

## QUESTIONS FOR EACH SCENE FROM THE OPERA

**Suggestion:** Have students watch a scene, then answer the following questions about that scene.

### **Scene 1: Arrival at the White House: The Argument**

What are the different concerns of President Lincoln and the First Lady? How is each one important?

How does the President compare Mary Todd's work to his own?

To what traits and attributes of the First Lady does the President appeal to begin to win her over to the idea of repairing the White House?

Mary Todd has a secondary concern. What is it? How does her place of birth contribute to her anxiety? And how will the redecoration of the White House address this concern?

What is the key to the President and the First Lady finally agreeing with each other?

### **Scene 2: Mary Todd's Bargain**

What made Sam Everyman hesitate to just tell Elizabeth to go around to the back door (the tradesman's entrance)?

When was the telegraph invented and what part did it play in the Civil War?

The President doesn't think the British Queen will be conferring knighthood on him anytime soon. Why do you suppose this is?

How would you describe the President and Mrs. Lincoln's attitudes toward their hired help? Why?

What is the bargain that Mrs. Lincoln proposes to Elizabeth?

What is it about Mrs. Lincoln that predisposes Elizabeth to trust her?

### **Scene 3: The Cabinet Meeting**

Why do you think this scene opens with President Lincoln playing with his sons?

Why was the President upset that no one died in the attack on Fort Sumter?

Look up information about the invention of the telegraph and explain its importance to President Lincoln.

The President says he bears his opponents no grudge. What does he think is more important than their support of him?

Compare and contrast the plans of the President and his Cabinet members and of the First Lady and Elizabeth Keckley. How do the men react to the women's plan? How do the women react to the men's plan?

#### **Scene 4: First Meeting**

President Lincoln mentions that he has followed the journal of Frederick Douglass and has found it helpful. Do some research to discover what this journal included.

President Lincoln states that abolition is a federal matter, and Frederick Douglass agrees. What do you think they mean by that?

The two men have different ideas about how to pass a bill of emancipation for slaves. How do their ideas differ?

What do we learn about the life of Frederick Douglass from this scene?

Frederick Douglass uses the famous phrase, "a house divided against itself cannot stand." Discuss the meaning of this and how it relates to the case for freeing the slaves. How does the President respond? What, to him, is the most important consideration?

What common ground do the two men discover as they reflect, each by himself, upon their meeting after its end?

#### **Scene 5: The Gala Ball**

Why does Mary Todd feel that they should have cancelled the ball? How does the President allay her fears?

What are some words you would use to describe the emotions of the guests at the ball as they see the remodeled White House for the first time?

Who is conspicuously missing from the ball? Why?

Contrast the emotions of the guests with the emotions of Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Keckley.

The two Cabinet secretaries express a third set of emotions. What words would you use to express these?

### **Scene 6: Mourning in Washington**

What emotion unites the three characters in this scene?

How has Mrs. Keckley's role changed in this scene from what it was before?

Look up some information about the foundation, or association, that Mrs. Keckley began and asks the President to consider funding.

### **Scene 7: Forest Gospel Singing**

Why do you suppose the President and Mr. Douglass had to travel to a secluded forest campground to hear the gospel singers perform?

The choir's first song, *Let My People Go*, talks about Israel being in Egypt. Do some research about Israel's captivity in Egypt and compare it to the slaves' captivity in the American South. Who was Moses? Who was Pharaoh? Why would this have been the subject of a Negro spiritual?

Have you ever felt like singing a song with the words, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen?" What were the circumstances that made you feel that way?

How does this second song affect the President? Why do you think that is?

### **Scene 8: Sam's Letter, and Akin to Abraham**

The President's aide, Sam Everyman, reveals in a letter to his mother that he has been changed. What is the change he writes about?

What does Sam ask his mother to do? Why?

What would you say are the qualities of Abraham Lincoln that made someone like Sam feel close to him?

How does this make Sam feel he must respond?

### **Scene 9: This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful**

To whom does the President direct his remarks in this scene? What does this tell you about him?

What does it mean to yearn? For what does the President yearn?

The President seems to be saying that men and women all over the world have many of the same concerns and triumphs and griefs. Would you say this is true? Can you think of examples?

What does the President describe as the greatest quality in the dream City of Friends? Do you agree that that would be the most important quality for a City of Friends to have? Why or why not?

Imagine a world in which the most important quality was love. What kinds of words and deeds would you expect to see every day in such a world? What kinds of words and deeds would you expect never to see?

What book does the President read a line from after singing about the City of Friends? What is the paper that he signs immediately afterwards? What do you think is the connection between the two?

### **Scene 10: The War is Over**

President Lincoln talks in this scene about “the difficult task ahead of us.” What do you think is the task, and why is it difficult?

Besides freedom from slavery, what was the other right that the President said he would ask Congress to grant? To whom would it be granted?

What is Mr. Douglass’s reaction to this idea?

What is the spirit and emotional tone of the last song sung by the Black soldier and Freedmen and Freedwomen? To whom does it give honor and praise?