



**Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States.**

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Friday is Abraham Lincoln's birthday and to honor our nation's 16th president, we are publishing the winning essays in the Lincoln Bicentennial Writing Contest.

The contest, which was open to all high school seniors in Winnebago County including those home-schooled, was run by the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois and the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission of Winnebago County.

Students were invited to submit a written 272-word response to the following question:

If Lincoln were alive today — in a time of war, economic turmoil and deep divisions among the American people — what would be his fondest hope and his most fervent prayer for the nation he loved?

**The winners are:**

1. [Clarissa Kittoe](#), Jefferson High School, Grade 12, winner of a \$1,000 college scholarship funded by the Gordon and Mary Ann Smith Charitable Fund.
2. [Mahalia Kahsay](#), Auburn High School, Grade 12, winner of a \$750 college scholarship funded by the Rundquist Family Charitable Fund.
3. [Zane Gilfillan](#), Guilford High School, Grade 12, winner of a \$500 college scholarship funded by the President's Discretionary Fund of the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois. All scholarships will be administered by the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois.

Essays were submitted to the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois and judged anonymously by the following panel: Chairman Scott Christiansen (Winnebago County Board), Linda Grist-Cunningham (Rockford Register Star), Dr. Robert Head (Rockford College), Robert Lindvall (retired attorney at law), Jean Lythgoe (Rockford Public Library), Zoe Norwood (Rockford Public Library), Tom Walsh (Community Foundation of Northern Illinois trustee), and Helen Ware (retired).

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## **First Place Essay**

Seven score and seven years ago, Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address. It was in this historic speech that he spoke of the testing of our nation. Today's present issues reflect the same testing he spoke of in the year 1863. At that time, our country was fighting a drawn-out war, divided among its people, and the economy was facing inflation. Sound familiar?

Lincoln's job as president obviously wasn't an easy one, but his presidency is now a legacy to Americans. We look towards him for inspiration. If Lincoln were alive today, he would be troubled by the lack of unity shared by the people. A divided country was the one thing he fought against. Looking more deeply at his speech, you can see how he embodied the Founding Fathers' principles. Their hopes of a strong country driven by the people create the very foundation of our nation. Lincoln's most ardent prayer would be for us to remember the Founding Fathers' spirit. To have the people *united* in the *United States*. He would hope for the safety of our citizens against terrorism. He would hope for an independent America. He would hope for a strong economy and a united government. And he would hope for an equal America and a healthy America. And the America the Founding Fathers had fought for. America: a country founded by rebels that miraculously became a world super power from the work put in by its people. Lincoln would pray for us to remember that things can change, but only if the people make it change. In the words of Lincoln, "never forget what they did here."

**Lincoln Essay Contest 1<sup>st</sup> Place  
Clarissa Kittoe  
Jefferson High School  
Grade 12**

## Second Place Essay

### Equality: The Hope and Prayer for True Freedom

A country torn apart by economic and social differences, a people separated through fundamental philosophies, a nation at the heart divided – America today parallels the America Lincoln loved and fought to save. While light bulbs have replaced oil lamps and email the horse drawn postal carriages, Lincoln’s hopes and prayers for the success and prosperity of the nation he led almost 150 years ago would be the same. Time could not diminish the dedication Lincoln had for this country. When asked what Lincoln’s fondest hope and most fervent prayer for America today would be, one can simply look at what he himself said after the end of the Civil War. The prayer “that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom”<sup>1</sup> would come from his mouth as he would watch the growing welfare lines, the increasing inmate population, and the faces of the children whose family situation makes their bedroom walls feel as cold as concrete prison gates. The hope “that these dead shall not have died in vain”<sup>2</sup> would flow from his heart as he would desire for American citizens to take the initiative and work hard for success, to empathize and organize to support those less fortunate, and to honor and respect, through their actions, their America and the fallen soldiers who so bravely fought to preserve it. Such aspirations could only come from a man who understood that at the heart of a nation, is its people, and that these people must within themselves find the desire to create, to the best of their ability, a land of the free and a home of the brave.

**Lincoln Essay Contest 2<sup>nd</sup> Place  
Mahalia Kahsay  
Auburn High School  
Grade 12**

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<sup>1</sup> “Avalon Project – Gettysburg Address.” *Avalon Project – Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, 2008. Web. 07 Jan. 2010, < [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/gettyb.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/gettyb.asp) >

<sup>2</sup> “Avalon Project – Gettysburg Address.” *Avalon Project – Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, 2008. Web. 07 Jan. 2010, < [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/gettyb.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/gettyb.asp) >

### **Third Place Essay**

I stand firm and tall asking for silence  
Asking for peace and to please stop the violence  
A top hat on my head and a beard on my face  
And as I look around I guess the world has changed  
Now I'll ask politely and firmly so listen to me  
Remember what I changed with the Amendment 13?  
And what I wanted to do was to close the sever  
Who would bring the American people together  
Since you won't listen I guess it's time for me to speak straight and stop the rhyme  
Look at what we are coming to and look at the bigger picture  
In times of war, economic turmoil, and political disagreement, we have to be one  
Not millions  
Look back in the past to see what we have endured and with that figure out the  
Right path towards the future  
It won't be easy, that is one and probably the only thing I can guarantee  
But it's nothing this great nation can't handle  
And let's not forget that we are still at war over seas  
Due to the fact that we are at war with ourselves  
It's time once again in the speech that I go back to rhyme with one more message to Teach  
And it has to do with what I accomplished in my life  
To bring together people, segregation, and strife  
So when I look at you and you look at him  
That your eyes go blind to the color of his skin  
As I stand here proud and tall  
I stand here preaching peace and justice for all  
And this is what I believe

**Lincoln Essay Contest 3<sup>rd</sup> Place  
Zane Gilfillan  
Guilford High School  
Grade 12**