

Sample Reading

Great Books Discussion

Second Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln

Interpretive Questions

1. Why doesn't Lincoln feel triumphant regarding the successful course of the war? Why does he make no predictions about the war's outcome, but only expresses "high hope" for the future?
2. According to Lincoln, did the North "accept" war because of its wish to preserve the Union or because of its abhorrence of slavery?
3. Does Lincoln blame the South for causing war?
4. Why does Lincoln point out that "the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement" of slavery? Is he suggesting that, in so compromising, the North was trying any means possible to avert bloodshed, or avoiding its moral responsibility?
5. According to Lincoln, why were people who had so much in common—even praying to the same God—unable to avoid such a terrible conflict?
6. Why does Lincoln suggest that both North and South are being punished by God for the offense of American slavery?
7. Why does Lincoln avoid calling for vengeance against the side "who would *make* war rather than let the nation survive?"
8. Why does Lincoln think that, rather than a detailed speech outlining a course of action for the next four years, a brief statement about the sin of slavery and his wish that the nation bear "malice toward none" is the appropriate subject of his address?