

# **William Henry Seward**



**Biography Workbook**  
**FOR HIGH SCHOOL U.S. HISTORY**

**WILLIAM HENRY SEWARD**

(May 16, 1801 – October 10, 1872)

William Henry Seward, the American statesman, was born in Florida, Orange County, New York, on May 16, 1801. He died at Auburn, in the same state, on October 10, 1872. Precocious in his studies, he pursued his preliminary education in his native village. At the age of fifteen, he entered, as a sophomore, Union College, then under the presidency of Eliphalet Nott, between whom and his pupil a life-long friendship, illustrated by mutual confidence and counsel, was early established.

1. Where was William Seward born?
  - a. Auburn, New York
  - b. Brooklyn, New York
  - c. Florida, New York
  - d. New York, New York

Seward's college course, especially brilliant in rhetoric and the classics, was interrupted in his senior year by a residence of six months, as a teacher, in Georgia. Here, previous impressions against African slavery were confirmed by observation of its workings. Returning to college, he was graduated with high honors in 1820, the subject of his Commencement oration being "The Integrity of the American Union."

2. Where did William Seward work as a teacher during his senior year of college?
  - a. Alabama
  - b. Georgia
  - c. Mississippi
  - d. New York

Seward was admitted to the bar at Utica, in October, 1822. In January, 1823, he settled at Auburn as a partner of Judge Elijah Miller, whose daughter (Frances Adeline Miller) he married in October, 1824. Although certain features of the law—its technicalities and uncertainties—were repugnant to him, he was soon in the full tide of professional success, and, in the opening of the circuit courts to equity jurisprudence, found much that was in harmony with his sense of justice.

3. William Seward married Frances Adeline Miller in October, 1822.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. repugnant:
  - a. abhorrent
  - b. congenial
  - c. friendly
  - d. pleasant

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Seward was also, from the first, interested in politics, for which he had decided genius. He came upon the stage in the closing days of "The Era of Good Feeling," under President Monroe, when parties were again dividing upon the issues that had mainly obtained throughout the constitutional era. He approved the principles of Alexander Hamilton, although his boyish training had been in the Jeffersonian school.

Enunciating his views with precision and felicity of diction, his voice and pen were in constant request, and he rapidly rose to distinction until, in 1834, he was the acknowledged leader in the state of the Whig Party (founded in 1833 and dissolved in 1860) and its candidate for governor.

5. To which political party did William Seward first belong?
  - a. Democrats
  - b. Know-Nothings
  - c. Republicans
  - d. Whigs
6. felicity:
  - a. bitterness
  - b. discernment
  - c. merriment
  - d. unlikelihood

Meanwhile, Seward had supported De Witt Clinton, the champion of internal improvements (investment in the nation's infrastructure). In 1824, he drafted, for

the Republican Convention of his county, a trenchant address, detailing the history and criticizing the aims of the "Albany Regency," which inspired the hostility to that famous clique that compassed its overthrow fourteen years later.

Among his notable utterances of this period were an address on Grecian independence, at Auburn, in 1827; a Fourth-of-July oration, at Syracuse, in 1831, in which John C. Calhoun's dogma of secession was denounced; and a eulogy on la Fayette (the Marquis de Lafayette), at Auburn, in 1834.

7. What group was one of the first political machines in the United States, controlling politics in the state of New York from 1822 until Seward's election as governor 1838?
  - a. Albany Regency
  - b. Grecian Urns
  - c. Republican Party
  - d. Whig Party

In 1828, Seward presided over the Young Men's Convention, at Utica, on behalf of the re-nomination of President John Quincy Adams (who was later defeated in the presidential election by Andrew Jackson), and declined a congressional nomination.

In 1830, he was elected by the Anti-Masons to the State Senate, and was re-elected in 1832. He had a prominent and an influential part in the deliberations of that body, although its youngest member,

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and in the political minority, whose addresses to the people he wrote at the close of each session.

8. Who won the presidential election of 1828?

- a. Andrew Jackson
- b. John C. Calhoun
- c. John Quincy Adams
- d. William Seward

9. deliberation:

- a. consideration
- b. disregard
- c. negligence
- d. thoughtlessness

Seward's most notable speeches were those for the common-school and canal systems, the abolition of imprisonment for debt, the amelioration of prison discipline, and the reform of the militia law, and against corporate monopolies, increasing judicial salaries, Governor Marcy's loan law, and the removal of the deposits by President Jackson.

The Senate was then a constituent portion of the Court of Errors, the tribunal of last resort, and Seward delivered many opinions which materially enhanced his legal reputation. In one instance he carried, with substantial unanimity, the court with him, against the views of the presiding judge, the eminent Chancellor Walworth.

10. William Seward supported the abolition of imprisonment for debt.

- a. True
- b. False

In 1833, Seward made a rapid tour of Europe, embodying his reflections in letters to the *Albany Evening Journal*, then edited by the highly influential Thurlow Weed, between whom and Seward there was, for fifty years, an intimate and unbroken attachment, unique in political annals.

11. Who served as editor of the *Albany Evening Journal* in the 1830s?

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In 1838, Seward was again the Whig candidate for governor of New York, and defeated Governor William L. Marcy, his former rival, his victory being the precursor of the national Whig triumph in 1840, in which year he was re-elected. He was inaugurated, January 1, 1839, his message to the Legislature embracing, with a masterly exposition of Whig policies, certain suggestions of his own concerning immigration, education, and eleemosynary institutions that revealed the catholic spirit and the philosophical habit which, despite his party fealty, he consistently exhibited. This message outlined the conduct of the administration that succeeded—

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enlightened in its scope, liberal to all classes, distinctly loyal to the Union, yet jealously guarding against any infringement of the rights of the state. It widened educational privileges, urged the prosecution of the public works, including the enlargement of the Erie Canal, granted franchises to railways, removed imprisonment for debt and the remaining guarantees of slavery from the statute-books, composed the anti-rent troubles and executed the laws within the insurrectionary section, perfected the banking system, and proposed jury trials for fugitive slaves and a constitutional amendment abolishing the property qualification for black suffrage.

12. eleemosynary

- a. benevolent
- b. greedy
- c. intolerant
- d. selfish

13. catholic:

- a. bounded
- b. general
- c. narrow
- d. specific

14. Who was elected governor of New York in 1838?

- a. John C. Calhoun
- b. Thurlow Weed
- c. William Marcy
- d. William Seward

15. William Seward was \_\_\_\_ voting rights for African Americans.

- a. against
- b. for

Governor Seward's regard for the dignity of the state was displayed by his refusal to discharge from custody, without trial, one Alexander McLeod, a citizen of Canada, held for the burning of the steamer *Caroline*, in New York waters, although the demand of the British government, to that effect, was supplemented by the request of Presidents Harrison and Tyler.

Seward's abhorrence of slavery was accentuated in his denial of the application of the Governor of Virginia for the rendition of seamen charged with the abduction of a slave, upon the ground that the offense, if defined as a crime in Virginia, was not so in New York, and he did not hesitate to add that his feelings coincided with his conception of his constitutional prerogative. When a Democratic Assembly subsequently passed resolutions disapproving his action, he declined to transmit them to the Virginia authorities, and he also failed to respond to a similar requisition from South Carolina.

16. abhorrence:

- a. adoration
- b. delight
- c. fondness
- d. repugnance

17.accentuated:

- a. hidden
- b. highlighted
- c. forbidden
- d. masked

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18.prerogative:

- a. burden
- b. duty
- c. obligation
- d. privilege

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19.Seward was opposed to laws such as the Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed the prosecution of people (like the seamen discussed in the above paragraph) who aided and abetted the escape of slaves. Do you agree with Seward’s refusal to extradite the seamen to Virginia for prosecution? Why or why not?

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Seward’s proposition for the employment of Roman Catholic teachers in the common schools showed his independence of partisan behest and popular clamor.

20.Why do you suppose that Catholics were previously forbidden to work as teachers in public schools?

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Seward left office in 1843. He passed the next six years in professional labors, varied by occasional addresses of a literary or patriotic cast, and by many

Whig speeches in the campaigns of 1844 and 1848. To his practice in the state courts was united that in patent cases, which not only brought him a lucrative clientage, but largely increased his acquaintance with public men at Washington. His gubernatorial service had given him national fame, and he was, although not in public life, esteemed as one of the national leaders of his party.

