

2025

President Abraham Lincoln took office during a period of extreme political and social polarization. When he delivered his first inaugural address in March of 1861, six states had already seceded from the Union and four more would soon follow suit. Despite his call for unity, the Civil War broke out just one month later and four years of devastating conflict ensued.

When Lincoln was reelected in 1864, and with the Union on the verge of winning the Civil War, the president did not use the occasion of his second inaugural address to deliver a victory speech and thereby widen divisions. He focused instead on reuniting the nation. Urging all Americans to move forward with humility and in a spirit of reconciliation, he counseled, "with malice toward none; with charity for all... let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds."



With this in mind, please answer the following prompt in 500 words or fewer:

The United States is once again deeply divided, politically and on a host of significant issues. Briefly describe how this polarization has impacted you, your community, family, and/or school. Then detail one action that you or your community, family, or school could take to promote the kind of reconciliation Lincoln spoke of. Explore both the possible challenges and potential positive impacts of this action in justifying why it would be worthwhile.

QUESTIONS?

Contact:

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IMPORTANT DATES:

Essays Due: February 12, 2025

Awards Luncheon: May 18, 2025

Winners will receive certificates and cash prizes:

- First Place Winners: \$500 each
- Second Place Winners: \$400 each
- Third Place Winners: \$300 each
- Up to four Honorable Mentions: \$200 each

OPEN TO all 8th grade
students residing in
VERMONT.

Your School Contact:
