

# The Gettysburg Address

*A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book*  
*Word Count: 2,125*

## Connections

### Writing and Art

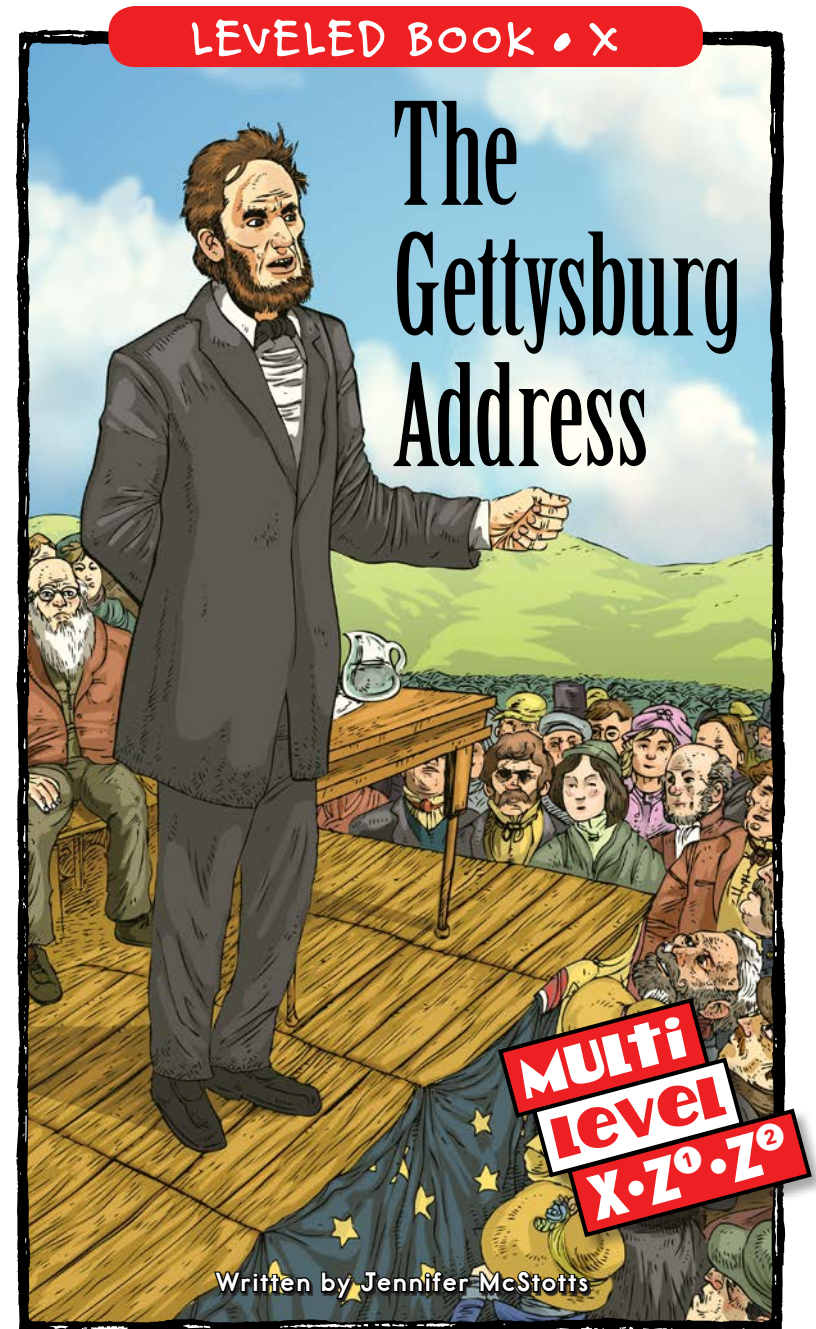
Imagine you are Abraham Lincoln. Write your own speech for the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg. Deliver your speech to your class.

### 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



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## Focus Question

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

## Words to Know

address	devotion
commit	inspiring
conceived	perish
dedicated	proposition
detract	resolve
devastation	secession

