



The Civil War: Lincoln and the Gettysburg Address

BY TIM BAILEY

UNIT OVERVIEW

Over the course of five lessons students will closely read and analyze Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. They will select key words from the text, write succinct summaries of selections from the text, restate these summaries in their own words, and ultimately write a short persuasive essay in response to a thought-provoking prompt based on the document.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Identify and explain key words and important phrases in a historical text
- Explain and summarize the meaning of a historical text, on both literal and inferential levels
- Analyze the writing style of an author based on close reading
- Develop a viewpoint and write a persuasive (argumentative) essay, supported by evidence from a historical text

NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS: 4–5

Although this unit is designed for five class periods, it can be completed in a shorter time frame by reading more than one section of text per class and/or assigning some lessons as homework.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.1: Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.2: Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4: Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.5: Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6: Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Civil War

Adapted from “The American Civil War” by Gary W. Gallagher, History Now, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, gilderlehrman.org

The Civil War marked a defining moment in United States history. Long simmering sectional tensions reached a critical stage in 1860–1861 when eleven slaveholding states seceded and formed the Confederate States of America. Political disagreement gave way to war in April 1861, as Confederates insisted on their right to leave the Union and the loyal states refused to allow them to go. Four years of fighting resulted in almost 1.5 million casualties (of whom at least 620,000 died), directly affected untold civilians, and freed four million enslaved African Americans.

Questions relating to the institution of slavery set the stage for secession and war. Most men and women at the time would have agreed with Abraham Lincoln’s assertion in his Second Inaugural Address that slavery “was, somehow, the cause of the war.” Alexander H. Stephens, the Confederacy’s vice president, minced no words when he proclaimed in March 1861 that slavery “was the immediate cause of the late rupture and the present revolution” to establish southern independence. Debates over the expansion of slavery into federal territories, which were tied to the South’s effort to maintain an equal number of free and slave states, created turmoil in national politics.

Both sides mobilized on a scale unprecedented in American history. Drawing on an 1860 population of just more than 1,000,000 military-age white males, the Confederacy placed between 800,000 and 900,000 men in uniform (fragmentary records do not permit a precise count). The United States mustered at least 2.1 million men, about half of its 1860 military-age population. More than 180,000 African American men served in United States Army units and another 20,000 in the Navy. Apart from its much larger population, the United States held decided advantages in industrial capacity, commercial interests, and financial infrastructure.

Yet either side could have prevailed. The Confederacy sought independence and only had to defend itself. The United States sought to compel the seceded states to abandon their hopes to found a new nation. Union armies would have to invade the Confederacy, destroy its capacity to wage war, and crush the will of the southern people to resist. The Confederacy could win merely by prolonging the war to a point where the loyal citizenry considered the effort too costly in lives and money.

Military fortunes ebbed and flowed for more than three years before United States forces gained a decisive advantage. The loyal states wavered more than once in their determination, most notably after Robert E. Lee frustrated Union offensives in the spring of 1863 and the spring and early summer of 1864. A string of Union successes won by Ulysses S. Grant in the West at Forts Henry and Donelson, Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga in 1862–1863, and by William Tecumseh Sherman at Atlanta in 1864, more than counterbalanced Lee’s successes. By the autumn of 1864, with Grant as the Union general in chief, United States armies applied pressure in Virginia, Tennessee, and the Carolinas that eventually forced a Confederate surrender in the spring of 1865.

No group was more directly affected by the outcome of the war than the four million black people who were enslaved in 1861. They emerged from the struggle with their freedom (made final by the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in December 1865), though the extent to which they would be accorded equal rights remained unresolved.

The cost of the war was appalling. More American soldiers lost their lives than in all other wars combined from the colonial period through the last phase of the Vietnam War.

The Gettysburg Address

BY TIM BAILEY

The Battle of Gettysburg, July 1–3, 1863, was a turning point in the Civil War. The Union army defeated a Confederate army that had invaded the state of Pennsylvania. Over three days, a total of 150,000 troops participated in the battle; approximately 10,000 soldiers were killed or mortally wounded, 30,000 were injured, and 10,000 were captured or went missing. Four months later, 3500 of the Union dead were interred in a new national cemetery near the battlefield. Writing on behalf of Pennsylvania governor Andrew Curtin on November 2, 1863, David Wills invited President Abraham Lincoln to deliver a “few appropriate remarks” at the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery on November 19. Only 272 words in length, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address has become one of the most revered, memorable, and influential speeches in our nation’s history.

