

## APRIL 15, 1865

*I wrote this for a friend of mine who is a teacher and needed something on Lincoln's assassination that her class of middle-school special ed students. She did not want the usual history lesson, but rather wanted the piece to have basic facts but to read like a short story to keep the students' attention. She also wanted a few multiple-choice questions at the end.*

Fourteen-year-old Jim lived with his mother in Washington, DC. His father had died in five years earlier, in 1860. That meant Jim had to go to work. He sold newspapers during the day. In the evening he would wander the streets and sell the muffins his mother had made.

While he was working, he would hear people talk. One said that President Abraham Lincoln was going to Ford's Theater to see a play called, "Our American Cousin."

Jim was sure that people would be hungry after the play was over, so on the evening of April 15, the day that Lincoln would be in the audience, he walked over to Ford's Theater. It was about 9:30 at night. He put the basket of muffins down and sat on the ground while he waited for people to come out.

As he leaned his head against the building's brick wall, he could hear the audience laughing in inside. *That play must be very funny*, he thought. *They're laughing a lot!*

At 10:15, during one extremely loud wave of laughter, Jim thought he heard something else: a loud bang as if a gun had been fired. A few seconds later, the laughing was replaced by screams.

As Jim hopped to his feet, the theater doors flew open, and some soldiers rushed out. They were carrying another man in their arms. Jim could see blood on the back of the man's head and how pale his face was. Then he focused on the beard and the wounded man's face. He was President Lincoln!

People were yelling back and forth.

"We've got to get him to the White House!"

"We can't put him in a wagon! Look at the street! It's full of holes and bumps. He'd die before we even could get him back."

"Bring him here," a loud voice shouted from the house directly across the street.

Jim looked up and saw a young man leaning out the window.

"Bring in here!" the man repeated.

So, the soldiers and several other men hurried across the street and disappeared into the house.

As Jim stood there, he heard people talk about how Lincoln had been shot by an actor named John Wilkes Booth. He had barged into the President's box at the play, shot him

in the head, and shouted "The South shall be free!" Then he leapt onto the stage and ran out the back door of the theater and disappeared into the night. Jim also learned that some doctors had been in the audience. They had run up to the President's box, examined his wound, and determined that he would not live long.

Suddenly, Jim realized that what had happened was news. He needed to get Mr. Riley, the editor of the newspaper that he sold every morning.

So, Jim dashed off and soon was outside Mr. Riley's home. He shouted the editor's name over and over until a window on the second floor flew open and a voice barked, "Can't a man get any sleep around here?"

Jim shouted, "Mr. Riley, come quick! President Lincoln has been shot at Ford's Theater!"

Within seconds, the editor burst out the front door. He was carrying a small book in his hand. Jim knew that he used the book to take notes.

Together, the two ran all the way to Ford's Theater. Once they got there, Jim pointed at house across the street. "The President is in there!"

Then they, like the rest of the crowd, stood and waited. Every so often someone would come out of the house with a report about the President's condition. It did not sound good. In between the reports, Mr. Riley interviewed people about the attack and took notes in his little book.

Finally, at 7:22 in the morning, the group outside was told, "President Abraham Lincoln is dead."

A sad cry went up from the crowd.

"Such a terrible news," Mr. Riley murmured as he made notes in his book. "But without you, Jim, I would not have been able to be here to write a report for my paper."

Have you ever felt happy and sad at the same time? Well, that's exactly what Jim was feeling then. He had helped the newspaper which made him happy, but he had seen the death of a president and that made him so sad. He would never forget that day.

Questions:

1. Why did Jim want to go to Ford's Theater on the evening of April 15?

A. He wanted to see a play. B. President Lincoln would be there, there would be a crowd, and he would sell a lot of muffins. C. He got lost. D. It was the last performance of "Our American Cousin."

2. During the play, Jim heard the audience laughing. What else did he hear?

A. Someone sneezing. B. Lots of applause. C. A speech by Lincoln. D. A gun shot.

3. Where was Lincoln wounded?

A. In the back of his head. B. In his leg. C. In the heart. D. In his face.

4. Who shot Abraham Lincoln?

A. A close friend. B. A total stranger. C. Actor John Wilkes Booth. D. His wife, Mary Lincoln.

5. What does the title of the story refer to?

A. The day Lincoln was assassinated. B. Lincoln's birthday. C. The day the Civil War ended. D. The last performance of "Our American Cousin."

\*\*NOTE: You can find more information about Ford's Theater and the Lincoln Assassination at [www.fords.org](http://www.fords.org)