In the courts, Seward commanded respect for the clearness and strength of his arguments. But, even there, he was at his best when his heart inspired his speech with fervor, as in his pleas for Van Zandt and others charged with harboring fugitive slaves. (William Seward and his wife, Frances, were themselves active in the Underground Railroad.) The defense of Greeley, in the *Cooper* libel suit, and of the Michigan rioters, may be cited as instances of his persuasiveness before juries, but that in the case of William Freeman is celebrated both for its own quality and the intrepidity of its author. British Prime Minister Gladstone has characterized it as the greatest forensic effort in the English language, not excluding the masterpieces of Erskine.

21. William Seward, as a supporter of state's rights, actively worked to ensure that escaped slaves were treated as private property, and returned to their owners.

- a. True
- b. False

*The color of the prisoner's skin, and the form of his features, are not impressed upon the spiritual immortal mind which works beneath. In spite of human pride, he is still your brother, and mine, in form and color accepted and approved by his Father, and yours, and mine, and bears equally with us the proudest inheritance of our race—the image of our Maker. Hold him then to be a Man.* (William Seward in *William Freeman*.)

*William Freeman* is a plea for the life of a brutalized African American who butchered a whole family under circumstances of peculiar atrocity. The deed was without excuse or palliation, save in the insanity of the perpetrator, of which Seward became convinced. William Freeman was mentally ill, and had been grossly and violently abused in prison. Seward volunteered as counsel amid the surprise, imprecations, and threats of the Auburn community, where the case was at issue. The moment was a supreme one for him, but he did not hesitate.

Without reward, or the hope of reward, even in the gratitude of the insensate wretch for whom Seward risked professional standing and public favor, he worked as indefatigably as though the weightiest honors and emoluments depended thereon, from the impaneling of the jury to the failure of

executive clemency. But Freeman's death in prison, and the autopsy that disclosed the morbid condition of his brain, fully vindicated Seward's analysis and exalted him in public regard.

22. William Seward sought an acquittal for William Freeman on the grounds of \_\_\_\_.

- a. guilt
- b. innocence
- c. mental illness
- d. slavery

On March 4, 1849, coincident with the accession of General Zachary Taylor to the presidency, Seward entered the United States Senate, having been chosen thereto by a large majority of the Legislature of New York. When he took his seat, the Whig party was already divided upon the slavery question. Seward, by virtue of his previous utterances and his skill as a politician, became the exponent of the free-soil element, as also the representative of the administration, an unprecedented trust to be confided to a senator in his first term. He thus found himself in opposition to Webster and Clay, and especially to the "Omnibus" bill of the latter, a measure intended to reconcile conflicting claims concerning the admission of new states, the status of slavery in the Territories, and the protection to be accorded it in the free states.

23. Who won the presidential election of 1848?

- a. Abraham Lincoln
- b. Daniel Webster
- c. William Seward
- d. Zachary Taylor

24. A/An \_\_\_\_ bill is one that covers a number of various, and even unrelated, issues.

- a. bipartisan
- b. legislative
- c. omnibus
- d. wartime

On March 11, 1850, Seward made a speech, generally pronounced to be his ablest, as it is certainly his most noteworthy deliverance, in which he declared that there is a law higher than the Constitution, whose authority may be invoked in legislation for the national domain.

The death of General Taylor brought him into collision with President Millard Fillmore, who hailed from New York, and was largely indebted for his vice-presidential nomination to Seward's kindly offices. Fillmore urged the adoption of the compromise scheme (known as the Compromise of 1850, it decided the free or slave status of territories acquired during the Mexican-American War) and signed the separate bills therefore as they successively passed Congress, thereby incurring censure at the North, while Seward retained his



ascendency with the anti-slavery masses throughout the country, as well as with the Whigs of New York.

25. William Seward and Millard Fillmore came into conflict because of Seward's unwillingness to compromise on the issue of \_\_\_\_.

