

## Introduction

Fanny Seward, born 1844, lived throughout one of the most turbulent time periods in American history, and witnessed firsthand the social and political changes brought about by the Civil War. Her father, William Henry Seward, served as Secretary of State during this time, and Fanny visited her father in Washington, D.C. several times during this period. In this lesson students will read along with the author of the piece, Reagan Graney, and will then answer a series of questions about the section to check for understanding.

## Objective

By reading the historical fiction story about Fanny Seward, students will understand that the 19th Century was a time of radical social, political, and economic change, which was shaped by several important historic actors. Students will also continue developing their reading comprehension, while learning how to think from the viewpoint of others, building empathy.

## Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4-5.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4-5.10

By the end of year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 4-5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

## Directions:

1. Provide students with a copy of "Chapter 1", along with the "Fanny Seward: Activity 1" worksheet.
2. Access the video of the author reading, and have students read along with their copy of "Chapter 1"
3. Once complete, ask students to complete the "Fanny Seward: Activity 1" worksheet, and check for understanding.

## Chapter One: A Summer Afternoon

Scratch.

Fanny Seward drew a harsh line through her last sentence. The tip of her fountain pen dug into the paper of her diary, black ink bleeding through the page. Fanny felt frustrated, unsure of what to write.

Certain days in Auburn felt like they dragged on for months, especially during the stifling heat of August. Birds chirped in the trees above South Street, a bustling road down the center of Auburn, New York. Horse-drawn carriages rode past the Seward house, number 33, carrying passengers with sweaty red faces who glanced toward the big yellow building in awe. Flowers in the garden drooped with exhaustion and dehydration.

Fanny sat beneath an oak tree in her backyard, her diary perched upon her lap. She listened to the sounds of South Street, felt the grass beneath her legs, and looked around, searching for some inspiration. But in truth, she felt... well, bored.

An afternoon breeze blew across Fanny's face. It cooled her skin, which felt hot and sticky beneath the thick green fabric of her dress.

Honestly, she thought miserably, why hasn't the so-called fashion industry figured out a more comfortable form of summer attire by now?

Suddenly, her brother interrupted her thoughts with a large shout.

"Don't you see, Jenny?" he said. "If I became President, we wouldn't ever have to worry about school or other stupid things like that."

Fanny looked up. Her older brother, Will, was strutting about on the steps of their back porch, as usual. He was tall and thin, with the eyes of a hungry panther; and his charming, witty demeanor attracted anyone and everyone in his vicinity.

Will's wife, Jenny, sat in a chair in the shade, fanning the dark curls out of her face and smirking at her husband.

"And why's that, dear?" she asked. "School is important, and I certainly hope we encourage our own children to attend."

Will rolled his eyes, jumping over several steps to land neatly on the grass in front of her.

"Because school teaches you nothing about the real world. I, personally, have no use for anything I ever learned about art or literature." He spat out his tongue. "It's all so useless."

Fanny cleared her throat. “Says the man who used to pretend his eyesight was so bad that he needed to skip school every day of the week,” she said. “But you only did that so you could stay home, and play in the gardens with your friends, didn’t you?”

Jenny stifled a laugh. Will turned to his little sister, a smile creeping onto his face. “Oh, Fanny! I didn’t see you over there, hiding behind your diary like always.” “How do you expect to become President, anyway, without first having a proper

education?” Fanny questioned him.

Will shrugged. “Anyone can become President, can’t they? Take Lincoln. He taught himself in a log cabin. But look at him now. Clearly, a degree from Union College doesn’t get you everywhere.”

Fanny narrowed her eyes. Their father, Mr. Seward, had attended Union College, but lost in the presidential race to Lincoln just a year ago.

Sensing the tension, Jenny chimed in. “Okay, children, settle down,” she said sarcastically.

Will nodded. “Sorry, Fan,” he said, “but besides, I didn’t say I wanted to become President, anyway.... Only that I’d do a better job at it than Lincoln and the other guys who came before him. It’s not like Lincoln’s doing all the hard work anyway, is it? He’s just giving the orders.”

Jenny raised her eyebrows. “You surely don’t mean to call the leader of our Union lazy, do you?” She laughed. “I really think that President Lincoln has more important things than cancelling school to worry about at the moment.”

Fanny smiled, appreciating the support from her sister-in-law. She closed her diary, and walked over to be nearer to her siblings.

The three Swards spent the rest of their afternoon under the shade of the trees in the backyard, laughing together. Here, they found just a few moments of peace in their mundane little bubble in Auburn.

Will, Jenny, and Fanny were, of course, immensely aware of the world that existed outside their upstate New York town. There was the threat of war that divided their nation; the fear and hatred surrounding political families like their own; and the danger that surrounded their father, Mr. Seward, who currently sat at his desk in Washington, D.C.—the very center of it all, 350 miles away.

Indeed, though Mr. Seward had lost the presidential race to Lincoln—a shocking turn of events that Fanny had still not completely understood—he became Lincoln’s Secretary of State. This was one of the most influential and powerful positions in the President’s cabinet, and as such, he was often quite busy, and did not see his family in Auburn much.

As such, Fanny could not help but wonder what President Lincoln actually did. Was it true that he sat around in the Presidential Mansion, ordering others to do his bidding? Fanny certainly hoped not. The President simply couldn't be such a lazy, controlling figure, who barked at his cabinet members and staff all day, while never actually opening a book. But then again, she thought, her father did seem to be doing a huge share of the work down in the nation's capital....

Fanny looked at the faces of her brother and his wife: a pair of beautiful, intelligent young adults, prepared to take on a world that was so quickly headed toward chaos. She wondered if they would end up in Washington, too. And then she thought about herself: an awkward sixteen year old girl, never without her diary in hand, unsure of her place in this complicated life.

After a while, the trio heard the voice of Mrs. Seward calling them inside, her voice stiff and tough. Standing up, Fanny and her siblings headed back toward the house.

But before she made it to the back porch, something caught Fanny's attention: a small kitten, sitting in the bushes at the edge of the garden. It stared at Fanny with big, blue eyes, and Fanny stared back.

Unable to help herself, Fanny crept across the lawn toward the bush. The kitten's hair stood up on end, its dark brown fur matted in places. Suddenly, the kitten hissed at her angrily. It looked somewhat scary—or was it just scared? Fanny crouched down and reached a hand out to the tiny, mysterious creature.

The kitten sniffed at her fingers for a moment, and then closed its eyes, rubbing its head against Fanny's hand. It started to purr gently.

Fanny laughed. "You're not so scary after all, are you?"

Fanny pet the kitten for a few more moments, before remembering that her mother had called. She said a quick goodbye to the cat, then stood up and walked into the house, ready for dinner.