



Lincoln Lesson Plans

Grade Level:
8-12

Materials

- Student Handout: Textual Analysis form
- Student Handout: Assignment Sheet
- Background Info for Teachers Sheet

Technology

DVD player or computer

Vocabulary

conceive
consecrate
dedicate
detract
devotion
endure
hallow
liberty
measure
nobly
resolve
vain

Understanding the Gettysburg Address

Length

Two 50-minute class sessions or one 90-minute class session

Concepts/Objectives

- Students will learn a method for textual analysis.
- Students will understand what Abraham Lincoln wanted to convey in the Gettysburg Address and what he hoped would happen.
- Students will understand why the Gettysburg Address is regarded as one of the finest political speeches of all time.

Activity

Student will analyze President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address sentence-by-sentence and discuss their interpretations within the context of the Civil War.

Lincoln Resources

KET documentary, *I, too, am a Kentuckian*

- Segment 20: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

KET Audio file: the Gettysburg Address

Instructional Strategies and Activities

Before the Lesson

1. Print one copy of each page in the Textual Analysis form. Print enough copies of the Student Assignment sheets so that each student will have a copy.
2. Plan to divide the class into 10 groups, with each group having 2-3 students.
3. Write this sentence on the board:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Day 1

Introducing the Lesson

Ask a student to read the words on the board. Ask who wrote the sentence, where it comes from, and what it means. (*In an American history class, all students should recognize this as a sentence in the Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson.*)

Circle the word liberty. What did Mr. Jefferson mean by this? (*He meant that all people are entitled to liberty, that is, to be free of control by others.*)

Ask: Was this true of the United States after the Revolution up through 1860? (*No, one fifth of the adult males in America were enslaved to others.*)

Ask if anyone knows Abraham Lincoln's position on slavery.

Discuss: Lincoln was adamantly opposed to slavery; however, as a lawyer, he believed strongly in the law. Slavery was legal in the Southern states. All he felt he could do was try to prohibit its spread. When the Southern states seceded, he was willing to go to war to preserve the Union, because to do that was to preserve the principles upon which the Union was founded. He made his position clear in the Gettysburg Address, widely considered one of the finest speeches in history.

Ask if anyone knows where and why the Gettysburg Address was delivered.

Discuss: In the Gettysburg Address, which Lincoln delivered at the dedication of a new cemetery for the soldiers killed at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, was Lincoln's effort to honor the sacrifice of the soldiers while reminding the American people why the war was being fought and why the deaths were justified. He wanted to inspire them to continue their commitment to the war by reminding them of the moral vision of the founding fathers.

Conducting the Lesson

Show video segment 20, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, from the KET documentary, *Lincoln: I, too, am a Kentuckian*. After the viewing, have the students gather in their small groups. Give one of the pages from Textual Analysis form to each group. Ask them to follow the directions on the handout. Allow 15 to 20 minutes for this. Circulate among the groups as the students are working, encouraging all to participate and guiding them, only if necessary, to the correct answers.

Day 2: Continuing the Lesson

Ask each group to appoint a speaker (or choose one). Call on each speaker in order, from 1 to 10. The speaker should read Abraham Lincoln's words and then explain what they mean. Be sure the following points are made about President Lincoln's beliefs:

- Lincoln spoke to at least two audiences at Gettysburg: those who were in the audience and heard his words and those who read the speech in the newspaper accounts of it.
- The United States began not with the Articles of Confederation or the Constitution, but with the Declaration of Independence. The country was founded on an idea, not on a nationality or on a religion or as a personal acquisition. This made it unique at that time.
- The phrase "All men are created equal," from the Declaration of Independence, expresses an idea, a moral vision.
- The soldiers who died had dedicated themselves to preserving this moral vision.

