

Evaluating the Gettysburg Address

Primary Source Set Teaching Guide

This Primary Source Set is designed to help students analyze the Gettysburg Address and better understand the political and social attitudes in Northern and Southern states during the Civil War. As students progress through this set, they will answer document-based questions that challenge them to critically evaluate the views of the authors and the historical significance of each source.

Target Grades & Subject(s): Grades 6-12; Social Studies/History

Learning Objectives

- Students will cite evidence from the Gettysburg Address to show the connection that Lincoln made between emancipation and preserving the Union. (CCSS. RH.1, RH.2)
- Students will analyze the tone and word choice of sources to understand why some Northerners criticized Lincoln's Gettysburg address. (CCSS.RI.4)
- Students will understand how the Battle of Gettysburg changed the course of the Civil War. (CCSS. RH.1)

Before Teaching this Set

- Prior to analyzing the sources in this set, students should have some familiarity with the causes of the Civil War and key people during this time period (President Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, etc.).
- Remind students of the difference between primary and secondary sources.

Texts in this Set (download texts [here](#))

Text 1: Battle of Gettysburg (2 pages)	
<p>The first text in this set describes the events leading up to the Battle of Gettysburg and its outcomes. This text provides background information about the Civil War and this key battle. As students read, they will describe the strategies employed by both sides during the battle and their goals. After reading, encourage students to consider how the outcome of the Battle of Gettysburg impacted the both the Union and Confederacy.</p>	<p><u>Extension Activity:</u> Have students write a newspaper article reporting on the Battle of Gettysburg. They should explain why their side (the Confederacy or Union) is fighting the war and how the outcome of the Battle of Gettysburg might impact their strategy going forward.</p>
Text 2: Gettysburg Address (1 page)	
<p>Next, students will read the text of the Gettysburg Address. As they read, they will consider how the references to the Declaration of Independence impact the speech's tone and meaning. Students will also critically analyze the text to understand Lincoln's interpretation of the Civil War. After reading, students will use evidence from the text to explain how Lincoln hoped his audience would respond to the speech.</p>	<p><u>Discussion Questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is "the new birth of freedom" Lincoln calls for, and how does it differ from the nation's original birth? - Why do you think Lincoln quotes the Declaration of Independence throughout his speech?
Text 3: Editorial: The President at Gettysburg (1863) (2 pages)	
<p>The final text in set is an editorial written a few days after Lincoln gave the Gettysburg Address. This editorial, which was most likely written by a Northern Democrat, includes several criticisms of Lincoln's speech. As students read, they will analyze the references to the U.S. Constitution to understand how the original writers viewed slavery and states' rights. As students read, they will compare and contrast the views of both Lincoln and editorial's author regarding the causes of the Civil War.</p>	<p><u>Extension Activity:</u> Working in small groups, have students create 2-3 questions they would ask Lincoln based on the criticisms in the editorial. (e.g., How can Lincoln say that our forefathers were dedicated to the ideal that "all men are created equal" when the Constitution includes protections for slavery?) Then, have groups switch questions and prepare answers based on how they believe Lincoln would respond. After groups have had time to prepare, put one group on the "hot seat" (pretending to be Lincoln) while the other group poses their questions.</p>