In this selection set during the last days of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln reflects on his role as a leader and a politician. Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.

**The Last Days of Lincoln**

*by Mark Van Doren*

**Scene Three**

*Before Grant’s Headquarters, City Point, Virginia, March 25th.* A fire is burning in front of the hut. Trees right and left. Masts and funnels visible in background. Three kittens are playing between the fire and the base of a tree. The kittens are gray.

As the curtain rises **Lincoln and Admiral Porter** are sitting by the fire. One soldier (a Corporal) is standing at attention by the entrance to the hut; another (a Private) stands at the extreme left; a third (a Private) stands at the extreme right, guarding the entrance to the area.

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**Lincoln:** Admiral, do you suppose I would be interfering with discipline if I talked to one of these men?

*(Makes no attempt to lower his voice. All Three Soldiers hear him, but keep their poses.)*

**Porter:** Not being their commander, Mr. President—

Being, that is to say, only an old salt

Fresh up from Wilmington, I hesitate.

Yet since the General is gone so long

In search of his good wife, my poor opinion

Is that you may, and no harm will be done.

*(The pomposity of this is partly for the benefit of the soldiers, to impress or amuse them, and partly natural to Porter.)*

**Lincoln:** So. But if Grant scolds me, I'll hold you materially responsible. Corporal—

*(The Corporal presents arms.)*

—please don’t do that.

**Porter:** *(To Corporal)* The Commander in Chief means you are at your ease.

*(The Corporal nervously relaxes.)*

**Lincoln:** Corporal, I’ve been wondering about those gray kittens. Are they Confederates?

**Corporal:** No, sir—I mean, I don’t know, sir.

**Lincoln:** I suppose it would be hard to tell. Will you bring one of them to me?
CORPORAL:    Yes, sir.

(\textit{Goes over and picks up the nearest kitten, and takes it across the stage to LINCOLN, who puts it in his lap and starts petting it.})

LINCOLN:    And now the others, if you don’t mind. If you do mind, the other men can bring them.

CORPORAL:    (Looking toward the TWO PRIVATES in such a way as to suggest that they must keep their places.)

Oh, no, sir. I will.

(\textit{Brings them both at once.})

LINCOLN:    Now, there. Thank you, Corporal.

(CORPORAL returns to his post.)

Is their mother anywhere around?

CORPORAL:    We think she was killed, sir.

LINCOLN:    I was afraid of that. They act like orphans. Does anybody feed them?

CORPORAL:    I think so, sir.

LINCOLN:    Somebody should—milk, if nothing else. Will you see that they get plenty of it?

CORPORAL:    (Rather uncertainly) Yes, sir.

LINCOLN:    Admiral, I believe they are Confederates. Does this mean I should hang them?

PORTER:    It could, but I suspect you never will.

LINCOLN:    Why not? (\textit{Playing with one he has turned on its back}) Their claws are sharp.

PORTER:    They could be clipped, and then no one need worry—Not now, at least. Of course they would grow again.

LINCOLN:    So I should hang them? You say I never will. There might be others, though, waiting to do it while my back was turned—or thinking how to shame me for not doing it myself. I wonder how much chance these kittens have. Let’s see—three—nine—twenty-seven lives all told. A lot of danger there.

(Continues stroking them throughout)

PORTER:    They give you pleasure, sir, just as they are. I think if I were you I would consider them merely as kittens, with no politics.
LINCOLN: And better for it. You know, Admiral, I have never been anything but a politician. Sometimes I can envy those who are more than that—or as these are, less.

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1. Based on his first spoken lines and the stage directions following those lines, which of the following best describes Admiral Porter?
   A He thinks of himself as important.
   B He is an inexperienced military officer.
   C He does not respect President Lincoln.
   D He is a well-known, experienced politician.

2. What is the most likely reason the corporal decided to get the remaining kittens for Lincoln?
   A The two privates were sitting down and relaxing.
   B He was enjoying his conversation with the president.
   C He wanted to make a good impression on the president.
   D He knew that Admiral Porter wanted him to do so.

3. What is the most likely reason for Lincoln’s conversation with the corporal about the kittens?
   A to learn more about the three kittens
   B to show his lack of concern for all living things
   C to build his relationship with the corporal
   D to use the kittens as a metaphor for war

4. In his comment beginning with “So I should hang them?”, to which concern does Lincoln allude?
   A political pressure for a harsh stance toward the defeated Confederacy
   B fear for his personal safety
   C the devastating economic impact of the war
   D the fear that there are Confederate sympathizers in his administration
5. What can be most reasonably inferred from the scene’s last lines?

A Lincoln does not appreciate Admiral Porter’s observations.
B Lincoln does not always enjoy being a politician.
C Lincoln thinks being a politician is not worth the trouble involved.
D Lincoln is not sure that politicians really make a difference.

6. Which of the following relationships is most similar to the relationship below?

Confederate : gray
A British : white
B Union : blue
C French : green
D Rebel : yellow

7. What do the exchanges between Lincoln and Admiral Porter suggest about their relationship?

A They have just met and are uncertain about each other.
B They have just met and do not get along well.
C They have known each other a long time and do not get along well.
D They have known each other for a while and get along well.

8. What is the tone of this selection?

A amused
B frightened
C lighthearted
D serious

End of Set
### Answers to
*Grade 8  Reading Comprehension Sample Items*

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