



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

BY AMY MURRELL TAYLOR

The American Civil War erupted when eleven Southern states seceded from the United States in 1861 and attempted to form a new nation—the Confederate States of America. The Confederacy was founded on the belief that slavery was right and good, and that it should be permitted to expand across the United States without restriction. Its “corner-stone,” as Confederate vice president Alexander Stephens put it, was the belief that a Black person “is not equal to the white man.” The United States, led by President Abraham Lincoln, set out to stop the Confederacy and went to war to pull these states back into the union.

What some believed would be a quick war of just a few months soon became the most destructive war the nation had ever seen. It lasted four years. The United States had an advantage with a larger population to fill its army as well as a vast industrial base for producing weapons. But the need to conquer the Confederacy’s extensive territory sometimes stretched those resources thin. Two years into the war, the Confederacy, while focused on defending its capital of Richmond, Virginia, had scored a series of important victories that bolstered the morale of its people. And yet something else was happening that foretold the Confederacy’s eventual collapse: enslaved people were running away from plantations by the thousands and offering to work for the US Army. Their actions weakened the Confederacy and pressured the United States to make emancipation a central war aim.

The year 1863 proved to be a turning point. On January 1 of that year, President Lincoln cemented the United States’ alliance with the enslaved people by issuing his monumental Emancipation Proclamation. In it he declared that any enslaved person in Confederate territory would now be “forever free”—and Black men, for the first time, could enlist as soldiers in the US Army. More than 180,000 rushed to enlist in the months ahead, while the United States trained its eye on two important military objectives: stopping a Confederate invasion into Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and securing control of the Mississippi River by laying siege to city of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Over a two-day period in July 1863, the United States succeeded on both fronts. The twin victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg began to swing the war’s momentum in favor of the United States.

Not all Americans could see this at the time. They instead read newspapers bringing the dispiriting news of war casualties and received letters announcing the death of loved ones. An estimated 750,000 men would be killed throughout the war, with as many as 7,000 at Gettysburg alone. War was horrific—and the end of it did not seem near. Soldiers and civilians alike were left to wonder what it was all for: Was there any purpose behind the staggering death toll?

President Lincoln delivered an unforgettable answer in his Gettysburg Address that November. The United States was fighting for a “new birth of freedom”—for a reunited nation that would rededicate itself to its founding principle of liberty. Another year and a half of hard fighting followed, and the assassination of President Lincoln in April 1865 sent the nation into mourning. But with the Confederacy’s surrender that same month, the United States achieved the victory it needed to act on Lincoln’s words. In December 1865, the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution permanently abolished slavery and guaranteed freedom to four million African American men, women, and children and their descendants.

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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?