

## 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 5”, along with the “Fanny Seward: Activity 5” worksheet.
2. Access the video of the author reading, and have students read along with their copy of “Chapter 5”
3. Once complete, ask students to complete the “Fanny Seward: Activity 5” worksheet, and check for understanding.

## Chapter Five: To Washington

Within a few days, Fanny was on the train to Washington.

She watched as the September scenery rolled past her window. The trees that grew brown against a graying sky appeared blurry, coming into focus only at the command of her eyes.

Fanny and her family—all except Will, who had stayed home to watch over his banking business—were seated in a private compartment, with squishy chairs and polished tables. Waiters occasionally came around to offer drinks and food to the Swards. One waiter asked Fanny if she'd like a peach; slightly hungry, she accepted, and after taking a single bite, she was certainly glad she had. It was simply the best and freshest peach she'd ever tasted.

Occasionally the train would stop, and Fanny could look through her window to see a new American city teeming with life. At each stop, she attempted to count the number of Union flags that she could spot flying or hanging from balconies; as they journeyed south, however, she noted that they appeared less and less frequently. Nevertheless, a large flood of soldiers always climbed aboard the train's various carriages, heading toward Washington to support the Union cause.

Eventually, the train reached Baltimore. Here, Fanny saw the least amount of Union flags she had seen yet. As she gazed over the platform, taking in the scene of bustling travelers and soldiers, her eyes suddenly locked onto a woman with a harsh face and a tight frown. The woman stared angrily at a swarm of Union soldiers, who were filing into the compartment in front of Fanny's.

Then, the woman's eyes met Fanny's. She bared her teeth, and spat outrageously at the Swards' car. Fanny's mouth opened in shock. The woman turned briskly away without a backwards glance, and the crowd of people at the platform swallowed her.

"Rebel sympathizer," Mr. Seward's voice came from behind Fanny.

Fanny turned around. Mr. Seward was standing next to her seat, frowning at the woman's disappearing frame.

"She supports the South?" Fanny asked.

Mr. Seward nodded. "You'll likely see a lot more of her kind soon," he said, as the train began to move forward sluggishly. "Washington is located on the very border of the Confederate states."

Before Fanny could say anything else, there was a bustle of movement outside of the door at the front of the Swards' carriage. Mr. Seward quickly moved toward the sound, brushing gently past a rather agitated Mrs. Seward, and opened the door.

Several wide-eyed young men in Union uniforms stood before him, looking quite confused, precariously balanced on the edge of their car.

"Oh, gosh... sorry, sir, we don't mean to disturb—"

"That's quite alright, gentlemen. Are you trying to pass through?" asked Mr. Seward.

"Well, no, um... I mean, I guess we could. See, the soldiers' car is right behind yours, sir. But several of the boys didn't want to intrude here, we've heard it's the Swards' carriage, so they've climbed above...."

Sure enough, Fanny began to hear footsteps on top of the train above her seat, audible above the increasing sound of the train moving along its tracks.

"Why, don't be silly, men. Come on through our car," said Mr. Seward.

"Well, golly, sir, if you insist," said the first soldier, taking off his hat and bowing awkwardly.

Mr. Seward chuckled. "Of course. And may I say, thank you kindly for your service."

The soldiers began to file through the car, walking through it to the back door that led to their own carriage. They looked around the car eagerly with the energy of young children. Several of the men laughed merrily, others tipped back jugs of some strong-smelling liquid into their mouths, and a few smiled with cigars clamped between their teeth. As they stumbled through, Fanny sunk into her seat shyly.

Finally, after the last of the soldiers shut the back door to the carriage with a snap, the car was quiet. Mrs. Seward mumbled something under her breath about "undignified boys," while Fanny and Jenny looked after them curiously.

"Well, ladies, we're almost at the capital," announced Mr. Seward, clapping his hands together. "The next stop is ours."

And, in fact, as Fanny turned back toward the window, she noticed a great shift in landscape while the train moved onward. Baltimore rushed by in a palette of gray, and she began to see little tents clustered together throughout the countryside. She could spot gatherings of men, silhouetted against the green hills, marching in blocks across the grass. And eventually, as the train approached Washington, the air became foggy with smoke, which rose from the tops of warehouses that were hot with the breath of working men and women, churning out materials for war.

The Swards were entering the battlefield.

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Fanny and her family arrived at Mr. Seward's Washington home not long after. It was located in Lafayette Square, a pretty area in Washington very near the Executive Mansion. As they approached the front steps of the townhouse, Fanny looked up. Mr. Seward's bright red house seemed to stretch into the sky without end, and its windows were perfectly stamped into the brick.

Fanny wondered briefly what the inside of the home would look like. Would the decor resemble her mother's traditional style? Or would he have allowed his own personality to shine through in his decorations? Did Mr. Seward try to replicate his Auburn house at 33 South Street, and did he miss it?