- a. foreign policy
- b. slavery
- c. tariffs
- d. taxation

Seward was reelected to the Senate in 1855 by a combination of Whigs and Anti-Nebraska Americans. On October 12<sup>th</sup> of that year, at Albany, he formally announced his adhesion to the new Republican Party. In the Senate, he easily ranked as one of its most polished and effective speakers who, while resolutely maintaining his own convictions, scrupulously preserved the amenities of debate. He especially distinguished himself by his earnest, yet unavailing, resistance to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

26. What new political party was founded by anti-slavery activists in 1854?

- a. Democrats
- b. Know-Nothings
- c. Republicans
- d. Whigs

27. amenities:

- a. abominations

- b. annoyances
- c. enhancements
- d. inconveniences

Among Seward's popular addresses of conspicuous merit are those on "The Elements of Empire in America," at Union College, 1843; "Daniel O'Connell," at New York, 1847; "John Quincy Adams," before the New York Legislature, 1848; "The Destiny of America," at Columbus, Ohio; and "The True Basis of American Independence," at New York City, 1853; "The Development of the American People," at Yale College 1854; and "The Irrepressible Conflict"—i.e., between freedom and slavery—at Rochester, N.Y., 1858. He made an extended tour in Europe, Egypt, and Palestine, in 1859.

28. conspicuous:

- a. concealed
- b. hidden
- c. obscure
- d. perceptible

The Republicans met in National Convention at Chicago, in 1860, flushed with anticipated success. Northern opposition to the extension of slavery had combined, and the democracy was being resolved into antagonistic factions. Seward's nomination for the presidency seemed assured. He was the foremost statesman in his party. He had crystallized its ideas, interpreted its creed, and marshaled its forces. He had

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an enthusiastic following who believed that the occasion had met the man. But there were others who objected that his very superiority would provoke assault against him, which might hurt the cause for which he stood. They reasoned against his availability, and their argument prevailed. He led on the first two ballots in the convention, but, on the third, Abraham Lincoln, then comparatively unknown, became the Republican standard-bearer. Seward met this reverse tranquilly, rebuked certain manifestations of disaffection, proffered the candidate his hearty support, and, in a series of remarkably able and eloquent speeches, extending from Massachusetts to Kansas, contributed materially to his election.

29. Who was chosen as the Republican presidential candidate in 1860?

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Seward accepted the position of Secretary of State in Lincoln's cabinet and immediately assumed the gravest responsibilities. American relations with foreign governments during the Civil War were uniformly serious and sometimes perilous. The duties of the Secretary of State were exacting and delicate. Seward, by his tact and discretion, as well as his courage and wisdom, kept peace with the

world, without debasing the honor or forfeiting the rights of the republic.

30. What position did Seward hold in Abraham Lincoln's administration?

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One of the most intricate issues arose in the first year of the Civil War. It is known as the *Trent* case. Mason and Slidell, Confederate envoys to England and France respectively, were forcibly taken by an American naval commander from a British vessel and lodged in Fort Warren. The American public was exultant over the capture and protested vigorously against their release. But Seward had to decide officially the question of their surrender to the British government. When the demand was duly made, he yielded to it, basing his conclusion, with admirable adroitness, not only upon international comity, but also upon American precedents. The president, at first disposed to take the contrary view, conceded the force of Seward's argument, the people acquiesced, and a war with England was avoided.

31. At the same time that the Civil War raged in the United States, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing in Great Britain. The British textile industry relied heavily on cotton from





*First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Lincoln* by Francis Bicknell Carpenter (1864) – Seward can be seen seated at the table, in brown pants with his arms crossed.

Seward proclaimed the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, by which slavery was abolished, December 18, 1865, and of the Fourteenth, conferring suffrage and civil rights upon the freedmen, July 26, 1868. On February 3, 1865, he attended, with President Lincoln, the so-called Peace Conference, in Hampton Roads, with Messrs. Stephens, Hunter, and Campbell, the Confederate commissioners. The conference was fruitless, owing to the inflexible determination of the president not to entertain any proposals that did not involve the complete restoration of

the national authority as a condition precedent.

34. What constitutional amendment abolished slavery?

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35. What constitutional amendment guaranteed citizenship and voting rights to freed slaves?