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Level X Leveled Book  
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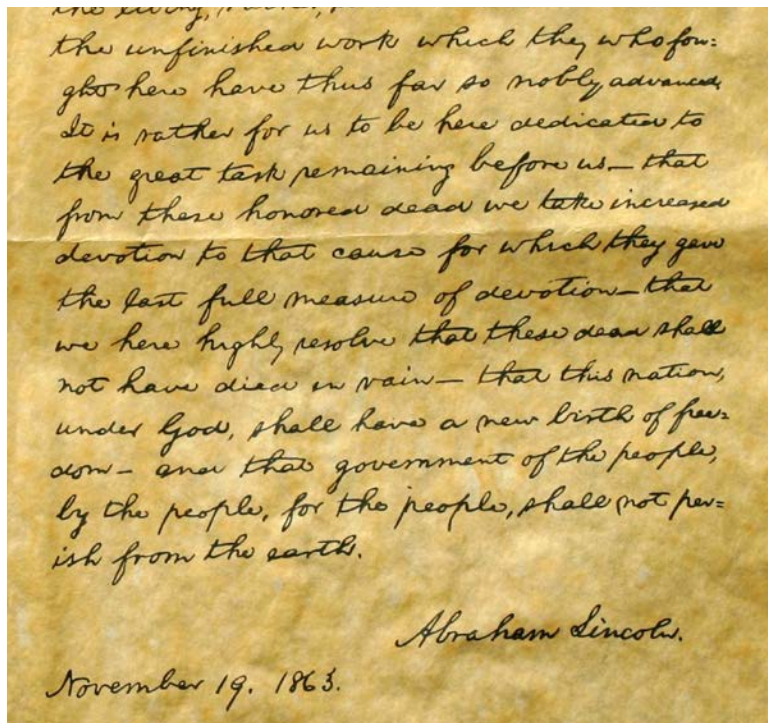
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### Correlation

#### LEVEL X

Fountas & Pinnell	S
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40





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

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## Brother Against Brother

Fighting between brothers and sisters 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 as your enemy.

The American Civil War was a long 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 wars. Some were close friends who found themselves on opposite sides for the first time.

The Union was made up of the Northern states, and the Confederacy was 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 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.



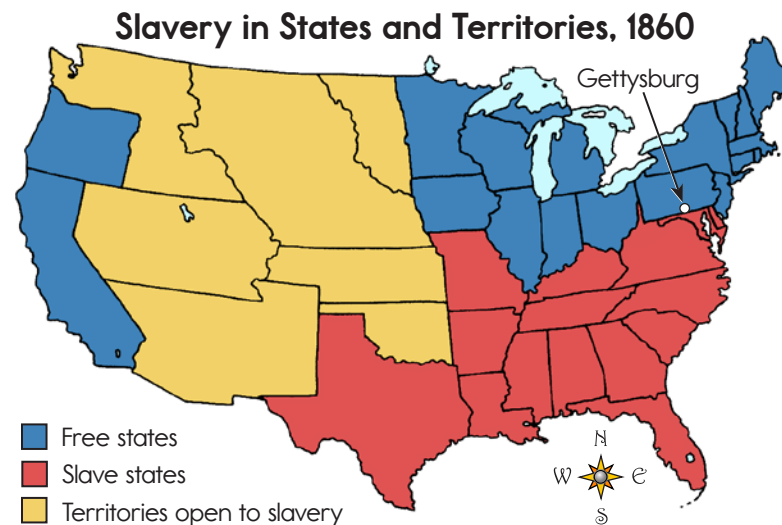
Winfield Scott Hancock



On the morning of the first day of this 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 leaving Germany for the United States. The two men hugged, happy to see each other. They parted when the Confederate brother was taken away, never to meet again. Rudolf was killed in action that afternoon.

How did we end up at war, with brothers fighting against brothers? Why is the Battle of Gettysburg famous?



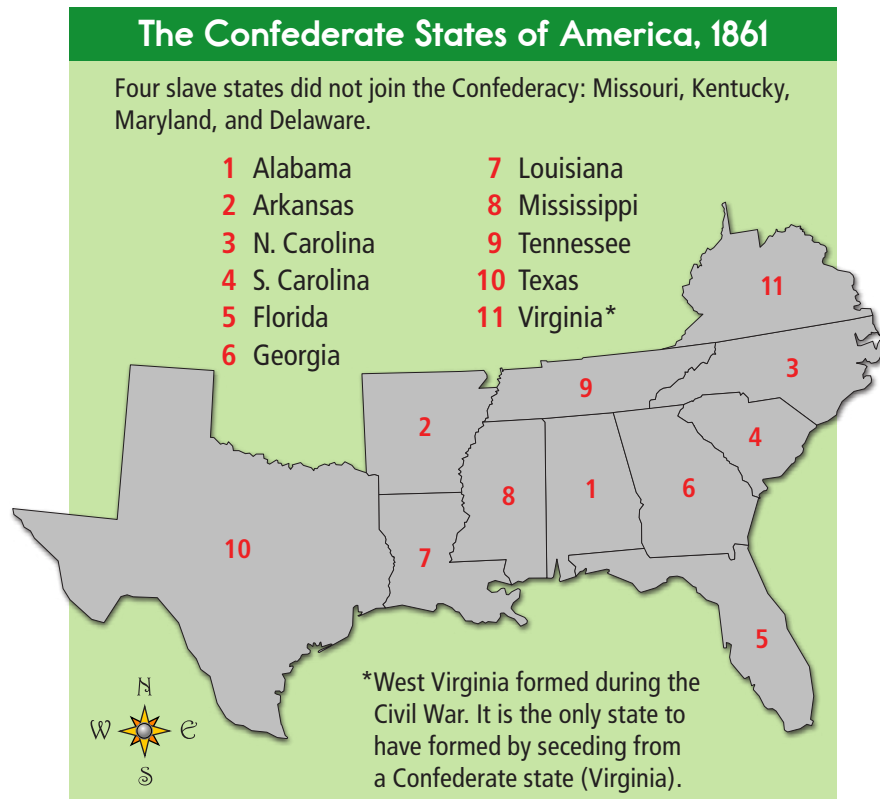
### President Lincoln and the Civil War

At the time Abraham Lincoln ran for president in 1860, slavery was legal in fifteen Southern “slave states” and illegal in eighteen Northern “free states.” Many slaves tried to escape north to become free.