The front door to the door suddenly opened, and Fanny's older brother, Fred, stood in the doorway.

"Mother! Sisters!" he cried, a smile bursting across his face.

Frederick Seward looked very much like his father. His long nose took up most of his face, his ears stuck out just a little, and his eyes were bright and intelligent. He was always jovial, his smile rarely fading behind a thick but neatly trimmed beard.

As Mr. Seward ushered his wife and children into his home, each person gave Frederick a hug in turn.

"So good to see you, brother," Fanny said.

"And you, Fan," said Fred. "Come into the parlor, everyone, Anna's just made some tea."

The family walked into the parlor, just adjacent to the entryway. If Fanny had expected Mr. Seward's home to be poorly decorated, she was certainly wrong. The floors were clean and gleaming, and exquisite gold trim lined the windows, portraits, and mirrors along pastel blue walls. A beautiful round, glass table sat in the middle of the parlor, topped with an exquisite tea chest that she figured must have been a gift from some notable, worldly ambassador.

In the center of the parlor stood Anna, who was pouring tea into six sparkling teacups. She looked up at the family and smiled radiantly. Anna was a beautiful young woman, with dark eyebrows and a constant blush in her cheeks. Her presence had always felt warm and familiar to Fanny, as though she had known Anna for her entire life.

After a cup of tea, Anna showed Fanny and Jenny around the home. It was three stories tall and had plenty of bedrooms, so that everyone would have his or her own. Anna brought them into the library, which was stocked full with books. She showed them the office, where Mr. Seward and Fred worked under the watch of two hundred black-and-white portraits of various foreign leaders. Lastly, they saw the dining room, where rose-colored plates were delicately set across the table, and a very large and extravagant epergne—a silver centerpiece used to hold fruits and candles during dinner—sat in the center. The house was magnificent, and bursting with colors.

“Who designed and decorated all of this?” asked Jenny, her mouth open in awe.

“I did,” Anna said humbly. “I really enjoy decorating. Except,” she added, her voice dropping to a hush, “Mr. Seward chose the epergne. I think it’s terribly ugly!”

Finally, Anna brought them to her favorite part of the house: the back garden. As Fanny and Jenny stepped into the evening air of Washington, they were struck with the scent of roses, geraniums, and a dozen other flowers that Fanny couldn’t name if she’d tried. Moths peeked gently out of bushes, and crickets chirped their welcome. Fanny never wanted to leave.

But suddenly, Mr. Seward appeared behind the three girls.

“Ready?” he asked, expectantly.

“For what, Father?” said Fanny.

“To meet President Lincoln,” he said, as though this were obvious.

Fanny lost her breath. “Oh, but Father, we aren’t properly dressed. We’re still in our traveling clothes—we must go tomorrow instead—”

But Mr. Seward waved his hand impatiently at her. “Don’t be silly, child, the President isn’t concerned with such nonsense. Let’s go, the carriage is outside.”

So without further ado, Fanny and Jenny, along with Mr. and Mrs. Seward, rushed away from the pleasant little garden and into the carriage out front. They held hands nervously as the carriage rolled away from Lafayette Square, and toward the Executive Mansion.

Upon seeing the President’s home for the first time, Fanny’s mouth gaped open once again. It was a gigantic, glowing building, made of intensely white stone. As the coach drew closer and closer to the mansion, it loomed over the girls, in all its splendor.

When the Sewards stepped out of the carriage, they were greeted by two elegantly dressed security guards, who brought them into the wide front doors of the mansion. They passed through one large parlor into another, and through several wide, red-carpeted hallways. Fanny wished that she had more eyes in her head, so that she could better see the incredible house around her.

Eventually, the Sewards were led into a comfortable sitting room with a tall ceiling. A servant brought them some tea, and asked the family to wait there for the President to meet them.

A few moments after she left, however, Mr. Seward tapped Fanny on the shoulder.

“Follow me,” he whispered. “I think I know where we can find the old man.”

Fanny raised her eyebrows, and placed her cup back into its saucer. Jenny and Mrs. Seward were too engrossed in exploring the room, with its crystal vases and velvet curtains, to notice as father and daughter snuck out behind the servant.

Fanny followed her father through the maze-like halls of the Executive Mansion. They passed almost nobody, except for the occasional man who smiled and bowed his head to Mr. Seward. "Good evening, Mr. Secretary of State," he'd say.

When at last Fanny felt that they must have sped through the entire house, Mr. Seward pulled her aside into a small, dimly lit room full of bookshelves and parchment.

"Where are we?" Fanny asked in a whisper.

"We're right outside the President's private library," he answered. "He's bound to be in there. I wanted you to be the first to meet him," he added with a smirk.