Kentucky Academic Content

Academic Expectations

1.2
2.14
2.20

Program of Studies

SOCIAL STUDIES

Understandings
SS-8-GC-U-3
SS-8-HP-U-1
SS-8-HP-U-3

Skills and Concepts

SS-8-GC-S-3
SS-8-GC-S-5
SS-8-HP-S-1
SS-8-HP-S-2

READING

Understandings
EL-8-IT-U-1
EL-8-IT-U-2
EL-8-IT-U-3

Skills and Concepts

EL-8-IT-S-1
EL-8-IT-S-2
EL-8-IT-S-3
EL-8-IT-S-4

Core Content

SOCIAL STUDIES

SS-08-1.3.1
SS-08-5.1.1

READING

RD-08-3.0.2
RD-08-3.0.4
RD-08-3.0.8

Writing for the Lesson

Students are to rewrite the Gettysburg Address in their own words. The Student Assignment sheet gives them an example of the first two sentences rewritten.

Applications Across the Curriculum

This lesson can be taught in collaboration with the language arts teacher, who can emphasize rhetorical aspects of Lincoln's speech and compare it to other well-known speeches.

- The best way for the living to honor the dead was to commit themselves fully to the war despite the terrible sacrifices it called upon them to make.
- If the South won the war, the nation would be destroyed; and if the United States could not function as a democracy, then how could the country be a beacon for other oppressed people in the world?
- The war was a test to see if the principles of freedom and equality could indeed inspire a government.

Ask for answers to the following questions:

- Thomas Jefferson said that “all men are created equal” was a self-evident truth, meaning that it was obvious to anybody. Lincoln calls it a “proposition,” meaning that it is something needed to be approved or denied. Why? What does this say about Americans? (*It acknowledges that Americans are deeply divided over slavery. In fact, even though the United States had been “conceived in liberty,” this did not mean liberty for all.*)
- The “fathers” Lincoln mentions in his first sentence were responsible for the Constitution as well as the Declaration of Independence. However, the Constitution contains provisions that recognize and safeguard slavery. How, then, can Lincoln claim that our fathers believed that “all men are created equal.” (*The provisions about slavery in the Constitution represented a compromise. Even the first draft of Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence contained much stronger passages condemning slavery; these were omitted in order to gain the support of the slave holding states.*)
- If the speech is about liberty and equality for all, why doesn’t Lincoln use the word “slavery” or mention the Emancipation Proclamation, which he issued six months earlier? (*To focus only on slavery was to narrow the meaning of “liberty for all.” If race could be used to separate people, some other criteria might be used in the future. Also, the Emancipation Proclamation, which only freed the slaves in the rebel states, had caused a lot of controversy. The speech would attract less criticism if Lincoln kept the words “slavery” and “emancipation” out of it.*)

Concluding the Lesson

Ask a student who reads well to read the entire address aloud, read it aloud yourself, or play the audio file of Sam Waterston reading the address. Tell the students to concentrate on hearing the rhythms and the sounds of the words, as well as focusing on their meaning. Lincoln uses both metaphor and allusion in the speech, and he pays careful attention to rhythm. Can students identify any instances of this? (*The metaphor of life and death is sustained throughout the document. Allusions are made to the Bible through word choice, though the Bible is not specifically mentioned, “fourscore and seven,” is a Biblical term and “consecrate,” “dedicate,” and “perish from the earth” recall the Bible as well. Lincoln establishes rhythm by repetition, using words and phrases in groups of three, e.g., dedicate/consecrate/hallow, of the people/by the people/ for the people.*)

As a homework assignment, have each student rewrite the Gettysburg Address into modern language. The rewrite should be done sentence by sentence, so that the student version has the same number of sentences as Lincoln’s version.

Support/Connections/Resources

Books:

Armstrong, Jennifer. *A Three-Minute Speech: Lincoln's Remarks at Gettysburg*. New York: Aladdin, 2003.

