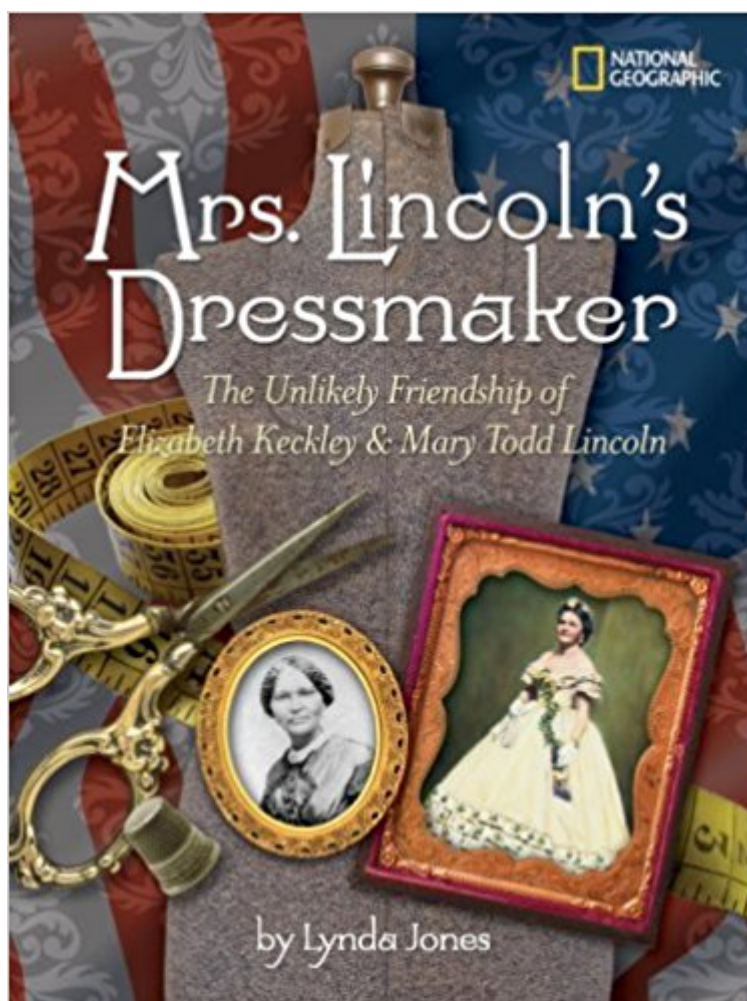


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Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker: The Unlikely Friendship Of Elizabeth Keckley And Mary Todd Lincoln



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 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

Grade 5

Opening with the initial meeting between the First Lady and the former slave who became her dressmaker, Jones then presents alternating chapters about the women's lives. Period quotes, and daguerreotypes, photos, paintings, and publications from the era appear throughout. Similar both in subject and title to Becky Rutberg's *Mary Lincoln's Dressmaker* (Walker, 1995), this book is sparer, but it references Rutberg's work, both as a source and with very similar language and quotes. The earlier title presents a broader story in a more engaging manner. This is a worthwhile subject for women's history, American history, and for providing insight into the Lincolns. However, Rutberg's book remains the better of the two.

Janet S. Thompson,
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Although it's difficult to find a fresh angle for a book in this year of Lincoln, Jones manages smartly with the story of Elizabeth Keckley, born into slavery, and her friendship with Mary Todd Lincoln. The book opens with the first meetings between Mary, the new first lady, in need of a seamstress, and Elizabeth, the experienced dressmaker. Things get off to a rough start, but Elizabeth has a talent not just for sewing, but for soothing Mary. In alternating chapters, Jones then introduces both women and contrasts their very different lives. Readers may be familiar with the ups and downs of Lincoln's life, but details of Keckley's story—the physical and sexual abuse she suffered, her efforts to buy herself out of slavery—will give them new insights into the life of a slave, in this case,

one who was educated and had a profession. Because Keckley wrote an autobiography, Jones is able to draw on her own words, which are used effectively. The format, however, is rather dull, especially compared with the current crop of Lincoln books. A short bibliography and source notes are appended. Grades 6-9. --Ilene Cooper

Very well written and historically accurate account of these two women's relationship. Also, liked the story of Elizabeth Keckley buying her way out of slavery. I had just returned from Springfield, IL and a 5 day program on the "Life and Legacy of Abraham Lincoln" when I ordered this book. For some reason, I wanted to know more about Mary Lincoln and her dressmaker, and this book told that story. Loved the pictures, too.

I see that this is a children's book, and I was a little disappointed that I didn't learn more about this interesting friendship. The book is laid out in an attractive way and is good for children to read. I like the depiction of such a capable and intelligent black woman in a time when people of her race were not valued. It did make me curious to read her own autobiography and to learn more about her and Mrs. Lincoln.

A lovely little book, couched in simple but nonpatronizing language, telling the story of the former slave who became an indispensable part of Mrs. Lincoln for a time. I don't have children and bought the book by accident (I was looking for the novel by the same name by Jennifer Chiaverini), but I'm glad I did; this one, though simpler, is a good companion to the other and told mostly in the words of the two women.

Lovely photos which are not in the adult version. I think my 10 year old granddaughter will enjoy her Christmas present. History, women, character building, and sewing are themes...also war. I told her I would save the adult version for her when she is older. Great story.

I think I must have ordered the wrong Mrs. L. Got it...read it anyway...and I will pass it on to my local middle school. No harm, no foul.....

I was greatly disappointed when I received this. This is a children's book, age range between eight and eleven, depending on ability. I was looking forward to reading this. It was returned.

It's fine as a brief cover story of the friendship between Keckley and Mary Lincoln. Jennifer Chiaverini's "Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker" covers the relationship in much more detail.

Great story

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