

The Gettysburg Address

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,487

Connections

Writing and Art

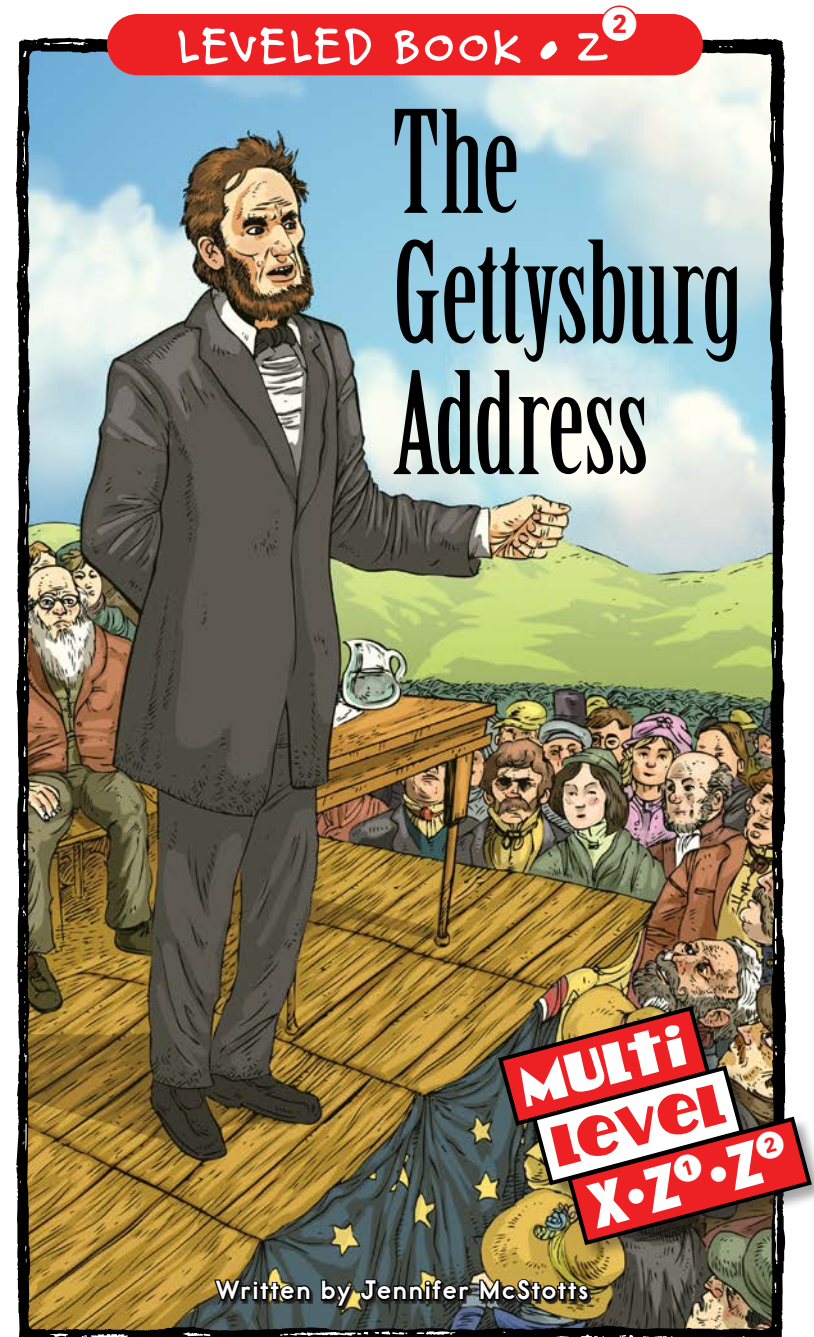
Imagine you are Abraham Lincoln. Write your own speech for the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg. Deliver your speech to your class.

Social Studies

Research to learn more about Abraham Lincoln. Write a biography of his life using facts from this book and outside resources. Include a timeline of at least five of the most important events in his life.

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The Gettysburg Address



Written by Jennifer McStotts

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Focus Question

Why is the Gettysburg Address one of the most important speeches in American history?

