

The Gettysburg Address**Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of the Civil War****Worksheet #1: The Origins of the Gettysburg Address**

Directions: The information presented in this reading is to help you understand the Gettysburg Address better by giving you some details about it. Read this passage and then answer some questions. When you have done that, you will know more about this speech, often described as the greatest speech ever delivered by an American president.

The Gettysburg Address: Basic Information

The Battle of Gettysburg was a turning point battle in the Civil War. General Lee was repulsed from his northern invasion into Pennsylvania and never again would he try to bring the Army of Northern Virginia into the North. The carnage from the three days of fighting (July 1-3, 1863) was overwhelming, David Wills, a resident of Gettysburg, approached Governor Curtin about the need to create a national cemetery on the site. Nearly 40,000 soldiers had died there. Aside from the tragedy of the terrible battle, the hot July sun had made the air putrid from the decaying flesh. Governor Curtin quickly responded and by mid-July a plan was put into operation. A large tract of land was purchased immediately. Then, bodies were gathered together and properly buried in a large site located on Cemetery Hill.

A United States Cemetery Board of Commission was placed in charge of the details necessary to establish this national cemetery. They decided that there should be dedicatory exercises to consecrate the sacred ground. The members were particularly anxious about getting just the right speaker for the formal ceremonies dedicating the final resting place of the fallen soldiers. They wanted the best known orator in America, the Honorable Edward Everett of Massachusetts. He quickly agreed, but pointed out that he could not possibly have a major speech prepared by the date selected, October 23. The committee agreed to push the dedication back to November 19 so they could have a powerful oration making the solemnity of the occasion.

Others were invited, too. Formal invitations went to the President Lincoln, cabinet members, General Meade, Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, Admiral Charles Stewart, members of the diplomatic corps, members of the House and Senate, and other distinguished persons. Four railroad cars decorated with red, white and blue would bring them from Washington, D.C. the evening before the ceremony. Military officers and soldiers were invited and, of course, the crowd of 15, 000 would include townspeople from Gettysburg.

The formal invitation to President was a last minute affair. It was sent on November 2nd while the Everett invitation had gone out weeks before the scheduled event. The invitation did not ask Lincoln to speak, at least, not much. It made clear that he was to say something at the conclusion of the ceremony rather than during the main part. Edward Everett's oration was the central focus; President Lincoln was the conclusion. The invitation said, "It is the desire that, after the Oration, you, as Chief Executive of the Nation, formally set apart these grounds to their Sacred use by a few appropriate remarks." This he agreed to do, and he went on to do it in two minutes with ten memorable sentences totaling 272 often quoted words.

There has been some debate about what he actually said that day. It was over so quickly that newspaper reporters did not take complete notes. They were relieved to hear that they would get a copy of the speech

The Gettysburg Address

Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of the Civil War

for their newspaper reports. But, what were the exact words? There are five known manuscript copies of the speech, and they vary in some of the wording. President Lincoln gave a copy to each of his secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay. These two copies are now in the Library of Congress. Many believe that Nicolay's copy was the original that Lincoln read at the ceremony. Some do not agree, however, because the Nicolay copy does not completely match contemporary accounts. Lincoln wrote the Hay copy shortly after he returned to Washington from Gettysburg. There are variations in words, and punctuations between these manuscript copies. Lincoln wrote the other three for charitable purposes long after the original speech. The Everett copy is at the Illinois State Historical Library; the Bancroft copy is at Cornell University; and the Bliss copy is in the White House.

Mr. Everett spoke for two hours and four minutes that afternoon. What he said was not a surprise to the audience because the text of his speech had been published and widely distributed days before the event. There did not appear to be much interest in what the President would say. His reputation as a storyteller had even made some Board of Commissions members fear that he would not be up to such a solemn occasion. How wrong they were. The day following the dedication Mr. Everett sent a note to President Lincoln congratulating him for his address. He said, "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." In his reply Lincoln noted that Everett was expected to make the long oration. He said, "In our respective parts yesterday, you could not have been excused to make a short address, nor I a long one."