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Lincoln began his second term March 4, 1865, with Seward remaining in the cabinet. On April 5<sup>th</sup>, Seward was badly injured by being thrown from his carriage. Nine days thereafter, Lincoln visited him in his sick chamber. It was their last meeting. On the same evening that Lincoln was assassinated (Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865, and died on the morning of April 15<sup>th</sup>), the murder of Seward was attempted. Seward was stabbed in several places in the head and throat, and for several days his life was despaired of. But he slowly recovered, and in June, resumed his desk in the State Department, President Johnson having urged him to retain it.

36. Who became president of the United States following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln?

- a. Andrew Johnson
- b. Thaddeus Stevens
- c. William Seward
- d. Ulysses S. Grant

Seward continued in office throughout Johnson's administration, favoring the reconstruction policy of his chief, without, however, incurring the active hostility of his Republican friends. Distinctive events of his second term were his maintenance of the Monroe doctrine, in the refusal to recognize the French empire in Mexico, and the purchase of Alaska, which was in

consonance with views long entertained by him as to the propriety of the expansion of the territory of the United States upon the continent of North America. In the best sense of the term, he was an advocate of "Manifest Destiny," and was proud of the acquisition of the Russian territory at the Far North. A treaty which he negotiated for the cession of the Danish West India islands of St. Thomas and St. John failed of ratification by the Senate.

37. As Secretary of State under Johnson, Seward refused to recognize the empire of what European power in Mexico?

- a. France
- b. Great Britain
- c. Portugal
- d. Spain



38. The U.S. purchase of Alaska from Russia was called "Seward's folly" by many. Alaska is indicated in red on this global position map. Alaska shares an extensive border with what country?

- a. Canada
- b. Greenland

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- c. Russia
- d. United States

Seward retired to private life March 4, 1869, and within the next three years visited Alaska and Mexico, and made a journey around the world, being everywhere received with official welcome and popular acclaim. The last few months of his life were passed at his home, where he dictated the story of his travels and began his *Autobiography*, which, even in its unfinished state, is a charming narrative.

39. acclaim:

- a. beratement
- b. disapproval
- c. kudos
- d. vituperation

Seward achieved greatness as an executive, a legislator, and a diplomatist. He was one of the most accomplished writers of his time, and was second only

to Lincoln, among civilians, in conserving American nationality and enlarging American liberties. There is a statue to his memory in Madison Square, New York, and, on November 15, 1888, another was unveiled in front of the Auburn homestead, William M. Evarts delivering the oration. Charles Francis Adams also paid his tribute, in an address at the Capitol, in Albany, 1873, upon invitation of the New York Legislature.

Seward published a volume on the *Life and Public Services of John Quincy Adams*, 1849. His *Essays, Speeches, and Extracts from his Diplomatic Correspondence*, etc., edited by George E. Baker, with a memoir, embrace five volumes. His adopted daughter published his *Travels around the World*, 1873. His *Autobiography*, to 1834, has been supplemented by a *Memoir* by his son, Frederick W. Seward, with extracts from his letters and selections from his *Table Talk*.

40. What aspects of William Seward's life would you most like to emulate in your own, and why?

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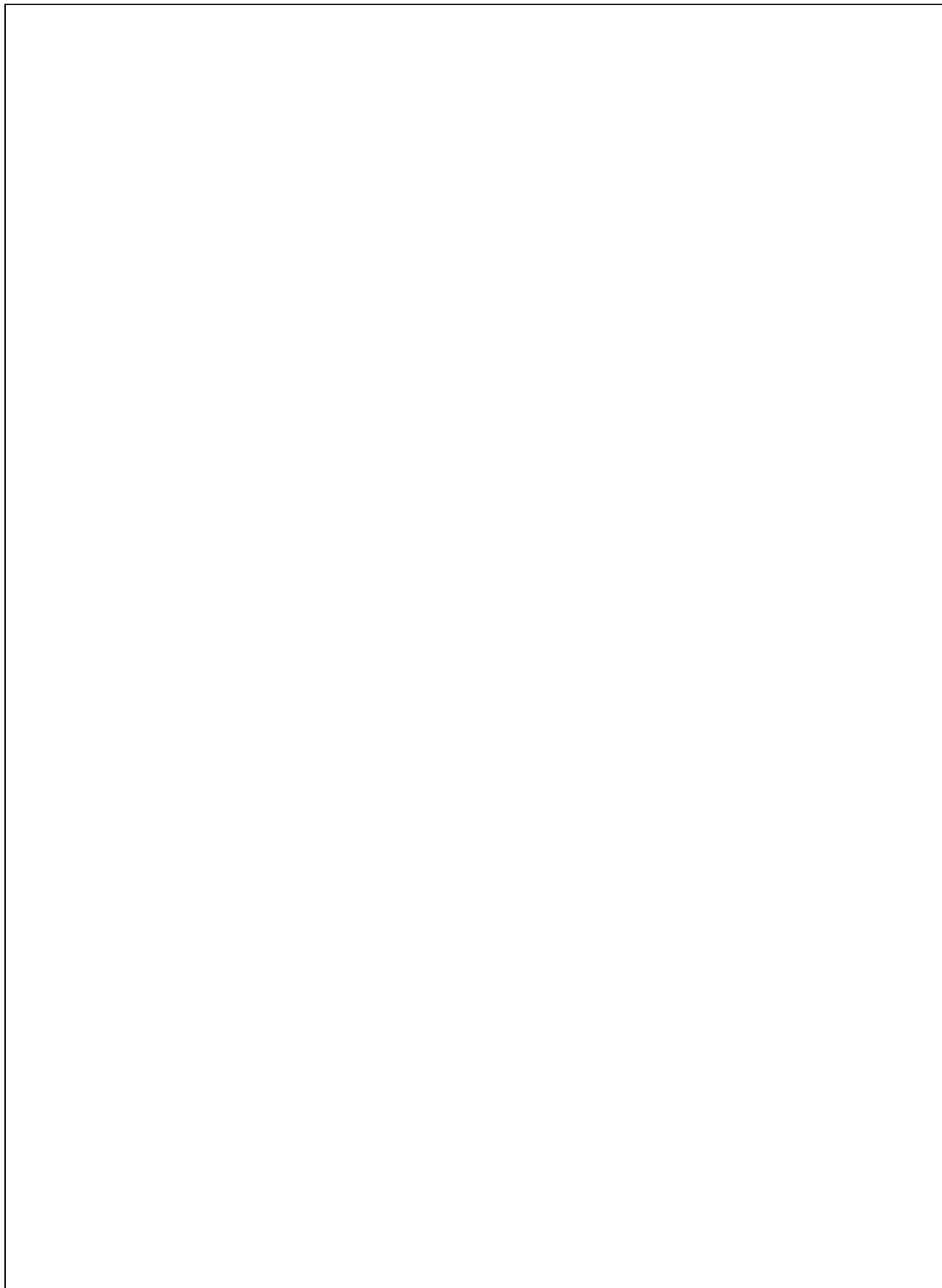
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**Artistic Expression:** Illustrate a scene from the life of William Henry Seward.





Word Search Puzzle

N O I T A M A L C O R P N O I T A P I C N A M E S  
R S Z G A N T B N G R O T A N E S A C M Y N A V T  
Q E N A U J Y M R J O A A U Q I H I E N H D U Z H  
L L Y A Q S F S I A B V J K X T V N A W S R B T G  
R S S W C G B V T O H L E E Z I C D Z G U E U O I  
J P Y I A I Q I L P D A Z R L C I W I O G W R W R  
F Z X L D L L I U I B W M W N R X H E B P J N R L  
C R T S V D T B M G F G A L O O W Q Q T V O N S A  
D F S H X I U X U N F R A L I V R A C M E H Y W U  
D I P L O M A C Y P A K F Q C N X P C A A N J Q Q  
A I H N K D Z Q T G E P I K K A C P F I K S F L E  
R A I E O M Q N C N S R U D G L L O C V S O I W O  
U S S E C R E T A R Y O F S T A T E L E A N F V H  
T Y L L O F S D R A W E S Q F V K I I N L C Z P W  
R U Q N R I O I W C L G N C Z R N M Y K A P V L R

abolitionist

Abraham Lincoln

Alaska

Andrew Johnson

Auburn, N.Y.

