Lincoln and the Whetstone

1 In 1834, when Abraham Lincoln was a candidate for the legislature, he called on a certain farmer to ask for his support. He found him in the hay field, and was urging his cause when the dinner bell sounded. The farmer invited him to dinner, but Lincoln declined politely, and added, "If you will let me have the scythe while you are gone I will mow 'round the field a couple of times."

2 When the farmer returned he found three rows neatly mowed. The scythe lay against the gate post, but Lincoln had disappeared.

3 Nearly thirty years afterward the farmer and his wife, now grown old, were at a White House reception, and stood waiting in line to shake hands with the President.

4 When they got near him in the line Lincoln saw them, and calling an aide, told him to take them to one of the small parlors, where he would see them as soon as he got through the handshaking. Much surprised, the old couple were led away. Presently Mr. Lincoln came in, and, greeting them with an outstretched hand and a warm smile, called them by name.

5 "Do you mean to say," exclaimed the farmer, "that you remember me after all these years?"

6 "I certainly do," said the President, and he went on to recall the day he had mowed around the farmer's timothy[1] field.

7 "Yes, that's so," said the old man, still in astonishment. "I found the field mowed and the scythe leaning up against the gate post. But I have always wanted to ask you one thing."

8 "What is it?" asked Mr. Lincoln.

9 "I always wanted to ask you, Mr. President, what you did with the whetstone[2]?"

10 Lincoln smoothed his hair back from his brows a moment, in deep thought; then his face lighted up.

11 "Yes, I remember now," he said, "I put that whetstone on top of the high gate post."

12 And when he got back to Illinois again, the farmer found the whetstone on top of the gate post, where it had lain for more than twenty-five years.

From "A Treasury of American Anecdotes," edited by B.A. Botkin. New York: Random House, 1957.

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[1]**timothy:** a kind of long grass used for hay
[2]**whetstone:** a stone used for sharpening tools

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1. The setting at the beginning of the passage is most likely intended to show that Lincoln

   A. prefers farm life to public office.

   B. feels comfortable with farmers.

   C. expects to return to farm life later.

   D. lives a short distance from the farm.

2. "He found him in the hay field, and was urging his cause when the dinner bell sounded. The farmer invited him to dinner, but Lincoln declined politely, and added, 'If you will let me have the **scythe** while you are gone I will mow 'round the field a couple of times.' "

   The information in these sentences suggests that a **scythe** is an instrument used for

   A. welcoming visitors.

   B. sounding alarms.

   C. preparing meals.

   D. harvesting hay.

3. What are two distinct parts to the passage "Lincoln and the Whetstone"? Using information from the passage, describe how Lincoln is characterized in the two parts of the passage. Write your answer in the **Answer Document.** (2 points)

4. Which word best describes the relationship between Lincoln and the farmer both times they meet?

   A. awkward

   B. doubtful

   C. respectful

   D. joyous

5. What does this passage suggest about Lincoln?

   A. He has a sharp memory.
   B. He has a curious nature.
   C. He is an honest person.
   D. He is a popular politician.

6. As President, how does Lincoln show his appreciation toward the farmer and his wife?

   A. He offers to mow the field again.
   B. He treats them as honored guests.
   C. He reveals where he put a whetstone.
   D. He invites them to a private dinner.

7. "Lincoln smoothed his hair back from his brows a moment, in deep thought; then **his face lighted up**."

   The author uses the phrase **his face lighted up** to show that Lincoln

   A. is amused.
   B. recalls something.
   C. is puzzled.
   D. feels embarrassed.

8. Which theme best applies to the passage?

   A. There is a time for work and there is a time for play.
   B. Sometimes what you search for is in your own back yard.
   C. There is more than just one way to do something.
   D. Sometimes it is best to make do with what you have.