Not everyone at the time agreed with Mr. Everett's assessment of the Gettysburg Address. The *Harrisburg Patriot and Union* ridiculed his short speech, "We pass over the silly remarks of the President; for the credit of the nation we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them and that they shall no more be repeated or thought of." The same Gettysburg Address later memorized by generations of school children and widely proclaimed as the greatest American speech ever given was mocked by the *Chicago Times*. The words and their author were roundly criticized in this harsh assessment: "The cheek of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, and dishwatery utterances of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as the President of the United States." (Both quotes taken from Harry J. Maihafer, War of Words: Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War Press, pp. 143-44)

Many other newspapers felt as Edward Everett did. They recognized the beauty, clarity, and simplicity of the words themselves. They sensed that these words would live on because they condensed the unique American experience into a timeless expression of the national values of freedom, liberty and equality. The *Springfield Republican* called it, " a perfect gem; deep in feeling, compact in thought and expression, and tasteful and elegant in every word and comma." The *Providence Journal* had high praise, "We know not where to look for a more admirable speech than the brief one which the President made at the close of Mr. Everett's oration... ."

Lincoln's ability with the English language permitted him to craft a ten sentence statement that would bring admiration from wordsmiths, but the speech is more than the arrangement of words. The words speak of ideas, not specifics of the recent battle. These ideas were not new, but there was nothing wrong or un-American with that. In fact, you could argue that the very document which proclaimed American independence was the product of the political theorists and philosophers of the Enlightenment, not Thomas

The Gettysburg Address

Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of the Civil War

Jefferson's imagination. His moving passages in the Declaration of Independence expressed ideals worth fighting for. So, too, were the words in the Gettysburg Address. The ideas so cogently expressed on November 19, 1863, were not new. They were embedded in the Republican Party platforms of 1856, 1860 and 1864. They also found expression in other speeches that Lincoln gave during his political career as well as in personal letters and other primary sources.

The Origin of the Gettysburg Address: Questions

1. List three things that were special or significant about the Battle of Gettysburg.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. Why was the date for the dedication of the cemetery changed from October 23 to November 19?
3. How can you tell that the people in charge of the cemetery dedication didn't think President Lincoln would be an important part of the ceremony?
4. What newspaper was critical of the Gettysburg Address and why?
5. Give some examples of what those who praised this speech in 1863 thought of it.
6. The Gettysburg Address is considered to be one of the greatest speeches ever given. Give at least three reasons why.

The Gettysburg Address

Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of the Civil War

Worksheet #2: Gettysburg Address Ideas Found Elsewhere

Directions: Read the primary source documents that were given to your group. Then, use this worksheet to find passages (sentences and/or phrases) in these documents which support a key idea expressed in the Gettysburg Address. Use a highlighter marker on the document to mark those passages. Then, copy it on this worksheet.

There will only be one worksheet for each group. Complete it together after each group member has had the opportunity to search a document to find evidence that President Lincoln expressed his ideas in other speeches as well as in the Gettysburg Address.

Passages from the Gettysburg Address

1. **"...a new nation...dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal..."**

(Words opposing slavery in our nation)

a. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

b. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

c. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

2. **"...a great Civil War, testing whether that nation...can long endure..."**

(Words questioning the affect of the Civil War upon our nation)

a. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

b. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

The Gettysburg Address

Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of the Civil War

- c. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

3. **"The world...can never forget what they (the brave men, living and dead) did here. ..."**

(Words praising the sacrifices and bravery of our soldiers)

- a. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

- b. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

- c. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

4. **"...that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; ..."**

(God's help in making us a better nation.)

- a. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

- b. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

- c. _____

The primary source document that this was found in: _____

Worksheet #3: Patriotic Speech

Directions: Use one of the ideas in the Gettysburg Address to create a persuasive speech. The speech should be modeled on the concise presentation of ideas found in Lincoln's speech. Lincoln stressed:

1. The enduring quality of our nation;
2. The idea that in the U.S. "all men are created equal,"
3. Bravery and sacrifice will be remembered forever,
4. "That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom," and
5. "Government of the People by the People and for the People shall not perish from the earth."

What can you say about any one of these ideas? Here is how to plan your speech:

- Pick any or all of these ideas as the basis of your speech. (You might think of your speech as a 21st Century version of what Abraham Lincoln might have said at the site of the World Trade Towers.)
- Do some pre-writing (brainstorming and creating web/clusters), to work with your ideas before you commit those thoughts to writing in the actual speech;
- Write a persuasive speech the approximate length of the Gettysburg address (272 words).
- Rehearse the speech with a partner, and then deliver it to the class.

Prewriting

Brainstorming

Write the title or topic of your speech here: _____

On the lines below write words, phrases or ideas that come into your mind when thinking about the topic of your speech:

