

CIVIL WAR VOCABULARY

Vocabulary Words from the Civil War Era - General

Emancipation – the act of freeing the slaves from bondage, or being owned as chattel. The fact or process of being set free from legal, social or political restriction, liberation.

Abolition, abolitionist – one who is in favor of abolishing or forbidding slavery

Suffrage, suffragist – the right to vote, a person active in the struggle to obtain the legal right to vote

Slavery, bondage – the condition of being owned as human chattel, property. A practice or institution that treats or recognizes some human beings as the legal property of others.

Manumission, to manumit – to release from slavery or servitude

Chattel – tangible property that is not land or attached to land, a moveable article of personal property, an enslaved person

Revenuers – persons who legally pursue escaped slaves to return them to their legal owners. Persons who illegally kidnap legally freed former slaves to sell them to slave owners and back into bondage.

Underground railroad – *U.S. History*. (before the abolition of slavery) a system for helping African Americans fleeing slavery to escape on foot into Canada or other places of safety. It was not underground and it was not a railroad.

Conductors – the guides who knew the way in the network of safe houses where the escaped slaves along the underground railroad route could stay for a night and a day. The conductor did not take tickets and didn't ride in a train. They were brave Black men and women who assisted slaves to escape by night on foot over dangerous territory.

Amendment – an alteration of or addition to a motion, bill, constitution, etc. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the USA freed the slaves.

Foundation – the result of the act of [founding](#), setting up, establishing, etc. an institution financed by a donation or legacy to aid research, education, the arts, etc.: *The Ford Foundation*. *Elizabeth Keckley's Foundation to provide funds to start Black businesses after Abolition*.

Freedman or woman – a person who was formerly enslaved but was freed. Freedom could be obtained by paying their price to their former owner as Elizabeth Keckley did, or their owner having waived payment and upon their death setting free their former slaves instead of willing them to a relative along with the rest of their property. A supporter could also pay their price to their owner as happened to Frederic Douglass.

Liberation, liberty – the state of freedom, of having been set free from slavery or another state such as being imprisoned, or in bond service for 7 years.

Scene 1 Arrival in Washington

The Argument

Fine lace curtain – “fine” here means beautifully and skillfully made by hand, “lace” means woven with an all-over design that is not solid but allows light through, and “curtain” refers to a window covering hung in folds gathered at the top or draped over a decorative metal rod. Mary Todd Lincoln is outraged that a citizen visitor to the White House would cut a piece out of such a valuable item with no respect for the labor and skill that it took to make it or for the mansion where it hung.

Souvenirs – a French word for an item purchased or taken from a place one has visited to remind you of your trip there. Memento – an Italian word is a synonym.

Dilapidated – reduced to or fallen into partial ruin or decay, as from age, wear, or neglect.

Daft – senseless, stupid, or foolish, insane; crazy.

Taste – good taste, bad taste. The president is telling his wife that she has a very good sense about whether or not an item is quality and beautiful or is trash and ugly.

Refinement – Abe Lincoln married Mary Todd because one of the things he lacked was refinement, but due to her upbringing, she had it. Fineness or elegance of feeling, taste, manners, language. Because he had been born in a log cabin and raised on a farm, Abe Lincoln had no exposure to beauty and refinement.

State – of being. The condition of a person or thing, as with respect to circumstances or attributes: *a state of health*.

Snubbed – to treat with disdain or contempt, especially by ignoring. To check or reject with a sharp rebuke or remark.

Refurbish – to furbish again; renovate; brighten: *to refurbish the lobby or the whole White House*.

Mansion – a very large, impressive, or stately residence manor house.

The Bargain between Mary and Elizabeth – an agreement between parties settling what each shall give and take or perform and receive in a transaction.

Tradesmen's entrance – a man or woman of whatever race who was not a guest visiting the White House would not use the front door, but rather some one of skill coming to fix or make something or deliver something would use the back entrance for someone of the trades. Elizabeth was pushing the definition hard because she was a freedwoman and Mrs. Lincoln had said that she should come in the front door.

Coming in the front door – means that you have been invited as a guest with whom you have or will have a relationship. Mary Todd shared tea with Elizabeth Keckley which shows that she was regarded as a guest by Mrs. Lincoln.

Calling card – Also called card, visiting card. a small card with the name and often the address of a person or of a couple, for presenting when making a business or social call, for enclosing in gifts, etc. In the 1860s one could not call in

advance because there were no telephones, so you presented you calling card when you arrived and that person would give it to the lady or gentleman of the house to see if they were up for a visit. If not, you would just have to be disappointed and come another day.

Telegraph room – The brand-new invention of the day for communicating.

British Queen conferring knighthood – our country was practically a toddler and still looked to anything British for leadership at least culturally. Queen Victoria could honor our American inventors but anything political was still touchy since our war of independence. The British were siding with the south because cotton for their mills came from there. They didn't support the north because northern industry was competing against British industry. That's why Abe Lincoln is joking with Sam Everyman about being called "Sir Abe". If you are knighted, you are called "Sir" until you die.

Empowered with a purse – Mary Todd tells Elizabeth that she is "empowered with a purse". This means she has money for the project.

Gowns – Gowns are formal or daily dresses custom made for the lady's figure in the 1800s. There were no factory-made dresses to buy in a store. The industrial mills to make cloth had just become a business. Custom or home-made clothing was what everyone wore. You went to the store and bought textiles to make yourself and your children's clothing. Some made their husband's clothing too. Some men went to a tailor for their suits if they could afford it.

Remodeling – reconstruction, reworking, refurbishing, redecoration, restoration.

Symbol of the Union – The house where the president works is his home and his office, all in one. It could easily become a symbol during the Civil War of bringing all the states back into the Union.

Collaboration – Association, collusion, concert, teamwork, alliance, joint project. The collaboration of a delicate sort" means that it is to be done in secret. The Bargain between Mary and Elizabeth is political information and in return many contracts for dresses and gowns and decorating the White House.

In return for fame and good pay – Mary promises Elizabeth "fame and good pay" and in return Elizabeth must tell her "what the women of Washington are saying about her and the president".

Bolts of cloth – cloth from textile Mills are folded and double wrapped around a cardboard "bolt" for sale in a dry goods store. Twenty bolts would be a lot of cloth.

The blockade – The Union Navy was hovering offshore to prevent supplies from getting to the Confederacy.

Falter and rip apart – Mary Todd Lincoln is aware that her temper can get the best of her, in fact her changeable moods will make her falter and fail, or not be up to the job they are planning to do. She is letting Elizabeth know that when she “rips apart” she would like Elizabeth to “stich me up again.”

Stich me up again – a metaphor for a mental break down as clothes mended by a needle and thread. This is to be a friendship as well as partners in a decorating project.

The Cabinet Meeting

Insurrection – an act or instance of rising in revolt, rebellion, or resistance against civil authority or an established government.

Union Telegraph – an apparatus, system, or process for transmitting messages or signals to a distant place, especially by means of an electric device consisting essentially of a sending instrument and a distant receiving instrument connected by a conducting wire or other communications channel.

Swatches – a sample of cloth or other material. a sample, patch, or characteristic specimen of anything.

Cannon – a mounted gun for firing heavy projectiles; a gun, howitzer, or mortar.

Misfired – Fired is clear, “The cannon fired”. Misfired could mean the timing is incorrect and the soldier was killed because he couldn’t get out of the way in time.

Civil War – a war between political factions or regions within the same country.

Farewell – a conventional expression used at leave-taking or parting with people

Succession, successionists – a number of persons or things following one another in order or sequence. The right, act, or process, by which one person **succeeds** to the office, rank, estate, or the like, of another.

Confederates – united in a league, alliance, or conspiracy. *initial capital letter* of or relating to the Confederate States of America: *The Confederate army*.

Evacuate – to leave empty; **vacate**, to remove (persons or things) from a place, as a dangerous place or disaster area, for reasons of safety or protection: *to evacuate the inhabitants of towns in the path of a flood*.

Dunderheads – a dunce; blockhead; numbskull.

Resolution of war – a declaration, an agreement in writing between allies to wage war against an opposing party.

Rebels – a person who refuses allegiance to, resists, or rises in arms against the government or ruler of his or her country, a person who resists any authority, control, or tradition, rebellious; defiant.