Words to Know

address	devastation
adversaries	juncture
brevity	oblivion
conceived	perish
concise	revered
constraints	secession

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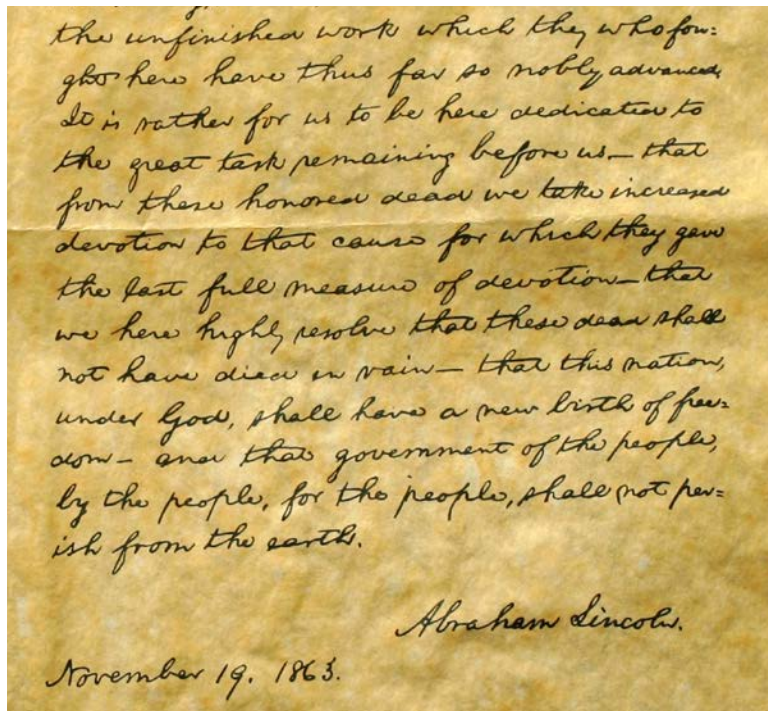
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Correlation

LEVEL Z2

Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



The fifth version of the Gettysburg Address is the only version President Lincoln signed.

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Brother Against Brother

Fighting between siblings is so common that we don't think twice about it, but imagine being at war and fighting on one side while your brother or sister is fighting on the other side.

The American Civil War was a protracted fight between two sides of the country. Soldiers sometimes knew their enemy because men from the same town and even the same family would fight on opposite sides. Many of the officers had trained and fought together on the same side in earlier conflicts. Some were close friends who suddenly found themselves **adversaries** for the first time.

The Union was composed of the Northern states, and the Confederacy consisted of the Southern states. From 1861 until 1865, the Civil War raged, and 620,000 men died in it. One of the war's most famous—and infamous—battles was the Battle of Gettysburg.



Lewis Armistead

Lewis Armistead and Winfield Scott Hancock were close friends before the Civil War. During the war, they served as generals on opposite sides. Both were wounded at Gettysburg. Hancock lived; Armistead died.



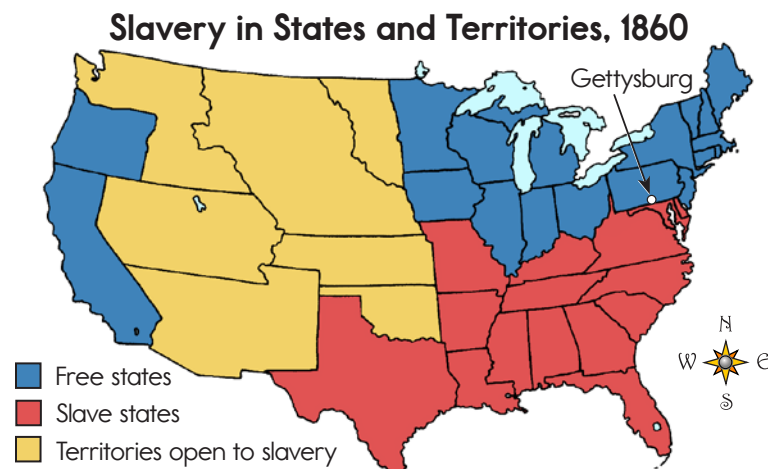
Winfield Scott Hancock



On the morning of the first day of the battle—July 1, 1863—Union soldier Rudolf Schwarz saw Confederate prisoners being led away. To his surprise, he recognized one of the enemy prisoners as his own brother!

