

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN AXIOMS FOR YOUTH

The opening of school in the fall always makes one think of the opportunities afforded youth. An intensely interesting letter written by Abraham Lincoln to George Latham, who had failed to pass the Harvard University entrance examinations, is reproduced here along with some Lincoln axioms which have an especial appeal to young people.

Springfield, Ills., July 22, 1860

My Dear George:

I have scarcely felt greater pain in my life than learning yesterday from Bob's letter, that you had failed to enter Harvard University.

And yet there is very little in it, if you will allow no feeling of discouragement to seize, and prey upon you. It is a certain truth, that you can enter, and graduate in, Harvard University; and having made the attempt, you must succeed in it. Must is the word.

I know not how to aid you, save in the assurance of one of mature age, and much severe experience, that you can not fail, if you resolutely determine that you will not.

The President of the institution can scarcely be other than a kind man; and doubtless he would grant you an interview, and point out the readiest way to remove, or overcome, the obstacles which have thwarted you.

In your temporary failure there is no evidence that you may not yet be a better scholar, and a more successful man in the great struggle of life, than many others, who have entered college more easily.

Again I say let no feeling of discouragement prey upon you, and in the end you are sure to succeed.

With more than a common interest I subscribe myself.

Very truly your friend,
A. Lincoln.

There are more mines above the earth's surface than below it.

The honor will be his if he succeeds, and the blame may be mine if he fails.

The difficulty is not in stating the principle, but in practically applying it.

It is a connection in which the words "can" and "will" were never more precious.

To be fruitful in invention it is indispensable to have a habit of observation and reflection.

I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me.

I believe I shall never be old enough to speak without embarrassment when I have nothing to talk about.

A young man, before the enemy has learned to watch him, can do more than any other. Pitch in and try.

Let them adopt the maxim, "Better luck next time," and then by renewed exertion make that better luck for themselves.

All the statements which lie within the range of my knowledge are strictly true; and I think of nothing material which has been omitted.

Even the unsuccessful will bring something to light which, in the hands of others, will contribute to the final success.

I am here; I must do the best I can, and bear the responsibility of taking the course which I feel I ought to take.

If you will state to me some meaning which you suppose I had, I can and will instantly tell you whether that was my meaning.

It is much for the young to know, that treading the hard path of duty, as he trod, it will be noticed, and will lead to high places.

Please excuse what I have said, in the way of unsolicited advice. I believe you will not doubt the sincerity of my friendship for you.

When one is embarrassed, usually the shortest way to get through with it is to quit talking or thinking about it, and go at something else.

So far as possible, the people everywhere shall have that sense of perfect security which is most favorable to calm thought and reflection.

Tell the boys of Children's Village that they must follow truth, justice, and humanity if they wish to become useful and honorable men.

I will not forbear from doing so merely on punctilio and pluck. If I do finally abstain, it will be because of apprehension that it would do harm.

I do not know one who combines the qualities of masculine intellect, learning, and experience of the right sort, and physical power of labor and endurance, so well as he.

It is not a question of sentiment or taste, but one of physical force, which may be measured and estimated, as horse-power and steam-power are measured and estimated.

So far as it is intended merely to improve in grammar and elegance of composition, I am quite agreed; but I do not wish the sense changed, or modified, to a hair's breadth.

You misquote, to some material extent, what I did say, which induces me to think you have not very carefully read the speech in which the expressions occur which puzzle you to understand.

I can not frame a toast to Burns. I can say nothing worthy of his generous heart and transcending genius. Thinking of what he has said, I can not say anything which seems worth saying.

Constituted as man is, he has positive need of occasional recreation, and whatever can give him this associated with virtue and advantage, and free from vice and disadvantage, is a positive good.

I am most thankful if my labors have seemed to conduct to the preservation of those institutions under which alone we can expect good government—and in its train, sound learning and the progress of the liberal arts.

Adhere to your purpose and you will soon feel as well as you ever did. On the contrary, if you falter, and give up, you will lose the power of keeping any resolution, and will regret it all your life. Take the advice of a friend, who, though he never saw you, deeply sympathizes with you, and stick to your purpose.