Grudge – as to hold or bear a grudge. a feeling of ill will or resentment: *to hold a grudge against a former opponent.*

First Meeting of Lincoln and Douglass

Journal – a daily record, as of occurrences, experiences, or observations
She kept a journal during her European trip, a newspaper, especially a daily one, a periodical or magazine, especially one published for a special group, learned society, or profession: the October issue of The English Journal.

Occasions – *pl n archaic (sometimes singular)* needs; necessities
personal or business affairs

Insubordinate – not submitting to authority; disobedient: *an insubordinate soldier.*

Abolition – the state of being abolished: *the abolition of war; the abolition of capital punishment; the abolition of unfair taxes;*
the legal prohibition of slavery, especially the institutional enslavement of Black people in the U.S.

Federal – the act of **abolishing** or pertaining to or of the nature of a union of states under a central government distinct from the individual governments of the separate states, as in federal government; federal system of, relating to, or noting such a central government.

Emancipation – the act of freeing from restraint; to free a person from bondage or slavery.

Moral persuasion – a deep conviction or belief relating to or concerned with the principles or rules of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong.

Horse trading – the act or fact of conducting a shrewd exchange or engaging in a horse trade; bargaining.

High ground – a position of moral or ethical superiority.

Recruit – to enlist persons for service in one of the armed forces.

Free state – before the Civil War, a state in which slavery was prohibited.

Abolishing – to do away with, put an end to, annul, or make void.

Expedient – tending to promote some proposed or desired object; fit or suitable for the purpose; proper under the circumstances; conducive to advantage or interest, as opposed to right.

Supporters – adherents, followers, backers, or advocates.

Bought my freedom – acquired the possession of, or the right to, one's freedom from slavery by paying an equivalent, especially in money.

The master – an owner of enslaved people, in the institution of chattel slavery; a slaveholder.

Natural rights – rights that people supposedly have under natural law. The Declaration of Independence of the United States lists life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as natural rights.

The Gala Ball

Gala – festive; festal; showy.

Ball – a large, usually lavish, formal party featuring social dancing and sometimes given for a particular purpose.

Dedicate – to devote wholly and earnestly, as to some person or purpose; to mark the official completion or opening of (a public building, monument, highway, etc.), usually by formal ceremonies.

A toast – a salutation or a few words of congratulation, good wishes, appreciation, remembrance, etc., uttered immediately before drinking to a person, event, etc.

Mourning in Washington

Regiment, white, black – a unit of military ground forces, consisting of two or more battalions or battle groups, a headquarters unit, and certain supporting units. A white regiment would consist of white soldiers, a black regiment of black soldiers.

Grieving, grief – keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss; sharp sorrow; painful regret.

Foundation – an institution financed by a donation or legacy to aid research, education, the arts, etc.

Government funds – money made available by the governing body of persons in a country, state, community, etc.

Black clothing – a conventional manifestation of sorrow for a person's death

Bodice – the part of a woman's dress covering the body between the neck or shoulders and the waist.

Sorrow – distress caused by loss affliction, disappointment, etc.; grief, sadness, or regret.

Woe – grievous distress, affliction, or trouble.

The Forest Campground

Pharaoh – the title of an ancient Egyptian king.

Forlorn – desolate or dreary; unhappy or miserable, as in feeling, condition, or appearance; lonely and sad; forsaken; expressive of hopelessness; despairing.

Glory Hallelujah – expression denoting great praise, gratitude, or joy to the Lord.

Jesus – also called Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth; the Jewish religious teacher (approx. 4 B.C. – 29 A.D.) whose life, death, and resurrection as reported by the Evangelists are the basis of the Christian message of salvation.

Sam's Letter and Akin to Abraham

Akin – of kin; related by blood.

Kin – a person's relatives collectively; kinfolk

Homespun cloth – fabric that is spun or made at home; made of such cloth.

Tailored – fashioned or fitted to resemble a tailor's work; custom-made.

Oath – a solemn appeal to a deity, or to some revered person or thing, to witness one's determination to speak the truth, to keep a promise, etc.; a statement or promise strengthened by such an appeal.

The War is Over

Dixie – also called Dixieland, Dixie Land, the southern states of the United States, especially those that were formerly part of the Confederacy; any of several songs with this name, especially the

minstrel song (1859) by D.D. Emmett, popular as a Confederate war song.