

Grades  
5–9

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## LINCOLN'S GRAVE ROBBERS

STEVE  
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**Perfect for teaching  
Common Core State  
Standards, including:**

### **Reading Informational Texts**

**RI.6-7.1.** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**RI.7.3.** Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text.

### **Speaking And Listening**

**SL 6-7.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions... Come to discussions prepared having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to prove and reflect on ideas under discussion....

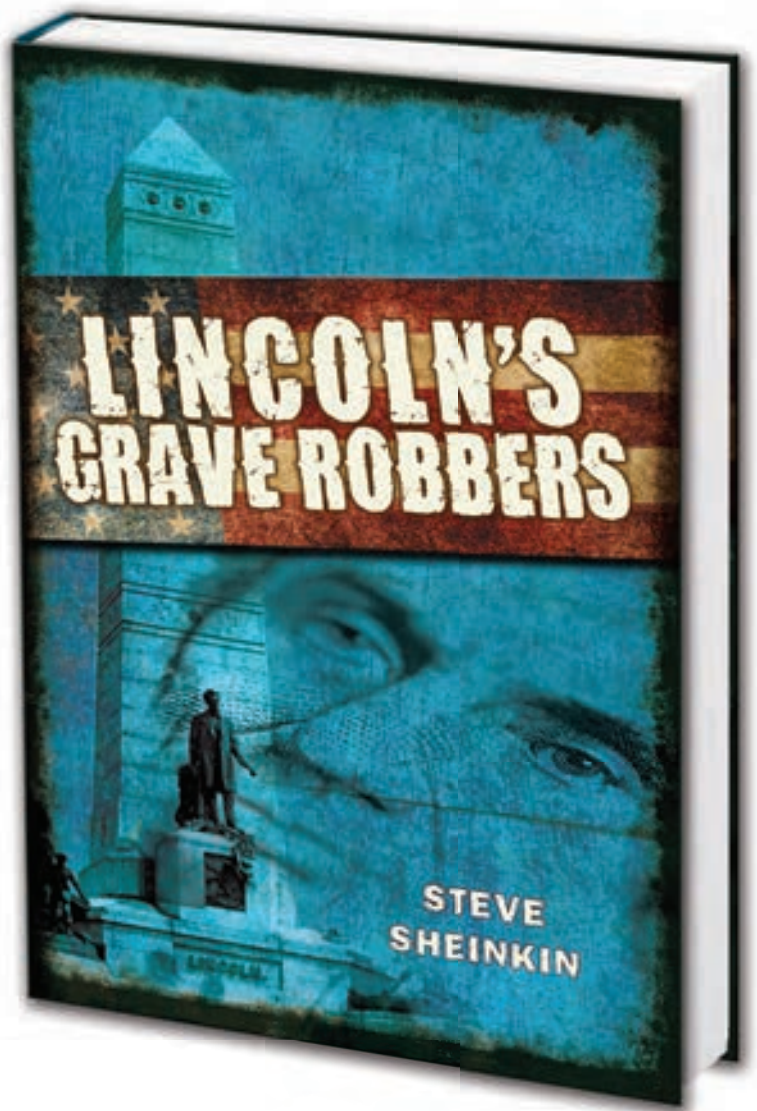
### **Writing**

**W.5.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational text to support analysis, reflection, and research.

## About the Book

America's sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated in 1865. Nine years later, the Lincoln monument was completed in Springfield, IL, and the great man's coffin was finally laid to rest.

But not for long. Desperate outlaws, intent on obtaining the release of an imprisoned counterfeiter, set in motion a bizarre plot to steal the Lincoln coffin during the nation's centennial year—1876—and hold it for ransom. In a gripping account that features an assortment of shady characters, dedicated lawmen, and the beginnings of our country's Secret Service, this story that took place nearly 150 years ago reads like a detective thriller. It's perfect for modeling the Common Core State Standard to "read like a detective, write like an investigative reporter."



## Pre-Reading Activities

1. The events in this book take place in the year 1876. Build up some background knowledge of life in the United States during that time by noting historical events, new inventions, and the way people lived. Here is a useful timeline: <http://americasbesthistory.com/abhtimeline1870.html>
2. Write a paragraph about the importance of Abraham Lincoln's presidency and legacy, and what the effect would be on the general public if his body disappeared from its grave.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why was Patrick Tyrell a good choice to work for the Secret Service in Chicago?
2. Why did Nat Kinsey turn informant on his former prize student in engraving? What made Ben Boyd turn to a life of counterfeiting? How did Tyrell corner Boyd and why did it take so long for him to make the arrest?
3. Why did the United States start to create paper money in the mid-nineteenth century? What was the advantage of using paper money rather than coins? How did this make it easier to counterfeit?

