“If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said, I am in height, six feet, four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on average, one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair and grey eyes—no other marks or brands recollected.”

Abraham Lincoln wasn’t the sort of man who could lose himself in a crowd. After all, he stood six feet four inches tall, and to top it off, he wore a high silk hat.

His height was mostly in his long bony legs. When he sat in a chair, he seemed no taller than anyone else. It was only when he stood up that he towered above other men.

At first glance, most people thought he was homely. Lincoln thought so too, referring once to his “poor, lean, lank, face.” As a young man he was sensitive about his gawky looks, but in time, he learned to laugh at himself. When a rival called him “two-faced” during a political debate, Lincoln replied: “I leave it to my audience. If I had another face, do you think I’d wear this one?”

According to those who knew him, Lincoln was a man of many faces. In repose, he often seemed sad and gloomy. But when he began to speak, his expression changed. “The dull, listless features dropped like a mask,” said a Chicago newspaperman. “The eyes began to sparkle, the mouth to smile, the whole countenance was wreathed in animation, so that a stranger would have said, ‘Why this man, so angular and solemn a moment ago, is really handsome!’”

Lincoln was the most photographed man of his time, but his friends insisted that no photo ever did him justice. It’s no wonder. Back then, cameras required long exposures. The person being photographed had to “freeze” as the seconds ticked by. If he blinked an eye, the picture would be blurred. That’s why Lincoln looks so stiff and formal in his photos. We never see him laughing or joking.

Artists and writers tried to capture the “real” Lincoln that the camera missed, but something about the man always escaped them. His changeable features, his tones, gestures, and expressions, seemed to defy description.

Today it’s hard to imagine Lincoln as he really was. And he never cared to reveal much about himself. In company he was witty and talkative, but he rarely betrayed his inner feelings. According to William Herndon, his law partner, he was the “most secretive-reticent-shut-mouthed man that ever lived.”

In his own time, Lincoln was never fully understood even by his closest friends. Since then, his life story has been told and retold so many times; he has become as much a legend as a flesh-and-blood human being. While the legend is based on truth it is only partly true. And it hides the man behind it like a disguise.

The legendary Lincoln is known as Honest Abe, a humble man of the people who rose from a log cabin to the White House. There’s no doubt that Lincoln was a poor boy who made good. And it’s true that he carried his folksy manners and homespun speech to the White House with him. He said ‘howdy” to visitors and invited them to “stay a spell”. He greeted diplomats while wearing carpet slippers, called his wife “mother” at receptions, and told bawdy jokes at cabinet meetings.

Lincoln may have seemed like a common man, but he wasn’t. His friends agreed that he was one of the most ambitious people they had ever known. Lincoln struggled hard to rise above his log-cabin origins, and he was proud of his achievement. By the time he ran for president he was a wealthy man, earning a large income from his law practice and his many investments. As for the nickname Abe, he hated it. No one who knew him well ever called him Abe to his face. They addressed him as Lincoln or Mr. Lincoln.
Directions: Read the passage “The Mysterious Mr. Lincoln,” then circle the letter of the correct answer.

1. What does the author mean by this sentence from the passage?

Abraham Lincoln wasn’t the sort of man who could lose himself in a crowd.

A. Lincoln’s height caused him to tower over most people.
B. Lincoln stood out because of his homeliness.
C. Lincoln’s fame made him easily recognizable.
D. Lincoln liked to be the center of attention.

2. Which word best describes Lincoln’s White House manners?

A. ambitious
B. artificial
C. unpretentious
D. sophisticated

3. What is the meaning of the word *gawky* as used in the sentence?

As a young man, he was sensitive about his gawky looks, but in time he learned to laugh at himself.

A. awkward
B. animated
C. formal
D. changeable

4. When the author writes that Lincoln “struggled hard to rise above his ‘log-cabin’ origins,” he means that Lincoln tried to overcome his

A. humble beginnings.
B. homespun speech.
C. bawdy jokes.
D. poor manners.
5. According to the author, which word best describes the real Abe Lincoln?
   A. ambitious
   B. common
   C. honest
   D. outgoing

6. When Lincoln’s partner, William Herndon describes Lincoln as being “reticent” he means that Lincoln was
   A. reserved.
   B. misunderstood.
   C. legendary.
   D. wealthy.

7. What does the author mean when he writes that the legend of Abe Lincoln is “only partly true. And it hides the man behind it like a disguise”?
   A. Lincoln wasn’t always totally truthful about his life story.
   B. As Lincoln’s life story has been told and re-told, it is no longer accurate.
   C. Lincoln was very secretive about the events in his life story.
   D. Even Lincoln’s closest friends did not know the truth about his life story.

8. Read this sentence from the passage.
   “The eyes began to sparkle, the mouth to smile, the whole countenance was wreathed in animation, so that a stranger would have said, “Why this man, so angular and solemn a moment ago, is really handsome!”

   What does the phrase the whole countenance was wreathed in animation mean?
   A. the entire face filled with enthusiasm
   B. the whole body became actively involved
   C. the facial features were not as obvious
   D. the body language changed completely
ANSWER KEY – The Mysterious Mr. Lincoln – LA.A.1.4.2

L.A.A.1.4.2: meanings of words phrases and sentences using context clues and word structure

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