

TEACHER GUIDE

1864 DOC. #1: Gettysburg Address

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A sitting President has the advantage of having the press by his side throughout his presidency. Unlike a challenger who has to create media opportunities during his campaign, a President merely has to give a speech in order to receive press coverage. One year before the election of 1864, on November 19, 1863 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, President Abraham Lincoln gave one of the most famous speeches in American history, a speech now referred to as the Gettysburg Address.

Lincoln spoke to a crowd of 15,000 during the dedication of a national memorial to honor Civil War dead. His speech took place at Cemetery Hill on the site of the battlefield which marked a turning point for the Union forces in the war. Lincoln didn't use a professional speechwriter to craft his words; this address is of his own construction. Although Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was not a campaign speech, it nevertheless served to communicate his views to the nation in a form and style that his challenger, George McClellan, never could have achieved. Lincoln's eloquence as an orator during a time of war helped him win reelection in the campaign of 1864.

Lincoln's address was made just five months after the battle at Gettysburg while the war was still raging in the South. As President of the United States he tried to reach out to every family, North and South, whose lives had been touched by the terrible Civil War. In the Battle of Gettysburg more than 50,000 Union and Confederate soldiers lost their lives over a period of three days. This approaches the total number of U.S. deaths during the entire ten years of the Vietnam War.

> **Project** the document and **distribute** the student handout. **Have students read** the Gettysburg Address text or read aloud.

QUESTION **What are the messages that Lincoln is giving to those who would hear or read his speech?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The union must be preserved and freedom upheld in order to honor all those fallen in the Civil War.

QUESTION **Who is the target audience for the speech?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The target audience would be those who would read his remarks thereafter in the newspapers, as well as those in attendance at the dedication ceremony.

1864 DOC. # 1

1864 DOCUMENT #4: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Four score 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 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, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Gettysburg Address

PowerPoint Slide

Text on student handout

QUESTION **Is Lincoln speaking more from his role as Commander-in-Chief of the Union Army or as President of the United States? Give evidence to justify your answer.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER **He is speaking as President of the U.S.**

EVIDENCE his words are less about victory and military might and more about the values of freedom, equality, and unity; he begins with a reference to the founding of the United States; he uses “we are met” rather than “us versus them”

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What role does emotion play when voters decide for whom to vote?

Should a presidential candidate’s speech-writing ability play a role in his or her quest for office? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL INFO

The idea for a national cemetery at the Gettysburg site originated with Mr. David Wills of Gettysburg. With the help of Pennsylvania Governor Curtin he purchased the land for the memorial and supervised the improvements. Wills invited the noted speaker Edward Everett of Massachusetts to present the oration for the occasion. He invited President Lincoln to formally consecrate the ground with a few words after Everett’s speech.

Mr. Everett spoke for nearly two hours, covering all three days of the battle as well as the purpose of the war and other related subjects. President Lincoln’s speech lasted only two minutes. Everett is said to have remarked that the President said more in two minutes than he had been able to say in his two hours. Lincoln wasn’t so sure at first. He is said to have commented to an aide after his speech: “It is a flat failure and the people are disappointed” (Daniel 381).

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Media Bias
Reaching Voters (speech)