The dedicatory program included several band and choir performances, memorial prayers, opening and closing benedictions, and a lengthy address of 13,600 words delivered over the course of two hours by Edward Everett, a clergyman who had served as a congressman, senator, and governor of Massachusetts, and as president of Harvard. Between two choral presentations, President Lincoln came to the podium before a crowd of 15,000. Although the President spoke very briefly, his words had lasting significance. On the following day, Everett wrote a letter to Lincoln stating, “I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes.”

Without mentioning words like “Confederacy,” “slavery,” or “secession” in the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln broadened the objectives of the Civil War to include not just preserving the Union as it was (with slavery largely intact in the South), but also achieving “a new birth of freedom” that would abolish slavery and, in the words of the Constitution, “form a more perfect union.” The address reaffirmed the nation’s founding principles, redefined the purpose of the Civil War, and transformed the American people’s view of their country, government, and society.

LESSON 1

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” to gain a clear understanding of the content of President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address of 1863. By reading and analyzing the original text, the students will learn what is explicitly stated, draw logical inferences, and demonstrate their knowledge by writing a succinct summary of the text. In the first lesson this learning process will proceed as a whole-class exercise.

MATERIALS

- The Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863
- Summary Organizer #1
- Overhead projector, Smartboard, or other display device

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute copies of the Gettysburg Address. Resist putting the document into historical context as the students should draw conclusions directly from the text itself.
2. “Share read” the address with the students. This is done by having the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read along with the students, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
3. Distribute Summary Organizer #1. The activity sheet contains the first section of the Gettysburg Address. Display the organizer in a format large enough for all the students to see, and explain that in this lesson the whole class will work together to read and summarize the first section of the Gettysburg Address.
4. Share read the excerpt with the class.
5. Explain that the first step is to select “Key Words” from the text. Guidelines for Selecting Key Words: Key words are important to understanding the text. They are usually nouns or verbs. The students should not select “connector” words (*are, is, the, and, so, etc.*). The number of key words chosen depends on the length of the original selection. This selection is only thirty words, so you can pick four or five key words. Tell the students that they must know the meaning of the words they choose. You can take the opportunity to teach students how to use context clues, word analysis, and dictionary skills to discover word meanings.

6. Students will now select four or five words from the text that they believe are key words and write them in the Key Words section of the organizer.
7. Survey the class to find out what the most popular choices are. You can write them down and have the class discuss the options and vote on the final choice, based on guidance from you. For example, the class might select the following words: *new nation* (you can allow a very short phrase if it makes sense as a unit), *liberty*, *men*, and *equal*. Now, no matter which words the students had previously chosen, have them write the words agreed upon by the class or chosen by you into the Key Words section.
8. Explain to the class that they will use the key words to write a sentence that summarizes Lincoln's message. This should be a whole-class negotiation process. For example, "The founders created a *new nation of liberty* where all *men* are *equal*." The students might decide they don't need some of the words to make the sentence even more streamlined. This is part of the negotiation process. The final sentence is copied into the organizer.
9. Now tell the students to restate the summary sentence in their own words. Again, this is a negotiation process. For example, "The founders started a country where everyone would be free and treated the same."
10. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. The students can keep a record of these words and their meanings on the back of the organizer or in a separate vocabulary form.

LESSON 2

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” to gain a clear understanding of the content of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. By reading and analyzing the original text, the students will learn what is explicitly stated, draw logical inferences, and demonstrate their knowledge by writing a succinct summary of the text. In the second lesson the students will work with partners and in small groups.

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer #2
- Overhead projector, Smartboard, or other display device

PROCEDURE

1. Discuss the meaning of the first section of the Gettysburg Address as determined by the class in the previous lesson.
2. Tell the students that they will be analyzing the second section of the address in this lesson, working with partners and in small groups. Distribute Summary Organizer #2 and display it in a format large enough for the class to see.
3. Share read the text with the students as described in Lesson 1.
4. Review the procedure from Lesson 1, reminding students that they will select key words from the text, use the key words to summarize Lincoln’s message, and then restate the summary in their own words. Because this paragraph is seventy-two words, they can pick six to eight words.
5. Pair the students up and have them negotiate which key words to select. After they have chosen their words, the students will write them in the Key Words section of their organizers.
6. Now put two pairs together. This group of four will go through the same negotiation process to come up with their final key words. Be strategic in how you make your groups to ensure the most participation by all group members.
7. Once they have finalized their key words, each group will use those words to build a sentence that summarizes that section of the Gettysburg Address. All of the students should write their negotiated sentence into their organizers.
8. Ask the groups to share out their summary sentences. This should start a discussion focused on the different interpretations of Lincoln’s meaning. How successful were the groups at interpreting Lincoln’s words, and were they careful to use the key words in summarizing the text?
9. Each group will now restate the summary sentence in their own words. Again, this is a group negotiation process. After they have decided on a sentence, they should write the final version into their organizers.

