

The Gettysburg Address Student Worksheet

Introduction:

Gettysburg was one of the most pivotal and bloody battles in American history, as nearly 40,000 soldiers were killed or wounded. Losses for the Southern forces were so staggering that they could not recover, and although the war continued more than a year, after Gettysburg, the South had virtually no chance of winning. In November, 1863, plans were made to hold a ceremony dedicating the Gettysburg battlefield as a national cemetery. President Lincoln was invited to come to the ceremony and make a “few appropriate remarks.” Lincoln accepted the invitation, and the short speech he gave became one of the best-known in American history.

Directions: Read the sources and answer the following questions.

The Gettysburg Address Drafts

<http://web.archive.org/web/20080709093744/http://loc.gov/exhibits/gadd/gadrft.html>

1. To whom were the two copies of the speech given? What positions (jobs) did both hold?
2. What evidence is given that Nicolay’s version may have been the one Lincoln actually delivered? Why might the draft not be the one Lincoln actually used?
3. According to the Library of Congress Web page, three other copies of the speech were made by Lincoln and given to others. Who received them?
4. In your view, why is it important to have different versions of the same speech?

The Gettysburg Address

Four score 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 battle-field 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.

5. How did Lincoln describe the creation of the nation in the speech? What reference in the opening paragraph does Lincoln make regarding the reason the nation was created?

6. What do you think Lincoln meant when he stated that the participants in the ceremony could not “consecrate” this ground?

7. How did Lincoln sum up the importance of the sacrifice of those who died in the battle?

8. Give two examples of phrases from the speech that were intended to unite the nation.