



Overview

The Gettysburg Address which was delivered on November 19, 1863, was relatively overlooked, even criticized by contemporaries. President Lincoln was not the featured speaker at the dedication of Gettysburg National Cemetery that day, and spoke for only three minutes following the featured two-hour “Gettysburg Address” by Judge Edward Everett. Media dissemination in the wake of the speech and Lincoln’s assassination propelled the “dedicatory remarks” to become one of the most famous orations in American history. In this lesson, students will read and analyze President Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address during a Reader’s Theater, then compare the role of the media in shaping the speech’s initial (in)significance and its significance today.

Preparation

1. Download the Gettysburg Address Reader’s Theater and corresponding PowerPoint presentation and the Civic Participation Chart from www.lawday.org for use in your classroom.
2. Make copies of the Reader’s Theater and the Civic Participation Chart for students.

Procedure

1. Distribute the Gettysburg Address Reader’s Theater to students, assign parts, and read the speech aloud with students. If possible, project the corresponding PowerPoint presentation images while students are reading.
2. To debrief the Gettysburg Address, ask students the following questions:
 - How many years are a “score?”
 - To whom did Lincoln mean when he talked about “our fathers?”

- Lincoln referenced the Declaration of Independence when he said, “all men are created equal.” Why did he refer to this document and not the U.S. Constitution?

- According to Lincoln, what is the responsibility of those who are still living?

3. The last sentence of the Gettysburg Address is a call to action for all Americans, and an opportunity to consider the role of citizens in government. Distribute the Civic Participation Chart to students, then assign each third of the class one section to brainstorm what Lincoln refers to with government (1) of the people, (2) by the people, and (3) for the people. Reporters will share their results with the class.

4. Students should use their charts to consider the following discussion questions:

- How have Americans helped to create the “new birth of freedom” that Lincoln described?
- Is the “new birth of freedom” finished, or is there more to do?
- What might you do as an individual to contribute to the “new birth of freedom?”
- Why is freedom so important to our government and society?

5. Ask students to consider the following quote from the Gettysburg address: “the world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here...”

How did people get news in Lincoln’s time? How was the news of the Gettysburg Address disseminated? How do people get news today? Which do you think has greater impact and why?

