stanton

Former Democrat Edwin Stanton was not Lincoln's first choice as Secretary of War. That selection went to Simon Cameron who proved to be incompetent. Initially critical of Lincoln, Stanton grew to respect and admire the President and became one of the most loyal cabinet members. Despite Stanton's critiques, the President had great faith in his abilities to run the War Department.



Edward Bates

Edward Bates, a one-time Whig and popular St. Louis lawyer, had lived in Missouri since 1814. His selection as cabinet member was designed to appease the border states. Bates' conservative nature was influenced by his family's split loyalties. Some of his sons fought for the Union, but one served in the Confederate army. Writing in his diary on December 31, 1861, Bates confided, "The Prest is an excellent man, and, in the main wise, but he lacks will and purpose, and, I greatly fear he, has not the power to command." Bates became disenchanted with his place in Lincoln's cabinet and resigned after Lincoln's 1864 re-election.



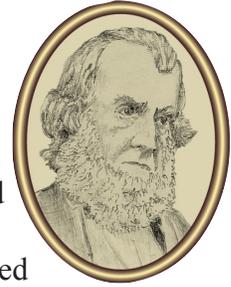
Montgomery Blair

A member of a prominent Maryland political family, Montgomery Blair, Lincoln's Postmaster General, held a deep animosity toward Seward, Stanton, and Chase and would not visit the War Department, where the President spent much time. A West Point graduate, Blair alienated many people by his repeated public criticism of other cabinet members, politicians, and the military. Blair, while friendly with the President, was dismissed from the cabinet in 1864 as a concession to the Radical Republicans. Later Lincoln would pass Blair over to appoint his political rival Salmon Chase as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.



Gideon Welles

Geographic location was the primary consideration in the selection of Gideon Welles, a New Englander, for Secretary of the Navy. Welles was sometimes kept in the dark on policy decisions. "Of the policy of the administration, if there be one," said Welles, "I am not advised beyond what is published and known to all." In addition, Welles harbored animosity toward Seward because he felt like Seward treated other departments as extensions of his own. Despite disagreeing with Lincoln at times, Welles became a devoted and trusted advisor to the President. After he retired he wrote that Lincoln's ability to lead would be "better appreciated in the future than now."



Caleb B. Smith

Caleb Smith, Secretary of the Interior, was instrumental in delivering Indiana's delegates to Lincoln during the 1860 Republican Convention in Chicago. He believed he was entitled to a place in the cabinet for his help. Considered a conservative in Lincoln's cabinet, Smith desired an appointment to the United States Supreme Court but didn't have enough political support behind him. Smith's biggest impact on policy was his support for colonization of blacks in Central America which failed miserably. Smith once told an assistant that if the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, he would resign from the cabinet and work against the administration. Failing health and a desire to work in a judicial role led him to lobby for a federal district judgeship. Lincoln agreed to the request in January of 1863.



Activity Procedure:

The following is a list of personality traits that describe Lincoln and members of his cabinet.

- Select three words from each individual and define them.
- Using the Assets vs. Liabilities Chart included in this lesson, list each cabinet member's characteristics into assets and liabilities columns. Do assets outweigh liabilities?
- Define and discuss rivalry.
 - What causes rivalry?
 - Who can be rivals?
 - What are the pros and cons of a rivalry
 - Discuss methods that can be used to resolve rivalries
- Why did Abraham Lincoln appoint his political rivals to cabinet positions?
- What are the strategies used in appointing cabinet members?
- If selecting potential cabinet members, would students choose people with the same political philosophy as the president or contrary opinions? Why?

Personality Traits:

Abraham Lincoln: patient, tactful, even-tempered, shrewd, ambitious, fatalistic, compassionate, tolerant, pragmatic, honest, self-confident, adroit, scrupulous, self-deprecating, ribald, humble, unassuming, witty, egalitarian, persuasive, determined, judicious, deliberate, perceptive, democratic, accessible, cautious, principled, tenacious, practical, droll, magnanimous, modest, politically astute, empathetic

Salmon P. Chase: self righteous, dynamic, religious, dignified, pompous, stately, upright, confident, ambitious, vain, arrogant, humorless, handsome, austere, fastidious, opportunistic, formal, egocentric, reserved, self assured, pretentious, stuffy, reserved

William H. Seward: austere, shrewd, commanding, intelligent, sociable, confident, flamboyant, idealistic, visionary, articulate, affable, ambitious, gregarious, astute, gourmand, unfashionable, charming, vane, aloof, urbane, meddlesome, pretentious, optimistic, imaginative, insightful, pragmatic

Simon Cameron: practical, calculating, shrewd, influential, manipulative, unethical, unorganized, powerful, genial, wheeler-dealer

Edwin M. Stanton: intelligent, honest, energetic, arrogant, domineering, hot tempered, excitable, opinionated, organized, efficient, stubborn, impulsive, workaholic, driven, combative, nervous, patriotic, organized, industrious, arbitrary, abrasive, brusque, dyspeptic, despotic, defiant, duplicitous, passionate, complex, uncharitable, secretive, tenacious

Edward Bates: homebody, respectable, articulate, skillful, conservative, stuffy, sober, civic minded, modest, old school, elderly, polite, earnest, gallant, religious, purposeful, formal, orderly, industrious, frugal

Gideon Welles: serious, precise, orderly, loyal, cranky, bookish, scholarly, ambitious, moralist, cautious, restrained, blunt, prudent, sagacious, upright, sarcastic, censorious, frank, exacting, ponderous, pompous, grave, reflective, humorless, sincere, religious, editorialist, fair-minded, exacting, obstinate

Montgomery Blair: erudite, well read, efficient, reform minded, lithe, earnest, religious, logical, courtly, irascible, organized, opinionated, strong willed, able, awkward speaker, classically educated, egotistical, vindictive, judgmental, quarrelsome, devious, cantankerous, difficult, assiduous

Caleb B. Smith: indolent, conservative, ineffectual, regimented, poor administrator, eloquent, trim, ingratiating, smooth, conformist, complacent, pragmatic, partisan, orthodox, political tactician, patronage dispenser, "lacked vim," compromiser, neat

Lincoln's Cabinet

Extension:

Rivalry and competition permeate our daily lives including politics, religion, school, the entertainment industry, business, geography and literature. Over the years, competition has become synonymous with western society and behavior. Books, magazine stories, and even a federal regulatory commission, the Federal Trade Commission, have emerged to improve America's ability to compete into the 21st century. Competition is a natural element to human and animal behavior and can have both positive and negative consequences.

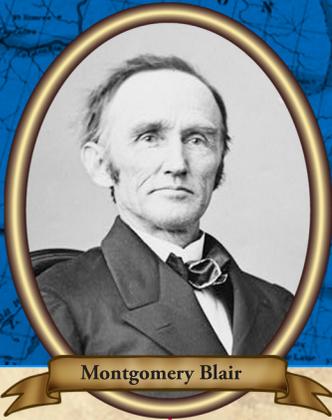
- Ask students to locate and research an example of rivalry in a book, poem, newspaper, play, on-line article, magazine or song.
- Using visual images students will convey the rivalry/competition by constructing a poster using magazines, newspapers, photographs, and illustrations.
- Students will write a composition on the nature of the rivalry. Include the issues, the source or history of the rivalry, roles of parties involved, the steps taken to reduce or resolve the issues, and whether the rivalry remains ongoing.
- Students will present poster and composition to the class.
- Class will discuss whether the competition/rivalry is negative or positive and what impact(s) the rivalry had.

For more information on rivalries in Lincoln's cabinet:

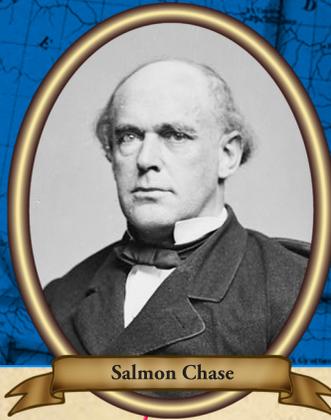
- Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.



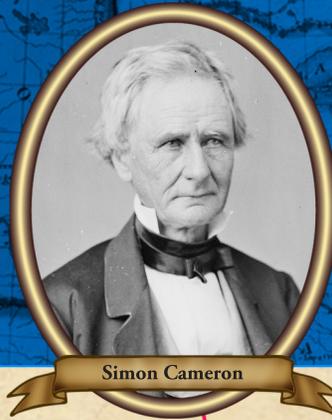
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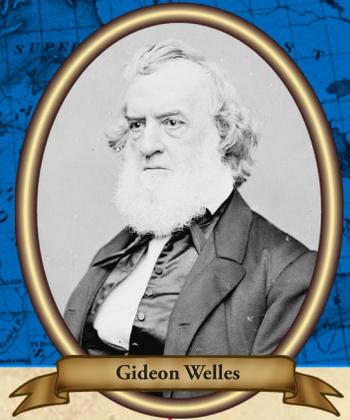
Montgomery Blair



