

Modeling Lincoln

Anyone who reads this column regularly knows that I am an admirer of Abraham Lincoln. Many share my gratitude for his life and leadership at a difficult time in our country.

Lincoln is often held up to children as a model of achievement and an embodiment of the American dream. If he was not the greatest President of the United States that we have had, he certainly was in the top two or three. Lincoln's second inaugural address is one of the noblest speeches ever given, and his Gettysburg Address is still studied and memorized by students.

Amazingly, Lincoln had only four months of formal education, and that in a one-room country schoolhouse where students ranged from age 5 to 25. His teacher probably had no more than an eighth-grade education, if that. But Lincoln wanted to learn, and he had a zestful appetite for reading.

One day a father was reciting all of these achievements of Lincoln to his son. "Where else but in America could this happen?" he mused. And then, hoping to instill in his son a little more ambition to study, he asked, "Do you know what Abe Lincoln was doing when he was your age?"

"No," the boy answered, "but I do know what he was doing when he was your age."

We nearly always err when we suggest to others that they be like anybody other than their own best selves. And, to our consternation, they usually let us know we have erred.

As my grandfather used to say, "Men are like fish. Neither would get into trouble if he kept his mouth shut."

--Beecher Hunter