The Schwarz brothers hadn't seen each other since departing Germany for the United States. The two men embraced, joyful for their unexpected reunion, however brief. They parted when the Confederate brother was taken away, never to meet again. Rudolf was killed in action that afternoon.

How did the United States end up at war, with brothers fighting against brothers? Why is the Battle of Gettysburg famous? Why is a 272-word speech about that bloody battle so **revered**?



President Lincoln and the Civil War

When Abraham Lincoln ran for president in 1860, there were thirty-three states in the United States. Slavery was legal in the fifteen Southern “slave states” and illegal in the eighteen Northern “free states.” Many slaves tried to escape to the North to become free.

Lincoln opposed allowing slavery to spread beyond the Southern states, which upset many people in the South. They believed that if Lincoln became president, he would eventually abolish slavery in all the states. Many Southerners made their money from agriculture, and huge farms called *plantations* required a great deal of labor. Southern plantation owners thought using slaves was the best way to fill that need. They thought ending slavery would destroy their whole way of life.

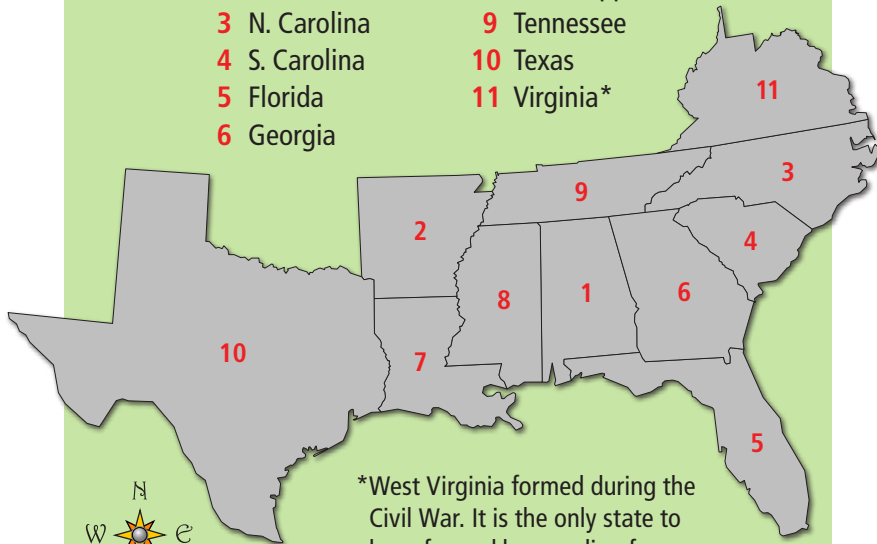
The economy was different in the industrial North, where factories and manufacturing were far more common. Northern factories did not use slave labor, and many people in those states thought that slavery should end.

In the months that followed Lincoln's election, eleven slave states declared their **secession** from the United States, banding together to form the Confederate States of America.

The Confederate States of America, 1861

Four slave states did not join the Confederacy: Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware.

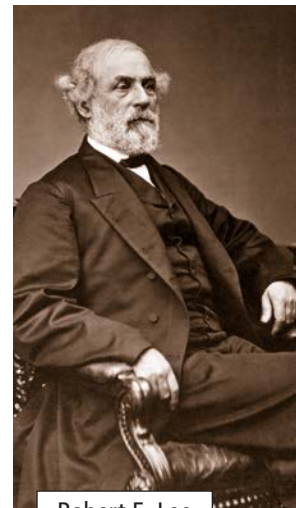
- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1 Alabama | 7 Louisiana |
| 2 Arkansas | 8 Mississippi |
| 3 N. Carolina | 9 Tennessee |
| 4 S. Carolina | 10 Texas |
| 5 Florida | 11 Virginia* |
| 6 Georgia | |



*West Virginia formed during the Civil War. It is the only state to have formed by seceding from a Confederate state (Virginia).

Lincoln took office in March 1861. The two sides went to war a month later. Soldiers who fought on the Confederate side were called rebels, or “Johnny Reb.” Residents of the Southern states fought hard for independence. The Northern states, which supported Lincoln and the United States, were referred to as the Union because they were dedicated to keeping the country together. Northern soldiers were nicknamed “Yankees” or “Yanks.” Many Northerners wanted to end slavery and fought passionately in what they called the “War of Southern Rebellion.”

Men (and sometimes boys) donned uniforms—Union blue, Confederate gray—and left their jobs, farms, and families to fight. Many thought the war would last only a few weeks or months.



Robert E. Lee

By the time of the Battle of Gettysburg, Lincoln had been president for two years. Confederate General Robert E. Lee had won many Civil War victories. He had led troops north into Pennsylvania through Virginia and Maryland. Yet despite Union losses, Lincoln had kept the nation together.

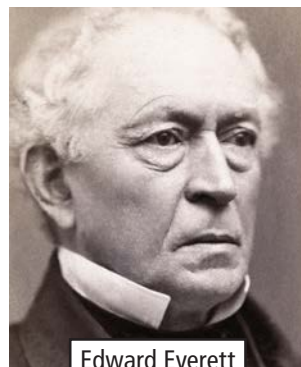


The Union marched more than 93,000 soldiers into Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and the Confederates more than 71,000. When the fighting ceased three days later, nearly 51,000 soldiers were dead, wounded, or missing. The casualty rate was thirty percent.

The Battle of Gettysburg ended Lee's northward advance; however, the battle brought **devastation** to both sides as well as the town. Public buildings and even private homes had to be used as hospitals for wounded soldiers. Every farm became a graveyard. Although the war continued for another year and a half, more men died at the Battle of Gettysburg than at any other Civil War battle.

The Gettysburg Address

Four months after the Battle of Gettysburg, on November 19, 1863, the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg was ready to be dedicated. It was the first national cemetery.



Edward Everett

President Lincoln was invited to give "a few appropriate remarks," but he wasn't the main speaker. Instead, one of the most popular speakers of the time, Edward Everett, gave the formal speech—one that lasted two hours.

The Other Speaker

Edward Everett was well known to the crowd at the dedication that day. A former U.S. congressman and senator, he had plenty of practice speaking before an audience. Everett got more practice at Gettysburg. He spoke for two hours—longer than many movies last today! While a speech of that length might sound overwhelming or boring to us, it was common in the 1860s.

The crowd applauded, but Everett praised the president for his short speech in a letter written the next day: "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 other words, Everett was impressed that the president said so much in so short a time. Lincoln wrote back that he was glad to learn that his speech was not a "total failure."

Days before the event, President Lincoln told a journalist that his speech would be “short, short, short.” He was true to his word, and wisely so. **Brevity** often affects us more powerfully than long-windedness. Why speak for two hours when two minutes will do? The modern phrase “less is more” conveys the same sentiment.



While additional considerations may have influenced the duration of his speech, the oratorical impact of the speech’s brevity cannot be overstated. Unquestionably, that is part of why we continue to read his speech today.

Though his speech was **concise**, Lincoln gave careful thought to his words on that solemn day. Witnesses describe Lincoln writing on the train to Gettysburg and even the morning of the ceremony. He continued to write until it was time to go to the cemetery.



President Abraham Lincoln in August 1863, a month after the Battle of Gettysburg

The Battle of Gettysburg marked a critical **juncture** in the war, but not many people realized this until much later. Even four months after the battle, few people understood its implications. Confederate leaders saw their loss as a defeat rather than a disaster. Some people in the North were sick of the war—they wanted to let the South go, and Lincoln couldn’t tell them that victory was just around the corner. He knew it was not.

That day at Gettysburg, Lincoln needed more than a good speech—he needed a great speech to rally the Union and keep it in the fight.

What Did President Lincoln Say?

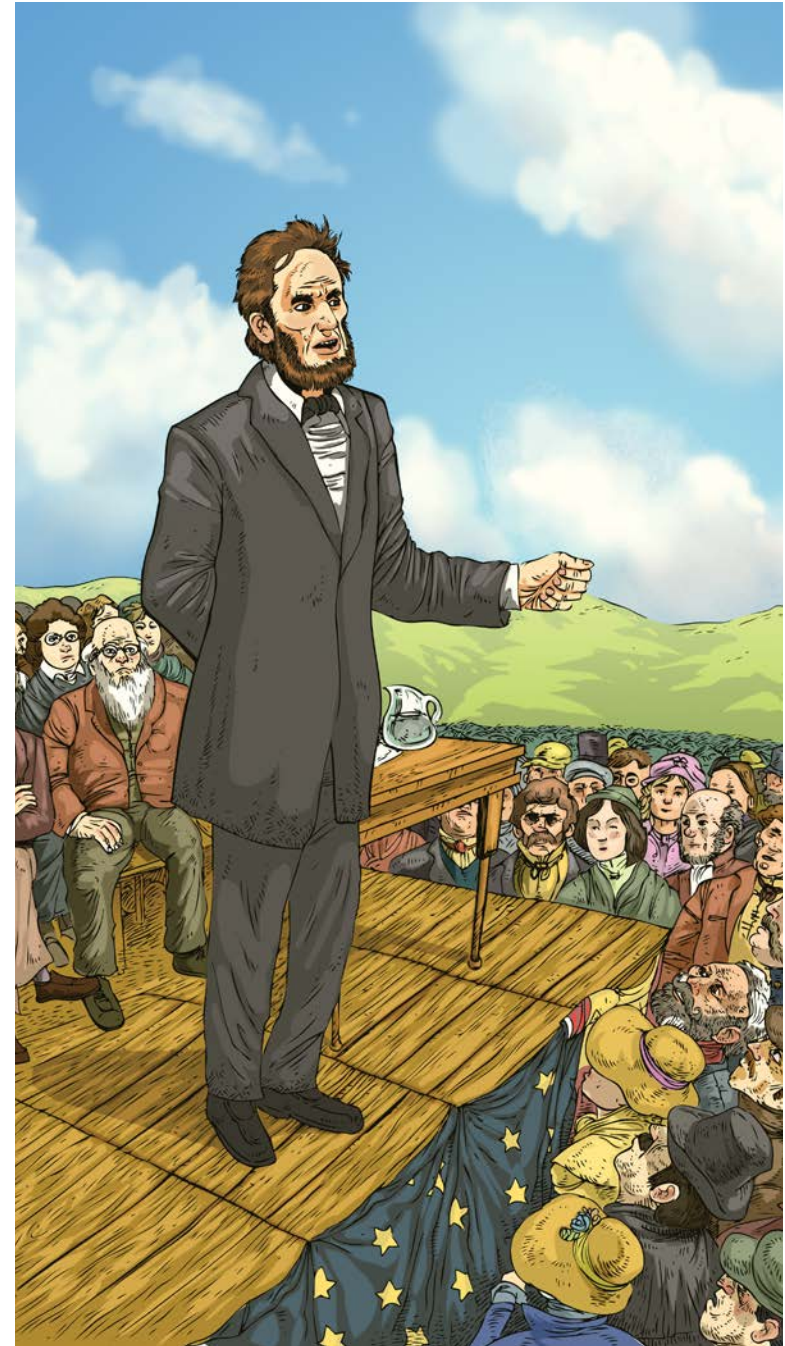
Today, the Gettysburg **Address** is considered one of the most inspiring speeches in American history. Since Lincoln gave his famous speech before recording technology was invented, there's no proof of his exact words. Reporters who were there wrote down what they heard and then sent it by telegraph to newspapers. What's more, five copies of the speech that were written in Lincoln's own hand exist, all slightly different from one another.

How Did the President Sound?

Because the Gettysburg Address was given in 1863, we don't have recordings of it, but many witnesses and reporters wrote about it. It is said that Lincoln spoke loudly and clearly but also slowly and carefully.

Lincoln's slow speech may have been for effect—to reflect how serious and solemn his words were. It also could have been because he knew his remarks were not very long.

We now know that Lincoln was coming down with a serious illness when he gave the Gettysburg Address. Most who saw Lincoln that day describe him as appropriately "sad" and "mournful." Lincoln's secretary also said his color was "ghastly" and his face "haggard." The president mentioned weakness and dizziness on the day and the morning before the famous speech. By the time Lincoln boarded the train home, he was feverish and had a severe headache. He was later diagnosed with smallpox.



The most popular version of the Gettysburg Address is the final copy. Lincoln even signed and titled this version, which is why it is the most often-reproduced copy and is considered to be worth almost half a million dollars. The original document hangs in the Lincoln Room of the White House.

Here is the text of that version:

*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 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 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.*

A Closer Look

Let's take Lincoln's address line by line to better understand what he said.

*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.*

When Lincoln says "four score and seven years ago," he means four sets of twenty years plus another seven. The year was 1863; eighty-seven years earlier was 1776, the year of the Declaration of Independence.

Lincoln takes a moment to remind his audience of its American history—not just the date when the nation was born, but more importantly, why it was born: so people could escape the **constraints** of an old political system (a monarchy) to enjoy both the freedom and opportunity of a new one (a democracy).

When Lincoln says, "our fathers brought forth . . . a new nation," he means the Founding Fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the line in the Declaration of Independence that Lincoln refers to: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

Yet in 1863, the South treated its people with glaring inequality—indeed, it failed to even recognize slaves as fully human. Lincoln subtly reminds his audience that they have a responsibility to uphold the ideal of equality that was the cornerstone of the country's founding.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.

Here Lincoln moves from the past to the present. He explains that the painful Civil War is "testing" the country's values and its fortitude. Whether the nation thinks that "all men are created equal"—or ought to be treated as equal—is being put to the test. As the North moved toward making this value a political reality, it put the nation under great strain (a nation "divided unto itself,") revealing the country's strengths and weaknesses.

We are met on a great battle-field of that war.

The Battle of Gettysburg was one of the bloodiest of the long war. Confederate leaders showed no signs of giving up, and Lincoln knew the war was far from over.



Gettysburg National Cemetery is the final resting place for more than 3,500 Union soldiers killed in the Battle of Gettysburg.

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.

Saying the soldiers “gave their lives” rather than “died” puts emphasis on their sacrifice for their country. Lincoln uses this phrasing to unite the mourners on both sides of the war for the sake of the country.

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.

First Lincoln says it’s right to dedicate part of the battlefield as a national cemetery. Then he changes course and uses repetition to make a stronger point.

Lincoln uses synonyms for *dedicate*: *hallow*, which means “to honor as holy,” and *consecrate*,

which means “to make sacred.” The president hasn’t changed his mind and decided that there can be no cemetery. He means that the soldiers’ deaths have already made the grounds as sacred and special as they possibly could be.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

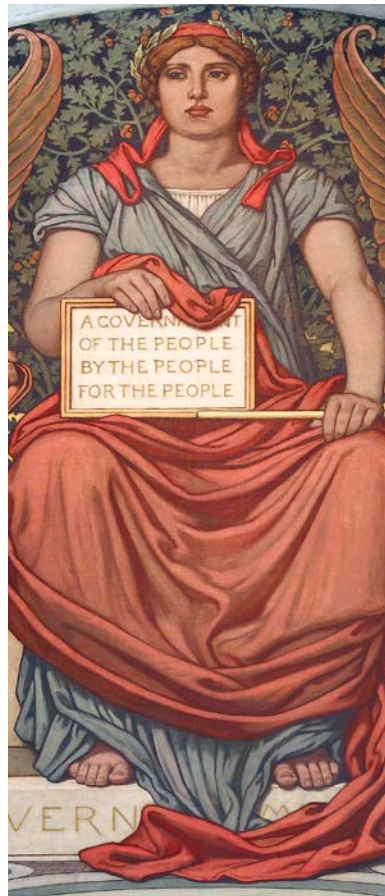
In a way, Lincoln is saying that actions speak louder than words. His choice of words is meaningful. By changing *will* to *can* in the second clause, he reinforces the idea that it’s not even possible that the battle of Gettysburg could ever be forgotten.

*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.*

Lincoln fills his audience with respect for the fallen soldiers, describing them as noble and honored. “The last full measure of devotion” translates as “their lives”—they gave everything, and have nothing more to give. He uses that respect to inspire listeners to recommit to their nation, its freedoms, and the “great task ahead”—winning the war, ending slavery, and saving the United States of America.

The speech ends with the most famous part: “that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Here, Lincoln again uses repetition but with a difference. Rather than using synonyms, Lincoln varies one phrase with simple prepositions to remind his audience of what the government of the United States is all about: people.

Detail of Elihu Vedder’s mural *Government* (1896) in the Library of Congress. The tablet is inscribed with Lincoln’s famous phrase.



Life After Gettysburg

Today, the handwritten copies of the Gettysburg Address are national treasures. The speech is also carved into the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., where visitors are inspired by it every day. Yet we’re not certain what the audience thought of his address on that day in 1863.

The Lincoln Memorial



Designed to resemble a Greek Temple, the Lincoln Memorial opened in 1922. Forty-one years later, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech from its steps. Great leaders like Lincoln and King have shown the power that words and speeches have to inspire change in America.

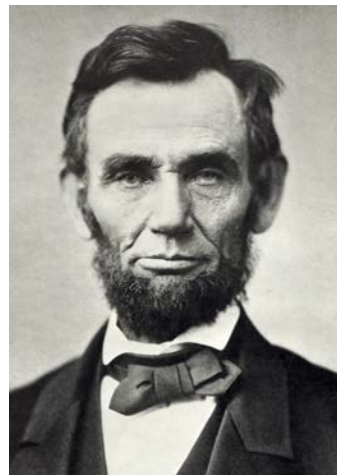
This 19-foot statue of Abraham Lincoln sits in the Memorial’s central hall. (If the statue were standing, it would be 28 feet tall.)

Their reaction to Lincoln's speech was quiet. Some say there was delayed, scattered applause, barely enough to be polite. One newspaper's editorial merely commented, "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 be no more repeated or thought of."

Others describe the scene as hushed with "a dignified silence." Some historians say there was no applause because the audience was so impressed. After all, in just ten sentences, Lincoln had summarized the war and the spirit of a nation.

Just as the battle's significance emerged over time, so has posterity's appreciation of Lincoln's famous speech. People revere Lincoln's speech today because he preserved a vision of a nation founded on and dedicated to equality. He rescued not just the war effort, but also the ideal that all those men died for. Americans have been inspired by that vision ever since.

The sixteenth president of the United States is, for many people today, the most beloved president of all.



Glossary

address (<i>n.</i>)	a formal speech (p. 13)
adversaries (<i>n.</i>)	enemies or opponents (p. 4)
brevity (<i>n.</i>)	the quality of expressing something in few words or lasting for only a short time (p. 11)
conceived (<i>v.</i>)	thought of; imagined (p. 17)
concise (<i>adj.</i>)	consisting of as few words as possible; brief (p. 11)
constraints (<i>n.</i>)	limits or restrictions on actions or ideas; the state of being limited or restricted (p. 17)
devastation (<i>n.</i>)	great damage or destruction (p. 9)
juncture (<i>n.</i>)	a particular point in a process or in time; a place where things come together (p. 12)
oblivion (<i>n.</i>)	the state of being completely forgotten or unknown (p. 23)
perish (<i>v.</i>)	to die, especially in a sudden, violent, or unexpected way (p. 20)
revered (<i>adj.</i>)	deeply respected or held in high esteem (p. 5)
secession (<i>n.</i>)	the act of formally separating from or leaving an organization or government (p. 7)