4. Why did Jim Kenally's first plot fail? Do you think Kenally was right when he "didn't believe he needed a better plan. He just needed a better team" (p. 57)?
5. Why was John Carroll Power the only one concerned about the safety of Lincoln's grave after the first plot failed?
6. Why did Kenally feel more confident about the second team he recruited to steal the body? What was his connection to Mullen and Hughes?
7. How did Swegles gain the confidence of Mullen and Hughes? How was he able to convince them to let him in on the plot? Why didn't they ever suspect Swegles was a "roper"? Why did Tyrell trust Swegles?
8. Why did it take so long for Tyrell to get approval from his boss to try to thwart the Lincoln grave robbery? Why did he go ahead with his own plans to catch the thieves, even without permission?
9. How did Swegles convince the gang to bring in "Billy Brown" to the plans? Why did Mullen and Hughes agree to include this new person in their plot?
10. What role did Robert Lincoln play in this drama?
11. How did John English, the reporter, happen to accompany the lawmen to the Lincoln Monument on the night of the attempted robbery? What is the importance of a reporter being an eyewitness to the events of that night?
12. Why did Tyrell take so long to move against the thieves when he heard them in the tomb? What was the main reason he was not able to catch the thieves that night? Compare this trap to his earlier plan to catch Boyd.
13. What story did Mullen and Hughes tell the authorities when they were captured? What mistake did they make while they were in jail awaiting trial and sentencing?
14. Why was Lincoln's body moved so many times

after the robbery attempt? How long did it take for the body to finally be laid to rest?

15. Who is the only one of the criminals who went "straight" and lived an honest life at the end of this saga?

## Post-Reading Activities

1. Create a timeline from when "Big Jim" Kenally first had the idea of stealing Lincoln's coffin until the thieves were apprehended. What are the milestones of the plot as it unfolded?
2. Draw a map of the route from Chicago to Springfield and include other towns and cities that are important in this book. Include the entire area that Tyrell had to cover as a federal agent in this part of the country.
3. Look up information on the Hayes/Tilden presidential campaigns of 1876. Compare that election year to others that have been contested. Imagine what a Hayes or Tilden TV advertisement would have looked like if they had our technology back then.  
<http://www.history.com/topics/memorable-elections>
4. Research the history of the Pinkerton detective agency and list their involvement in significant historical events. Discover their connection to Abraham Lincoln when he was alive:  
<http://www.legendsofamerica.com/we-pinkertons.html>
5. Discover if there have been other plots to rob the graves of famous people. How do these other plots compare to the Lincoln robbery?  
<http://www.mentalfloss.com/blogs/archives/39723>



## Further Reading

**Beyer, Mark**

***Secret Service*** (Children's Press, 2003).

Learn about the undercover operations of today's Secret Service and its duties.

**Freedman, Russell**

***Lincoln: A Photobiography*** (Clarion, 1987).

This highly readable and profusely illustrated biography of the beloved president sets a context for his life and times.

**Stratton, Allan**

***The Grave Robber's Apprentice*** (HarperCollins, 2012).

Two young people fight against evil forces in this lighthearted adventure story about Hans, who was raised by a grave robber.

**Swanson, James L.**

***Chasing Lincoln's Killer*** (Scholastic, 2009).

This fast-paced thriller based on true events traces the crime of Lincoln's assassination until all those involved were brought to justice.

## About the Author



Photo: Erica Miller

National Book Award Finalist Steve Sheinkin has been writing history books for years. A meticulous researcher and documenter, he is also a former teacher and knows well how to grab young readers' interest and hold it. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

***Lincoln's Grave Robbers*** by Steve Sheinkin (Ages 10-14, 224 pages, 978-0-545-40572-0, \$16.99) is available from your local bookstore or usual vendor. Teachers and librarians may order from Scholastic, P.O. Box 7502, 2931 East McCarty Street, Jefferson City, MO 65102, or call toll-free 1-800-SCHOLASTIC.



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