This account of the significance of the Gettysburg Address begins with the Declaration of Independence and explains the young republic's struggle with slavery. It also discusses Lincoln's political ideas and his rise in politics. The exact text of the Gettysburg Address is included, with an analysis of why it had such an effect on Americans both then and now.

Burgan, Michael. *The Gettysburg Address*. Minneapolis: Compass Point, 2006.

Details the events that led to the Battle of Gettysburg, including an overview of slavery, the Civil War, and Lincoln's election and presidency.

Murphy, Jim. *The Long Road to Gettysburg*. Boston: Clarion, 1992.

By telling the story of the Battle of Gettysburg through the journeys of two young soldiers, the author conveys the boredom, excitement, and terror of the battle. Powerful photos show the kind of historic detail that's often missing in books for adolescents. An epilogue explains what happened to the two soldiers after the battle. Best for older students.

Holzer, Harold, editor. *Abraham Lincoln, The Writer: A Treasury of His Greatest Speeches and Letters*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills, 2000.

Abraham Lincoln tells his own story, beginning with the words scribbled in the margin of his arithmetic book; the collection includes poems, letters, excerpts from speeches and debates, his inaugural addresses, telegrams, notes on the law, and more. Each piece of writing is accompanied by an informative introduction explaining its context and significance. Best for older students.

Web site:

Eyewitness to History: Mr. Lincoln
www.eyewitnesstohistory.com

This award-winning web site by the children's book publishers presents history through the perspective of those who lived it. Five accounts deal with Lincoln. Each account is preceded by a summary of the importance of the event. The account of President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/gtsburgaddress.htm

is reported by John Hay, his private secretary.

Adaptations for Diverse Learners/Lesson Extensions

- Students who are motivated to learn more will be interested to discover that there are five drafts of the Gettysburg Address. They can check them out and see Mr. Lincoln's handwriting at this web site: www.loc.gov/exhibits/gadd/. They'll learn about Lincoln's writing/thinking process if you require them to compare one of the drafts with the final copy and list the differences.

- As Newsweek columnist Anna Quindlen noted, "Honest Abe was a techie." He keenly supported the spread of telegraph lines and railroads, the era's new technology, across the country and used the telegraph to communicate with his generals. If e-mails and text-messaging were around in 1860, he would have made good use of both. Ask students in need of a challenge to rewrite the Gettysburg Address as a text message.

Open Response Assessment

- Ask students to come up with a list of tips on how write a good speech, based on what they've learned from the Gettysburg Address. An excellent list is online at The Internet Journalist web site, www.theinternetjournalist.com/10-tips-to-writing-a-great-speech/. Do students come up with the same ideas?

Prompt: In the Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln honors the soldiers who died at Gettysburg while explaining the meaning of the Civil War and the reason for preserving the Union.

Directions: Answer the following:

- For what cause did President Lincoln believe the soldiers were fighting the Civil War?
- What does President Lincoln mean by “a new birth of freedom”?

Use relevant details to put your answer in context.

Open Response Scoring Guide				
4	3	2	1	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student correctly relates the cause to the principles of the Declaration of Independence and interprets “a new birth of freedom” to mean a long-overdue commitment to “liberty for all.”• Details are insightful and relevant and demonstrate extensive knowledge of the meaning of the speech.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student explains the connection between the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address.• Details are relevant and show broad knowledge of the meaning of the Gettysburg Address.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student makes some connection of the “cause” to the Declaration of Independence but details are missing or may be incorrect in part.• Student does not understand that the “new birth” fulfills the promise of the Declaration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student states but does not explain the connection between the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address.• There are no details or details that are mostly incorrect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No answer or irrelevant answer.

Multiple Choice Questions

- Abraham Lincoln’s reason for coming to the Gettysburg battlefield was to
 - declare an end to the Civil War.
 - dedicate a national memorial to the fallen soldiers.
 - campaign for re-election.
 - tell the listeners about the history of the United States.