10. Have the groups read out their sentences and discuss the clarity and quality of the students' interpretations of Lincoln's meaning.
11. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. They can keep a record of these words and their meanings.

LESSON 3

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” to gain a clear understanding of the content of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. By reading and analyzing the original text, the students will learn what is explicitly stated, draw logical inferences, and demonstrate their knowledge by writing a succinct summary of the text. In this lesson the students will work individually.

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer #3
- Overhead projector, Smartboard, or other display device

PROCEDURE

1. Discuss the summaries of Lincoln's text that the class came up with for the first and second sections of the Gettysburg Address in the previous two lessons.
2. Hand out Summary Organizer #3, which contains the third section of the speech, and tell the students that they will be working on their own to summarize this part of the text.
3. Display Summary Organizer #3 in a format large enough for the class to see and share read the excerpt with the class as described in Lesson 1.
4. Remind students that they will select key words from the text, use the key words to summarize Lincoln's message, and then restate the summary in their own words. Because this paragraph is 166 words, tell the students that they can pick up to ten key words. After choosing their words, they will write them in the Key Words section of their organizers.
5. Using these key words, the students will build a sentence that summarizes Lincoln's message. They should write their summary sentences on their organizers.
6. The students will now restate the summary sentence in their own words. This should be added to their organizers.

7. Have the students share out and discuss the clarity and quality of the different interpretations of Lincoln's meaning.
8. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. They can keep a record of these words and their meanings on the back of the organizer or in a separate vocabulary form.

LESSON 4 & 5

OVERVIEW

This lesson has three objectives. First, the students will synthesize the work of the last three lessons and demonstrate that they understand Abraham Lincoln's message in the Gettysburg Address. Second, they will analyze Lincoln's writing style by examining his use of the word "dedicate." Third, they will answer a question that requires them to make inferences and support their conclusions by citing the text. They can write their response in the form of a short argumentative essay.

MATERIALS

- The Gettysburg Address
- The Gettysburg Address (highlighted)
- Overhead projector, Smartboard, or other display device

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute the Gettysburg Address and ask the students to read it silently to themselves.
2. Ask the class for the best summary of the first paragraph. This is done as a negotiation or discussion. Write this sentence on the overhead projector or similar device. Follow the same procedure for paragraphs two and three. Once this process is complete, the students will have a brief summary of the entire speech.
3. Explain that Lincoln used one particular word six times in this short speech, and that as the speech develops, so does the meaning of the word. He used it once in the first paragraph, twice in the second paragraph, and three times in the third paragraph. Have the students figure out that the word is "dedicate."
4. Display the highlighted copy of the Gettysburg Address, but cover up the definitions at the bottom of the page for now. Ask the students to figure out how the meaning of the word changes from paragraph to paragraph. After this discussion, reveal the definitions at the bottom of the page and match the definitions with the highlighted words.

5. Ask the students the following questions to generate discussion:
 - a. How does the use of the word “dedicate” change the meaning of the message in each paragraph?
 - b. Why did Lincoln choose to use the same word over and over in this short speech instead of picking different words that mean the same thing?
 - c. How does the meaning of “dedicate” change who Lincoln is talking to or about?
6. The students will write a short essay addressing one of the following prompts. If they are not familiar with the writing process, you can proceed with a brief lesson on constructing an argumentative or persuasive essay, and you can assign the essay for homework or for the next lesson. Remind the students that any arguments they make must be backed up with evidence taken directly from the Gettysburg Address. The first prompt is designed to be the easiest.

PROMPTS

1. In the Gettysburg Address, how does Lincoln shift from the founding of the United States to the future of the United States?
2. The word “slavery” is never used in the Gettysburg Address. In what ways does Lincoln make clear that slavery is central to his message?
3. Why does Lincoln argue in the Gettysburg Address that the Civil War is worth fighting, in spite of the lives lost?



Abraham Lincoln, The Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln, The Gettysburg Address (highlighted)

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

ded·i·cate

1. to set apart and consecrate to a deity or to a sacred purpose: *The ancient Greeks dedicated many shrines to Aphrodite.*
2. to devote wholly and earnestly, as to some person or purpose: *He dedicated his life to fighting corruption.*
3. to offer formally (a book, piece of music, etc.) to a person, cause, or the like in testimony of affection or respect, as on a prefatory page.

Summary Organizer #1

Original Text:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:

Summary Organizer #2

Original Text:

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:

Summary Organizer #3

Original Text:

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Key Words:

Summary:

In Your Own Words:
