

## The Gettysburg Address and Its Enduring Legacy

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Subjects:** U.S. History, Civics, U.S. Government

**Time Required:** One 50-minute class period

**Historical Thinking Skills:** Primary Source Analysis, Contextualization

**Objective:** Students will analyze the text and significance of the Gettysburg Address.

**Materials:**

- Student Handout (attached)
- Short [video clip](#) on the Battle of Gettysburg (optional, 3-5 minutes)

**Background:**

Despite its brevity, the Gettysburg Address, delivered by President Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863, is one of the most significant speeches in American history. It was given during the American Civil War at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where a pivotal battle had taken place just months earlier (July 1-3, 1863). By 1863, the nation was deeply divided, and Lincoln's address sought to unite the country under common ideals while honoring those who had died in battle.

**Key Themes:**

- **Equality:** Lincoln begins by referencing the Declaration of Independence and the idea that the nation was "conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." He emphasizes that the war is not just a fight for the Union but for this foundational principle.
- **Sacrifice and Dedication:** Lincoln honors the soldiers who died at Gettysburg, stating that their sacrifices sanctified the ground, far beyond anything that words could accomplish.
- **A "New Birth of Freedom:"** He reframes the war as a struggle for a new birth of freedom, linking it to the end of slavery and the survival of democracy itself.
- **Democracy:** Lincoln concludes by reminding the audience that the nation's government is of, by, and for the people, and that it must not perish.



## Lesson Plan:

### Part 1: Warm Up Activity (5-10 minutes)

Ask students "What makes a speech memorable or powerful?" Brainstorm qualities that may make speeches stand out (inspiring language, addressing timely issues, calls for action, etc.).

What speeches can they cite as examples of significant speeches in American history? Today we'll be exploring one of Abraham Lincoln's most famous speeches – the Gettysburg Address.

### Part 2: Setting the Stage (5-10 minutes)

Provide a brief overview of the Civil War, highlighting the Battle of Gettysburg's significance:

- Bloodiest battle of the Civil War
- Over 50,000 casualties in three days
- Destroyed hope of the Confederate States of America to become an independent nation

Consider showing this brief [video](#) from American Battlefield Trust (5 minutes).

Explain that Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address at the dedication of a new national cemetery for soldiers who died in that battle.

### Write-Pair-Share:

Ask students how a speech after such a bloody battle might be expected to address the nation. What emotions and messages might the President need to convey? What might you predict the President to say to the nation? Have students record their thoughts on the handout, match up with a partner, and share what they wrote.

### Part 3: Primary Source Analysis Activity (15 minutes)

Have students read and annotate the Gettysburg Address on their own (or consider showing a video of a reading of it, such as this [clip](#) from "Saving Lincoln").

- Ask students to identify founding principles in the speech, such as equality, liberty, and democracy.
  - Have students underline or highlight quotes that demonstrate those themes.
- After reading, students should complete the primary source analysis questions.



- Have students share (either in small groups or in a whole class setting) what phrases and ideas they found most powerful and why.

**Part 4: Application Activity** (15 minutes)

Independently, or in pairs, ask students to write a modern-day "Gettysburg Address," reflecting on a challenge America faces today.

**Part 5: Assessment** (5 minutes)

Ask students to reflect and respond to the prompt "How can understanding famous speeches from the past help us speak out on issues today?" Individual responses will vary, but students will ideally emphasize the enduring power of words and the responsibility to use speech as a tool for positive change.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

### **The Gettysburg Address and Its Enduring Legacy**

**Objective:** I will be able to analyze the text and significance of the Gettysburg Address.

#### **Warm Up Activity:**

What qualities make a speech memorable or powerful?

What example(s) of powerful speeches can you think of?

#### **Setting the Stage:**

Record any key notes about the Battle of Gettysburg.



**Write-Pair-Share:**

How might a speech after such a bloody battle be expected to address the nation? What emotions and messages might the President need to convey? What might you predict the President to say to the nation?

**Primary Source Analysis:****Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln, delivered November 19, 1863**

"Fourscore 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 battlefield 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 cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate—we cannot 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 here 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."



### Analysis Questions:

- 1) Based on what you learned during the context portion of the lesson, who was Lincoln's audience?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) In just 272 words, Lincoln repeats the word "dedicate" several times. How does the repetition of this word affect the tone and message of the speech?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) What other themes or values are depicted in this speech? Underline or highlight the quotes that demonstrate the theme or value.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) Highlight or underline and star the quote that you find most powerful. Why does it resonate with you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) Look back at the write-pair-share. Did Lincoln speak to the themes you expected? What about what you had predicted?



### Application Activity: A Modern-Day Gettysburg Address

Using the style, tone, and themes of the Gettysburg Address, write a brief speech that addresses a significant issue facing our country or community today.

- Keep it Concise: Lincoln's speech was just 272 words. Try to convey your message in 200-250 words, focusing on clarity and impact.
- Reflect Lincoln's Tone: Write with respect, honor, and hope, aiming to inspire unity and commitment.
- Choose a Theme: Select a current issue or cause that you believe is important. It could relate to:

- Justice and equality
- Community or national unity
- Civic engagement and the future of democracy



### Assessment: Reflect & Respond

How can understanding famous speeches from the past help us speak out on issues today?

