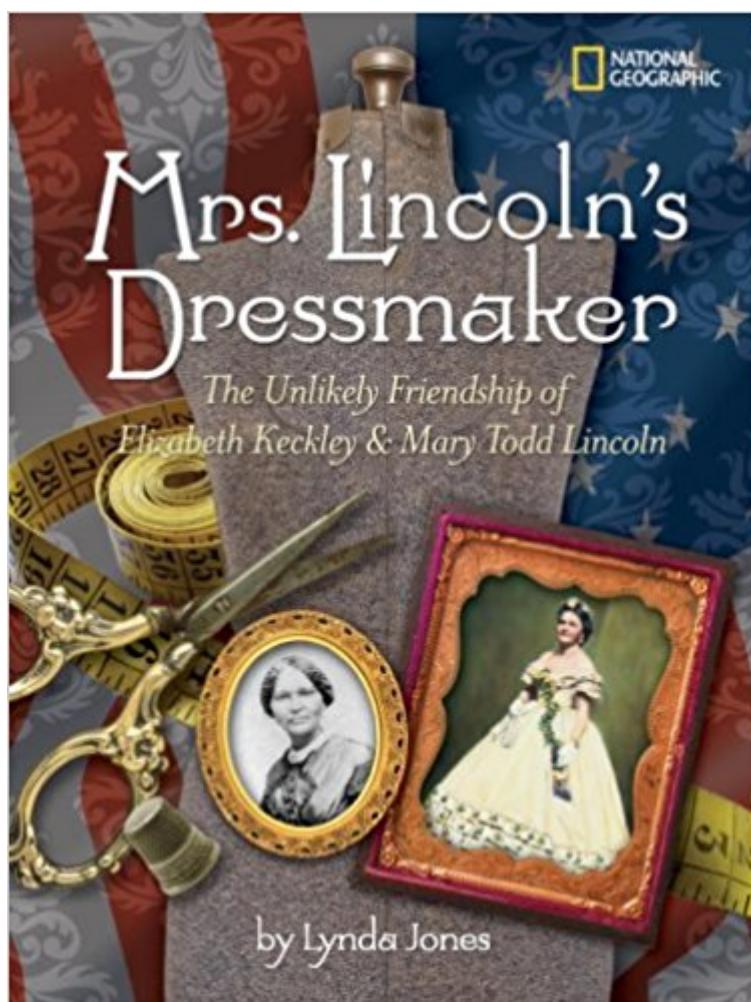


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Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker: The Unlikely Friendship Of Elizabeth Keckley And Mary Todd Lincoln



Synopsis

Few events can stir up a scandal more than an autobiography of a First Lady's confidante. In 1868, a controversial tell-all called *Behind the Scenes* introduced readers to Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley. Mrs. Keckley was a former slave who had been Mary Todd Lincoln's dressmaker and friend during the White House years, and in the aftermath of President Lincoln's assassination. The book exposed Mary's marriage and her erratic behavior, along with confidential opinions of many in high society. The airing of the Lincoln's "dirty laundry" meant humiliation for Mary and her family, and Elizabeth's reputation was destroyed. This outcome would have been unimaginable in 1867, when Mary declared in a letter, "I consider you my best living friend." How could such a bond have developed between a woman born into slavery and the First Lady of the United States? Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker answers this question by chronicling the extraordinary lives of these women. Readers will be fascinated by a tale of friendship and fate. The pair seem like polar opposites: Lizzie is calm, dignified, with a steely inner strength; Mrs. Lincoln is fragile, unstable and flighty. Yet both share a burning resolve to get what they want. Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker examines the strains on such a unique friendship, as it's debated and parodied in newspapers. Lizzie must frequently leave her work to attend to the demands of Mrs. Lincoln. She offers constant support and companionship, particularly after the assassination of the President. In return, the dressmaker enjoys all the prestige and the popularity of those close to power. Readers witness Elizabeth Keckley in her many roles: from fashion designer to abolitionist to caretaker. They follow her through the Civil War, the evils of slavery, and the many challenges faced alongside the First Lady. Handsome duotone illustrations include daguerreotypes, photos, paintings, and illustrations of the Lincoln's, Mrs. Keckley, and her masters. The book's elegant design emphasizes period fashion and the art of dressmaking. Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker tells the remarkable story of a forgotten figure whose influence ran deep and offers a revealing insight into an extraordinary relationship at the very heart of Abraham Lincoln's presidency. National Geographic supports K-12 educators with ELA Common Core Resources. Visit www.natgeoed.org/commoncore for more information.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 14 years

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

This is the story of two women of history and the friendship that evolved between them. Elizabeth Keckley was born into slavery and brutalized by her masters until she finally earned her freedom and that of her son. She started a dressmaking business in Washington, D.C., and was able to impress Mary Todd Lincoln enough to garner her clientele and, over the years which followed, her endearment as well. Elizabeth was such a close friend to Mary that it was Elizabeth's comfort Mary requested during the time when the President was on his deathbed after being shot. Even after Abe Lincoln's death, Elizabeth came to Mary's aid in trying to raise money by selling the previously famous wardrobe created by Elizabeth and worn by Mrs. Lincoln during her husband's presidency, but this sale did not go well and ended up sullying the reputation of both women, becoming known as the Old Clothes Scandal. As a last ditch effort to repair her own reputation and also to raise money, Elizabeth wrote an autobiography, *Behind the Scenes*, which chronicled both her struggle to overcome slavery and also her relationship with Mrs. Lincoln. Some personal correspondence from Mary to Elizabeth was included in the book. This caused an uproar, and Mary was outraged. Sadly, their friendship came to an end over this publication, even though Elizabeth swore the letters were published without her permission and that she had never meant to tarnish the Lincolns' image. What a shame that this beautiful, mutually supportive relationship ended on such a sad note. This book is very well written and easy to follow and includes spectacular photographs of Mrs. Lincoln wearing Mrs. Keckley's creations. I can only imagine the hours and care that went into sewing each individual flower decoration.

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