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Danny Russel, portraying Abraham Lincoln, talks Monday to a group of Covington Elementary School students.

'Lincoln' visits Indiana schools

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COVINGTON, Ind. — Elementary students in Fountain County schools had a special visitor Monday.

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, presented a program telling about his life as a teenager in southern Indiana and as an adult in Illinois leading up to his presidency during the Civil War.

Today school children across Indiana and Illinois remember Lincoln on his birthday. While Illinois gets the attention for Lincoln, Hoosiers honor Lincoln's boyhood. He lived in Indiana from age 7-21.

Danny Russel has been an actor since leaving college 25 years ago.

"I have been researching historical characters for 15 years," Russel said. His appearance at Covington Elementary School was his third of the day. He spoke to students at Attica and Southeast Fountain schools earlier.

Russell dressed the part of Lincoln with the beard and topped with the stovepipe hat where Lincoln kept his speeches. He seemed to keep the students attention as he interspersed Lincoln's jokes in with serious issues.

"I think he was very good," said Corinne Moore, 10. "I learned things I didn't know."

Ella Martin, 10, agreed.

"I didn't know his nickname was Honest Abe," she said.

Russel said the students at all three schools had lot of questions.

"I have to include the Gettysburg Address," Russel said. "In a few words, he said so much. Lincoln had enough jokes that you can counterbalance it."

Russel began his first-person talk of Lincoln by telling of the family's move from Kentucky to southern Indiana.

"We moved here (to Indiana) to be free," he said. "It took two weeks to move 16 miles."

He told of building their log cabin home in what is now Spencer County and the furniture that is in it.

"My Mother would read scripture to us every day," he said. Lincoln's mother died when he was 9, but he clung to her Bible and read it routinely.

"By the age of 10, I had quite a vocabulary," he said. "My formal education lasted no more than a year."

His father thought he was lazy because he didn't like to work in the fields.

"I would much rather read," he said.

At age 16, he got a job on a ferry, and at age 18 he had his first essay published in a newspaper in Ohio.

On a boat trip to New Orleans he saw his first slave auction.

"That haunted me for the rest of my days," he said. "I hated slavery."

Lincoln and his wife, Mary, had four sons, but only Robert, the oldest, became an adult.

Lincoln ran in 12 elections and lost nine times.

"You should never give up," he said.

Lincoln hated the Civil War.

"A housed divided against itself cannot survive," he said. "There was father against son and brother against brother."

Lincoln won the presidential election in the fall of 1860.

"I left Springfield, Ill., not knowing whether I would return," he said.

After he was shot and killed in Washington, D.C., he was brought back to Springfield to be buried a month after his second inauguration.

"Just so you know, freedom is not free," he concluded his talk.

FAST FACT

Today is Abraham Lincoln's birthday. He was born in 1809 in Kentucky. He lived there for seven years before moving to Indiana for 14 years, and then on to Illinois. As a circuit lawyer, he traveled to the Danville area on a regular basis.