Civil War

diplomacy

Emancipation Proclamation

equal rights

Florida, N.Y.

governor

lawyer

Republicans

senator

Seward's folly

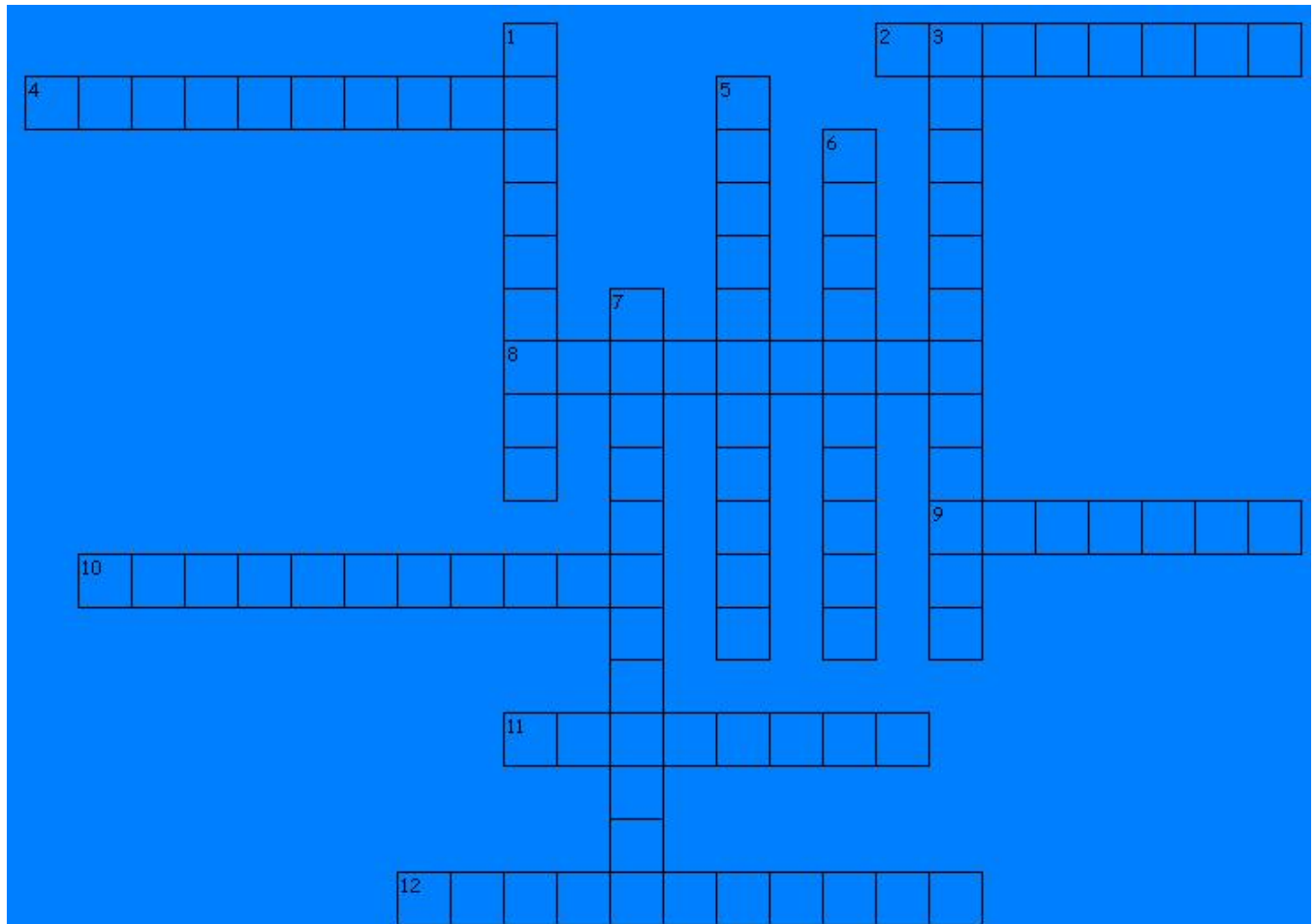
U.S. Secretary of State

Whigs



*Matthew Brady photograph of William Henry Seward, taken between 1860 and 1865.*

Vocabulary Terms Review Crossword Puzzle



**Across**

- 2. merriment
- 4. repugnance
- 8. enhancements
- 9. kudos
- 10. privilege
- 11. general
- 12. highlighted

**Down**

- 1. abhorrent
- 3. benevolent
- 5. perceptible
- 6. dexterity
- 7. consideration