2. What was the unfinished task President Lincoln presented to the American people in the Gettysburg Address?

- A. to win the war.
- B. to abolish slavery.
- C. to establish the principles of the Declaration of Independence as the goal of the United States.
- D. to punish the South.

3. Which of the following principles did Mr. Lincoln not address directly in the Gettysburg Address?

- A. liberty
- B. equality
- C. the pursuit of happiness
- D. unity

4. With which of the following statements would President Lincoln be most likely to disagree?

- A. The rebellion of the Southern states was an effort to overthrow the principle that all men were created equal.
- B. The causes of emancipation and preserving the Union are independent of each other.
- C. At the core of the Declaration of Independence are the principles of human equality and government by consent.
- D. Defending the American Union is the highest tribute the living in attendance at Gettysburg could pay to the dead.

5. In the Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln said that Union soldiers had sacrificed their lives to ensure that “government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.” What type of government was Lincoln referring to?

- A. democracy
- B. aristocracy
- C. oligarchy
- D. monarchy

6. Lincoln motivated his audience to continue the war by

- A. emphasizing the differences between North and South.
- B. encouraging the American people to be angry enough to crush the enemy.
- C. telling the American people why the Southern states were wrong.
- D. offering the American people pride, purpose, and hope.

Answer Key for Multiple Choice Questions

- 1. B
- 2. C
- 3. C
- 4. B
- 5. A
- 6. D

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STUDENT ASSIGNMENT:

Your task is to rewrite President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address into modern language, sentence by sentence.

Here are examples of the first two sentences:

Eighty-seven years ago, our ancestors created the USA, a country based on the principles of freedom and equality for all citizens.

Now our country is going through a civil war to figure out if any country based on the principles of freedom and equality can last.

President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; November 19, 1863

Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon 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 it as the final resting-place of those who have given 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 power to add or to 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 that they have thus far so nobly carried on. 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 shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

The Gettysburg Address

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

The Battle

The Battle of Gettysburg took place July 1-3, 1863. It is widely considered the turning point of the American Civil War. There were 50,000 casualties in the three-day battle. More people were killed at Gettysburg than had been killed in all the battles of the Civil War fought up to that time put together.

The Occasion

President Abraham Lincoln was asked to make some “remarks” at the dedication ceremony for a new federal cemetery at the battlefield site. The main oration was delivered by Edward Everett, a well-known and much admired speaker. It was two hours long. President Lincoln spoke for two minutes. His speech contained 272 words, and he read it aloud, rather than speak it from memory. Later, Everett wrote Lincoln to say, “I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near the central idea of the occasion in two hours, as you did in two minutes.”

The Speech

- The soldiers died to make Americans live up to their own beliefs in equality. For 87 years, the government of the United States, founded on such noble sentiments, had been a sham, a fakery, because all men were not equal. Lincoln saw the Civil War as an opportunity for the nation to bring about a “new birth of freedom” or liberty for all. He believed this was necessary for the survival of self government.
- In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson called equality for all a “self-evident” truth. By 1863, it had become a “proposition,” to be approved or denied. With the economy of the South dependent upon cotton, slavery was much more visible in 1860 than it was in 1776. In 1776, slavery was “a necessary evil.” By 1860, some Southerners were defending slavery as a positive good.
- By invoking the Declaration, Lincoln is saying that the country did not begin with the Articles of Confederation, with the victory over Great Britain, or with the ratifying of the Constitution. It began with an idea.
- Lincoln does not mention slavery or emancipation in the speech. Given the controversy over the Emancipation Proclamation, which had been issued six months earlier, he probably thought it was unwise to do so.

