

Can a letter change History?

In 1860, eleven-year-old Grace Bedell penned a letter to then presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln, suggesting that he might “look a great deal better” with whiskers. Her letter touched Lincoln. In fact, he grew a beard. Grace Bedell met Lincoln in person the following year as his inaugural train journeyed to Washington, D.C. The meeting had a profound impact upon the rest of her life.

Grace Bedell's Letter to Lincoln

N Y
Westfield Chatauque Co
Oct 15. 1860

Hon A B Lincoln
Dear Sir

My father has just home from the fair and brought home your picture and Mr. Hamlin's. I am a little girl only eleven years old, but want you should be President of the United States very much so I hope you wont think me very bold to write to such a great man as you are. Have you any little girls about as large as I am if so give them my love and tell her to write to me if you cannot answer this letter. I have got 4 brother's and part of them will vote for you any way and if you will let your whiskers grow I will try and get the rest of them to vote for you you would look a great deal better for your face is so thin. All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husband's to vote for you and then you would be President. My father is a going to vote for you and if I was a man I would vote for you to but I will try and get every one to vote for you that I can I think that rail fence around your picture makes it look very pretty I have got a little baby sister she is nine weeks old and is just as cunning as can be. When you direct your letter dir[e]ct to Grace Bedell Westfield Chatauque County New York

I must not write any more answer this letter right off
Good bye
Grace Bedell

Lincoln's Response to Grace Bedell

October 19, 1860
Springfield, Illinois

Miss. Grace Bedell
My dear little Miss.

Your very agreeable letter of the 15th. is received.

I regret the necessity of saying I have no daughters. I have three sons — one seventeen, one nine, and one seven, years of age. They, with their mother, constitute my whole family.

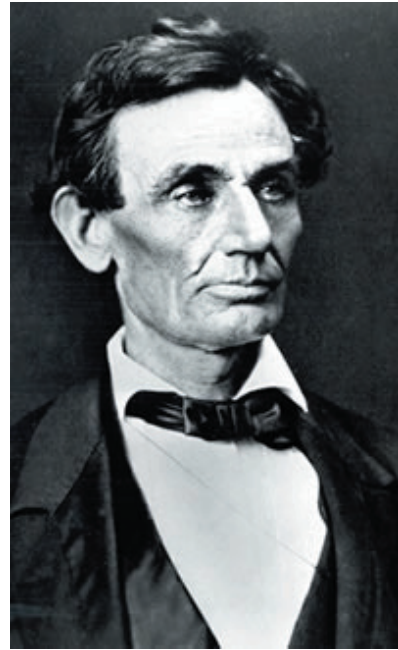
As to the whiskers, having never worn any, do you not think people would call it a piece of silly affection if I were to begin it now? Your very sincere well-wisher

A. Lincoln

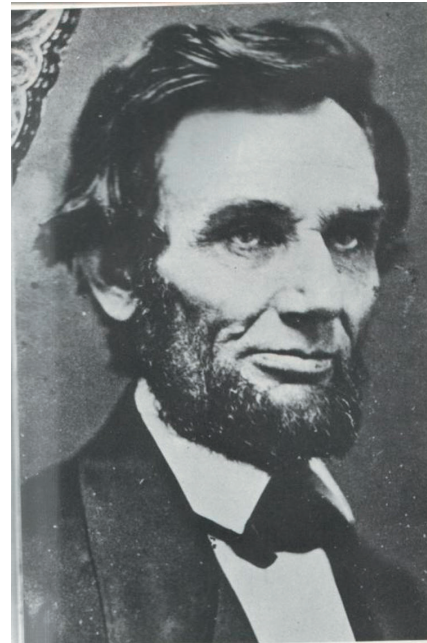


Discussion Questions

1. How can a letter change history?
2. Why do you think Lincoln was persuaded by Grace's letter?
3. What famous person would you like to write to and what would you say in your letter?
4. Do you write letters? How often and to whom?
5. Do you receive letters? From whom? Do you keep them? Why? Where do you keep them?
6. How might you express yourself differently in a letter than in person?
7. Grace Bedell's original letter in her own handwriting is located in the Detroit Public Library. How might the use of email, telephones and text messaging impact future historians and collectors?



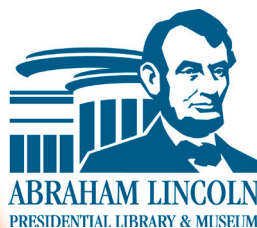
June 1860



February 1861

Write a letter to...

- A friend
- A relative
- A public official
- A soldier
- A celebrity
- A role model
- A newspaper



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