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## New Book Takes Insights from What Lincoln Read

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## **New Book Takes Insights from What Lincoln Read**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Historians often recount President Abraham Lincoln’s avid love of learning. The image of a young Lincoln reading late into the night by the dying embers of the fireplace has become an iconic part of Lincoln lore.

Illinois Wesleyan University faculty member Robert Bray is shedding new light on that firelight image, by offering a deeper understanding the books Lincoln read. Bray, who is the R. Forrest Colwell Professor of English at Illinois Wesleyan, examines the books Lincoln read, and how those books reflect his thoughts and influences in *Reading with Lincoln* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2010).

Bray delved into the world of Lincoln to create the book, reviewing everything from letters he composed for illiterate friends, to books, pamphlets, poetry, plays and essays to which Lincoln was exposed. “I like to think of it as looking over Lincoln’s shoulder while he’s reading,” said Bray, who tied the materials Lincoln read to his speeches, writing and political policies.

Fellow Lincoln are praising Bray’s book. According to William Lee Miller, author of *President Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman*, “Robert Bray has not only discovered every book and text and poem and treatise and humorous sketch and Shakespeare play that Lincoln read; he has also read them himself, and he takes the reader inside those readings—and therefore inside Lincoln’s mind—in this excellent book.” Fred Kaplan, author of *Lincoln: The Biography of a Writer*, said Bray’s work “adds an important dimension to our understanding of our sixteenth president’s mind. It effectively delineates the rich resources of literature and language that he brought to his political career.”

A noted scholar, Bray is also the author of the 2005 book, *Peter Cartwright, Legendary Frontier Preacher* (University of Illinois Press), which explored the dynamic relationship between Illinois Wesleyan founder Cartwright and Lincoln, who were political rivals for the House of Representative in 1846. He also helped celebrate the 200th birthday of Lincoln in 2009 by co-writing a play about the future President’s time on Bloomington titled *Lincoln's in Town!* He is also the author of *Rediscoveries* (University of Illinois Press, 1982), and editor-in-chief of the 1985 *A Reader's Guide to Illinois Literature* (Illinois State Library).

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A graduate of Pittsburg State University in Kansas in 1966, Bray earned his master's degree and doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1967 and 1971, respectively. He has been a member of the Illinois Wesleyan faculty since 1970, and was honored with the University's teaching excellence award in 1990. Bray has been active in state organizations promoting education and chaired the Secretary of State's Read Illinois program. He has been honored with many fellowships and grants, including those from the national endowment or the Humanities and the Illinois Humanities Council.