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Thorne Middle School seventh graders, who are studying the civil war this spring, hosted, President Lincoln (a.k.a. Lincoln impersonator Robert Costello) to speak to them on his life and presidency.

Lincoln Visits Thorne Middle School on His 200th Birthday

Middletown: In honor of Presidents' Day and Lincoln's 200th birthday, the Thorne Middle School invited the 16th president (in the persona of Lincoln impersonator, Robert Costello) to visit with the seventh grade students who are about to embark on their curriculum study of the Civil War. As a core novel for the 7th Grade unit of study, they will be reading, "Gone With the Wind". Mr. Lincoln, with his trusty military assistant (Civil War re-enactor Tom Cuff) at his side, discussed his humble beginnings, his ascent to the presidency and the sobering horror of the civil war.

Answering a student's question on whether he became president to end slavery he replied, "I had hoped that that scourge (slavery) would have died in the 13 states. I desperately wanted to end it, but never by war."

Mr. Cuff mentioned that the 16th president required a special military assistant (body guard) when an attempt had been made on his life. President Lincoln mentioned that he had received many threats during his presidency. The two also discussed the atmosphere in the country when he ran for the presidency. Mr. Lincoln was considered an outsider from the "West" as Illinois was thought of in the late 19th century. He was the first president who was not from one of the original 13 colonies.

"That is why he came to the East to speak and establish his credentials," Mr. Cuff stated.

President Lincoln's commoner background, with no formal college education, was a great contrast to the members of gentile society who had held the office of president in the past and who challenged him for the presidency. These included the great orator Stephen Douglas and the then Vice President of the United States, John Breckinridge.

Thorne Principal Al Cores emphasized this point to the seventh graders stating that this was a man who suffered many adversities and personal failures and still managed to become the President of the United States.

President Lincoln told the students, "I have no middle name, but if I did, I would choose the initial P for perseverance." He added, "If you take anything away with you today it should be that if you persevere to do your best in whatever you choose to do, you can succeed also."

Principal Cores thanked President Lincoln for the contribution of the word "perseverance" which the seventh graders would now add to their literacy word wall - a word, whose meaning after meeting President Lincoln they are not soon to forget.

Mr. Costello remained in character the entire time, telling the students he had to leave to join Mrs. Lincoln at the theatre that evening, a reference to where his life would end.

After he concluded his speech, the Thorne students and staff thanked him for the visit and offered a little surprise for the occasion. Seventh grade social studies teacher Cheryl Mustachio, who arranged for the visit, wheeled out a red, white and blue frosted birthday cake decorated with lit candles denoting the number "200". Several students gathered around President Lincoln urging him to blow out the candles, as their classmates sang a chorus of "Happy Birthday."

One young man casually remarked, "He doesn't look anything like his pictures."

Both Mr. Costello and Mr. Cuff have been donning their Civil War roles in historical enactments for many years. Mr. Cuff is a retired social studies teacher from Jackson Township. Mr. Costello a semi-retired title insurance agent. He states of his penchant for impersonating American's great president, "My hobby has progressed to passion in playing Abraham Lincoln."

