

## 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 4”, along with the “Fanny Seward: Activity 4” worksheet.
2. Access the video of the author reading, and have students read along with their copy of “Chapter 4”
3. Once complete, ask students to complete the “Fanny Seward: Activity 4” worksheet, and check for understanding.

## Chapter Four: Mr. Seward's Surprise

The next day, Fanny didn't say a word about the people in the basement. She, Jenny, Will, and Mrs. Seward sat around the dining table, sipping tea and eating scones for breakfast—a completely normal Wednesday morning.

Between bites, they discussed the upcoming school year (Fanny would be homeschooled again), the aid societies the ladies would be joining (Fanny and Jenny would be helping to stitch flags and sew clothes for soldiers), and the private bank Will recently started (“Mother, how many times do I have to tell you? I’m making good money there,” he groaned when she questioned him about it). Servants came in and out of the dining room, refilling teapots and water jugs, cleaning up dirty dishes and bringing out more scones. Sunlight shone through the big glass windows, sparkling upon the silverware on the table.

Mrs. Seward sighed deeply. “I’ve not heard a word from your father, you know,” she said.

Fanny looked up, concerned. “When did you last write to him?”

“Well, I write to him every day, of course,” Mrs. Seward said, filling her teacup. “But it’s been a few days since he last replied.”

“Perhaps the mail route from Washington is taking longer than normal,” Jenny offered kindly, sensing her mother-in-law’s worry.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Mrs. Seward said. “It’s just so unlike him.”

“Mother, please,” Will said, his tone a bit more biting than he likely intended. “Father is fine. You’ve said it yourself—he’s a busy man. He’s probably off travelling somewhere to gather information for the Union.”

“Should I write to Fred?” asked Mrs. Seward. Frederick Seward was Fanny and Will’s older brother. He lived in Washington with his wife, Anna, and served as Assistant Secretary of State alongside his father. Anna worked as the hostess at Mr. Seward’s house. They would both know what Mr. Seward was doing.

“If you so desire,” said Will. “But Fred’s going to tell you the same thing. Our father’s just bad at keeping in touch, nothing more.”

“Who’s bad at keeping in touch?” said a voice from behind them, slightly offended.

Fanny spun around. Standing in the doorway to the dining room was a short, funny-looking man. He had bright red hair and striking blue eyes that pierced through wiry eyebrows; and upon his lips was a sly grin. It was Mr. Seward.

“Father!” Fanny cried.

Everyone stood up from their chairs and reached their arms out to the man, who laughed and hugged them each in return. Greetings flew through the air, along with several questions of “how did you get here?” and “why didn’t you tell us you were coming home?”

“I’m sorry I didn’t write to you first, dear,” Mr. Seward said to his wife. “I didn’t mean to worry you... I just wanted to make it a surprise.”

“Well, it certainly was,” said Mrs. Seward briskly. But she could not help a smile from forming on her face.

“It’s been *eight months*, Father,” said Fanny. “You must tell us everything!”

Mr. Seward laughed. “I will, my darling Fanny,” he said, “but first, could I have some tea? I’m parched.”

Mr. Seward sat down with his family for the first time since Christmas, and then he launched into stories from his time in Washington. He told them about Anna Seward, his

daughter-in-law and Fred's wife, who put together the most fantastic dinner parties for guests at his home there. He told them about taking carriage rides through the capital city, and the interesting people he saw on the streets of D.C. And he told them about the Presidential Mansion, a huge, white building that sounded to Fanny like an extravagant castle, where he often sat with the Lincolns and had meetings, or even dinner.

"What is President Lincoln like?" Fanny asked her father, enthralled in his stories.

Mr. Seward laughed. "Hm... President Lincoln is..."

Fanny stared at him with bated breath. Lazy? Manipulative? Untrustworthy?

"...an inexplicable man."

Fanny blinked. "Inexplicable?" she repeated.

"Inexplicable," Mr. Seward said. "He can't be described."

Fanny felt slightly abashed. "Father, why does nobody know who this man actually is?" she asked, lost. "Do you think he deserves to be in charge of our country?"

Mr. Seward's brows furrowed. "Well, of course I do!" he replied. "He is, without a doubt, the best and most capable man for the job."

"So," Jenny asked, "you do *like* President Lincoln?"

"By God, he is wonderful!" said Mr. Seward. "The President has become one of my closest friends and dearest mentors. He is complicated, and stubborn, and flawed, but he is a gift to our world and the person who will help to fix our nation."

Everyone fell silent, thinking on these words.

Mr. Seward turned to Fanny, taking her hands in his. "I wonder, my dear, if you might like to meet President Lincoln?"

Fanny felt as though her heart had skipped a beat. "Do you mean... I could come to Washington with you?"

Mrs. Seward cleared her breath. "Henry, dear?" she said to her husband. "What are you asking, exactly?"

Mr. Seward looked up at her, and at everyone else. "Well, this is for everyone, of course!" he said, joyously. "I am here today because I think that it's finally time you all visited Washington with me."

"Oh, wow!" Fanny said, throwing her arms around her father. "I would absolutely love that."

"Me as well," said Jenny, beaming.

But Mrs. Seward was pale. "For how long?" she asked, quietly.

"Just a little while," Mr. Seward said. "No longer than a month, or even a couple of weeks, I promise."

Fanny looked at her mother, sensing apprehension behind her eyes. Her mother was frail; and she knew, though she'd never admit it, that Mrs. Seward always wished her husband would live in Auburn with her, away from the dangers posed elsewhere.

"Is it safe there?" Mrs. Seward asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Seward. "I promise. I wouldn't invite you all if I didn't truly believe so."

Mrs. Seward paused, looking down at her plate. Finally, she replied, "Okay. But *only* for a couple of weeks."

Fanny smiled widely. She would finally be seeing the capital! And even more than that... she would be meeting President Lincoln.