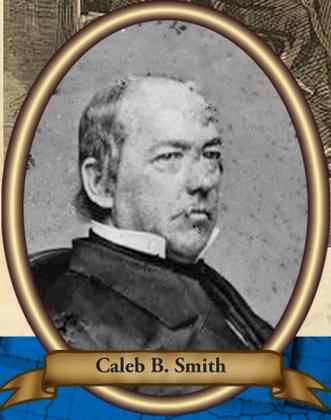
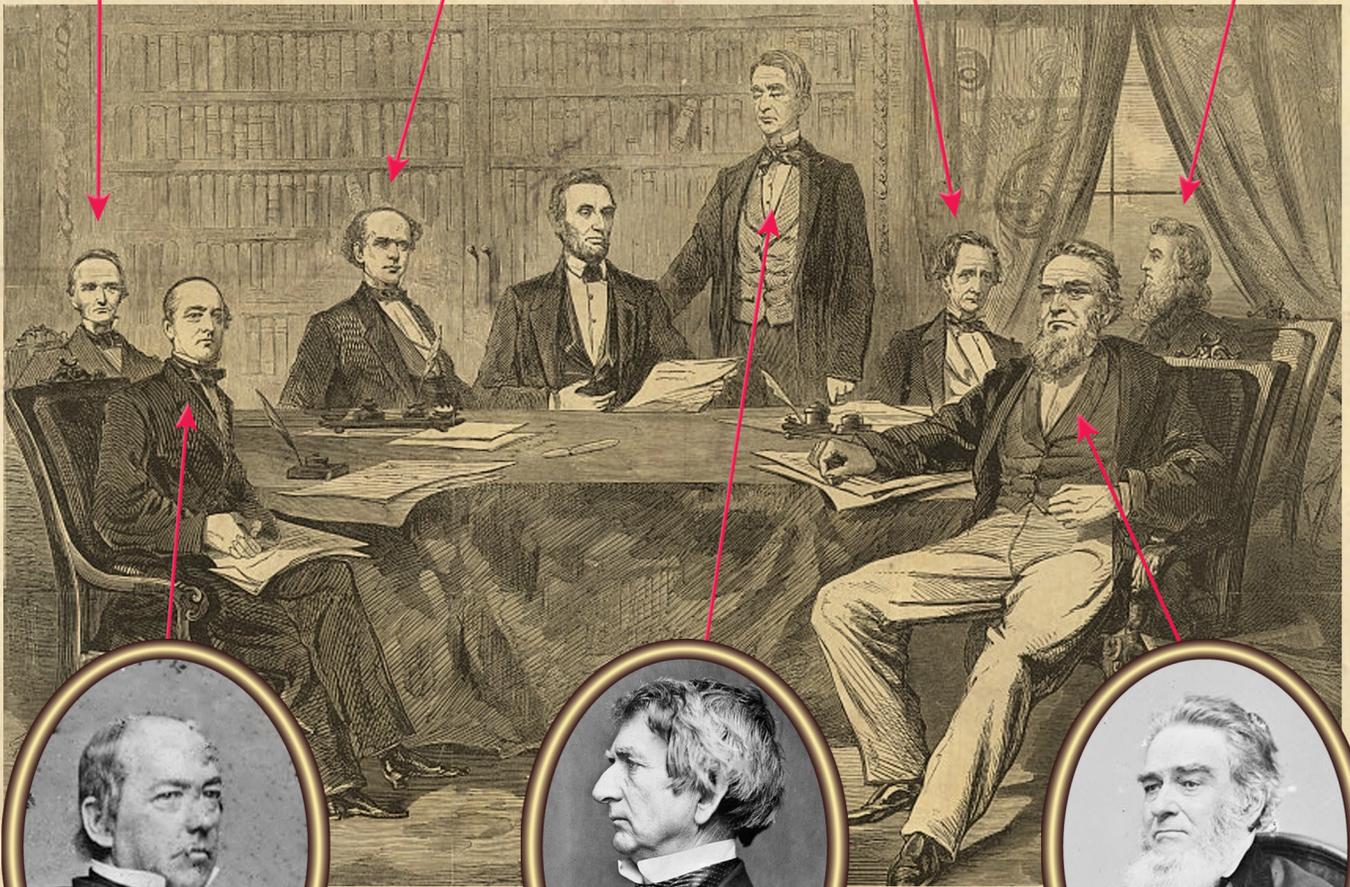
Salmon Chase



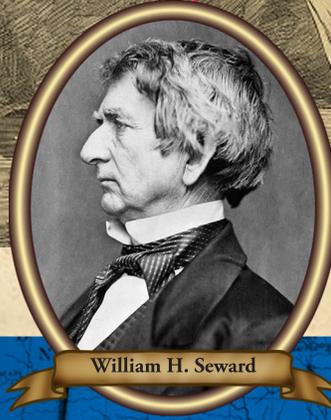
Simon Cameron



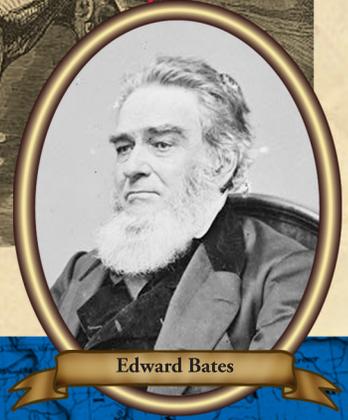
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