Fanny smiled proudly. "Why, Father?"

"I think you're going to make quite an impression on him," said Mr. Seward. "You are capable of so much, my dear Fanny. I hope you know that. I am confident that you will lead us one day."

Fanny was quiet. She wasn't completely what to say, or how to express her gratitude for her father. But inside, she felt touched.

Mr. Seward gestured toward the door to President Lincoln's study. Fanny took a deep breath, and knocked.

Then, a high, cool voice rang through the air: "Come in."

Just before Fanny entered, she felt some small amount of fear. Who was the man hidden behind the door? Would he be the fiercely demanding character that Will believed him to be? The imposter Martha believed him to be? The quiet leader the passengers believed him to be?

Fanny carefully swung the door open, and found something completely unexpected.

President Lincoln sat in a tall-backed chair, his thin legs stretched comfortably before him. Open books and a thin pair of reading glasses were scattered across the carpet. He wore an unassuming suit of charcoal gray, a bit wrinkled in places. And climbing all over his figure were a pair of tiny kittens, purring delightedly as they rubbed against his dark beard, his delicate hands, and his knobby knees.

"Oh!" Fanny said, before she could help it.

The President looked up at her. His eyebrows shot up, and a smile formed on his face.

"Good evening, Fanny," said President Lincoln.

Fanny, surprised that he knew her name, felt frozen in place. "Good evening, Mr. President," she said in a shaky voice.

"Your father gave me these kittens," he said cheerily. "Would you like to meet them?"

Fanny was flabbergasted. "Indeed, I would!" she said.

The President stood up, holding one kitten in the palm of each hand. He was certainly much taller than she had anticipated; he strolled toward her with lanky ease and a peculiar strut. He gently handed her the gray speckled animal.

"This is Tabby," President Lincoln said. "He often joins us for dinner. He's especially fond of the cook's smoked salmon."

Fanny giggled, petting Tabby behind the ears.

"And this is Dixie," he continued, holding the orange kitten up to his face. "She's a particularly good listener, and smarter than my entire cabinet."

Mr. Seward suddenly emerged into the room. "What was that, Mr. President?"

"It's not a lie," said the President pointedly. Fanny laughed, and her father looked indignant.

"President Lincoln, it is such an honor to meet you," said Fanny. "I've heard so much about your work."

“Good and bad, I suppose?” asked the President.

Fanny shrugged.

The President nodded. “It is all probably correct. Unfortunately, the most one can do in a time of war is the best he possibly can.”

“I believe you’re right, sir,” said Fanny. “I would like to thank you for taking such good care of my father when he is here in Washington with you.”

“Your father is a valuable member of my cabinet,” said President Lincoln. “I feel incredibly lucky to work with him.”

Mr. Seward gave an appreciative bow.

“Keeping up with your studies, my dear?” asked President Lincoln, setting Dixie down softly. “And continuing to write plays and stories, I hope?”

“Oh, yes,” said Fanny. “Every day.”

“I hope you’ll have lots to write about after your trip this week. Did your father tell you our plans for the coming days?”

“I don’t believe so.”

“Well,” the President continued, “I thought I might take you and your family on some carriage rides around the capital. We’ll likely visit some encampments and speak to the soldiers there about their experiences.” He sighed. “It will be difficult in parts. Is this something that might interest you?”

Fanny nodded. “Of course, sir. I will be able to handle it.”

President Lincoln smiled. “Good.”

Fanny, her father, and the President talked for a while longer in the lamplight of the study. Eventually, Mr. Seward proclaimed that they must be getting back to the others, who still sat waiting in the sitting room on the other side of the mansion. The President said he would be along shortly.

As Fanny turned to follow her father out of the study, however, she decided to be courageous for just one more moment.

“Mr. President?” she asked.

“Yes, Fanny?”

She paused. “How do you think this war will end?”

President Lincoln looked at her thoughtfully. “How do you propose it should?”

“With freedom,” she said simply. “Freedom for every person who lives here.”

His eyes turned soft, and he nodded. “I think it’s time that I become as brave as you are, Fanny Seward.”

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Before Fanny went to bed that night, she did as she always did, and sat upon her blankets with her diary upon her lap, scribbling away furiously at the paper.

On this night, Fanny wrote the story of her train ride to Washington, her sister-in-law’s garden, and her visit to the Executive Mansion. She wrote of smoky skies in the center of the capital, her mother’s complaints about Anna’s decorating skills, and tiny kittens that ran through long, carpeted hallways beneath chandeliers and tapestries.

And finally, she wrote about meeting President Lincoln, an imperfect but genuine man, an enigma. She was unsure how to accurately sum up his character with words.

So eventually, she wrote just five simple words before closing her diary and drifting into sleep:  
“I liked him very much.”