- Lincoln never uses the word “union” in the speech. He refers to the United States only as a “nation.”
- Although Lincoln never mentions the Bible, the Gettysburg Address is full of Biblical language, e.g., “fourscore” and “consecrate,” and the rhythm of the speech is much like the rhythm in the King James version of the Bible.
- The phrase “all men are created equal” is the foundation of American government. It appeared in the declaration issued by the Seneca Falls Convention about women’s rights, altered slightly to read ““We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal.” Martin Luther King also used it in his “I Have a Dream” speech, as the “creed “ of the United States: “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.”
- Lincoln’s speech was not universally praised at the time. The *London Times* wrote, “The ceremony was rendered ludicrous by some of the sallies of that poor President Lincoln” and called his remarks “dull and commonplace.” An editorial in the *Chicago Times* pointed out certain provisions in the U.S. Constitution acknowledging slavery, and then added, “Mr. Lincoln occupies his present position by virtue of [the] Constitution, and is sworn to the maintenance and enforcement of these provisions. It was to uphold this constitution, and the Union created by it, that our officers and soldiers gave their lives at Gettysburg. How dared he, then, standing on their graves, misstate the cause for which they died, and libel the statesmen who founded the government?”

President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; November 19, 1863

1

Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

READ

Read your sentence aloud, several times. Have each person in the group read it aloud. Pay attention to the punctuation when you read, and think about the words.

VOCABULARY

fourscore – 80 (a score is 20; therefore, fourscore is 80)

conceived – made up, thought of, created

liberty – freedom from control or rule by another

proposition – a plan or an idea proposed by someone

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. Abraham Lincoln gave this speech in 1863. What happened in America fourscore and seven years earlier?
2. Who does President Lincoln mean by “our fathers?”
3. Why do you think he used the words “fourscore and seven” rather than just giving the date?
4. Why was the United States a “new” nation? How was it different from the other nations existing at that time?
5. The United States may have been “conceived in liberty,” but did this mean liberty for all?

President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; November 19, 1863

3

We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it as the final resting-place of those who have given their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

READ

Read your sentence aloud, several times. Have each person in the group read it aloud. Pay attention to the punctuation when you read, and think about the words.

VOCABULARY

It is altogether fitting – It is the right thing to do

dedicate – to commit totally to something, in this case, a graveyard or cemetery

final resting place – grave

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. Where is the speaker and where is his audience?
2. Why have they come to this place? Why is this “fitting and proper”?
3. Who gave their lives? How did they give them?
4. Why would Lincoln think it was important that these people died? Were they fighting for power or money? If not, why were they fighting?
5. What does it mean to say that the nation, that is, the United States, “might live”?

President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; November 19, 1863

5

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 that they have thus far so nobly carried on.

READ

Read your sentence aloud, several times. Have each person in the group read it aloud. Pay attention to the punctuation when you read, and think about the words.

VOCABULARY

dedicate – to commit totally to something

nobly – courageously, superbly, magnificently

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. Gettysburg was being dedicated as a national cemetery. Do you think it was a Union or a Confederate cemetery?
2. In the phrase, “the world can never forget what they did here,” who are “they”?
3. Why does Abraham Lincoln consider them noble? Why does he think the world will never forget them?
4. What is their “unfinished work”?

President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; November 19, 1863

6

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; . . .

READ

Read your sentence aloud, several times. Have each person in the group read it aloud. Pay attention to the punctuation when you read, and think about the words.

VOCABULARY

dedicate – to commit totally to something

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. Who does Abraham Lincoln mean by “us”?
2. Rather than dedicating the graveyard, Lincoln says that his listeners should dedicate themselves. To what?
3. Do you think Lincoln's purpose in this speech was more than honoring the dead or dedicating a new cemetery? What was his purpose?

President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; November 19, 1863

9

. . . that this nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom . . .

READ

Read your sentence aloud, several times. Have each person in the group read it aloud. Pay attention to the punctuation when you read, and think about the words.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. Abraham Lincoln says the nation will have a “new birth of freedom.” What was the first birth of freedom? Who was freed and from whom?
2. Will this “new birth of freedom” result in a country that is different from the one that existed before the Civil War?
3. What will it take for the nation to have this new birth of freedom?