Lincoln was against allowing slavery to spread beyond the Southern states. This upset lots of people in the South. They believed that if Lincoln became president, he would eventually end slavery in all the states. Many Southerners made their money from farming, 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.

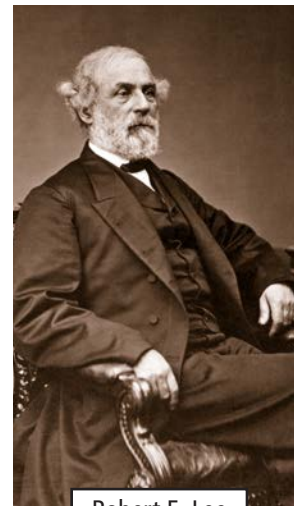
Things were different in the North. Northern states had lots of factories. Those factories did not use slave labor; many people in those states thought that slavery should end.

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected president. In the months that followed, eleven slave states declared their **secession** from the United States. They no longer wanted to be part of this country. Instead, they formed the Confederate States of America.



Lincoln took office as president in March of 1861. The two sides went to war a month later. Soldiers who fought on the Confederate side were called rebels, or “Johnny Reb.” The Southern states fought hard for independence. The Northern states supporting Lincoln and the United States were called the Union because they were **dedicated** to keeping the country together above all else. Their 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) put on 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 and 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 stopped three days later, nearly 51,000 soldiers were dead, wounded, or missing. For every ten soldiers who fought in the battle, three were hurt or killed.

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 the wounded. Every farm was a graveyard. Although the war continued for another year and a half, no other Civil War battle killed more men than the Battle of Gettysburg.

## The Gettysburg Address

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



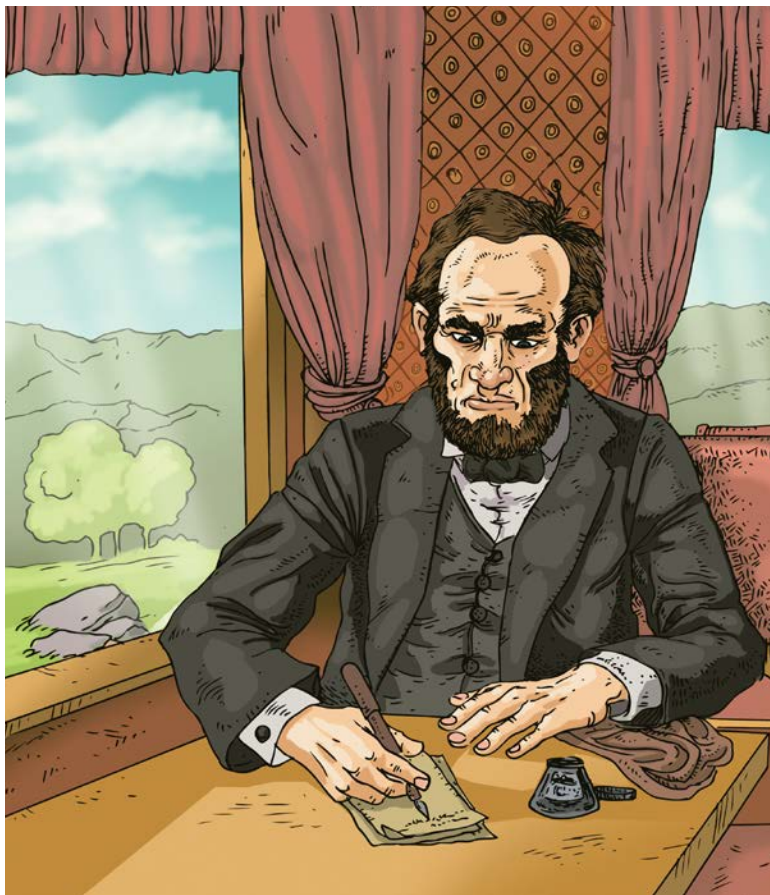
Edward Everett

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.” True to his word, the president spoke for only two minutes. Still, Lincoln gave careful thought to his words on this 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 turning point in the war, but even four months later, few people understood this. Confederate leaders saw their loss as a defeat rather than a disaster. Some 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.

Lincoln had to find a way to keep the Union strong and in the fight. That day at Gettysburg, he needed more than a good speech—he needed a great speech.



## What Did President Lincoln Say?

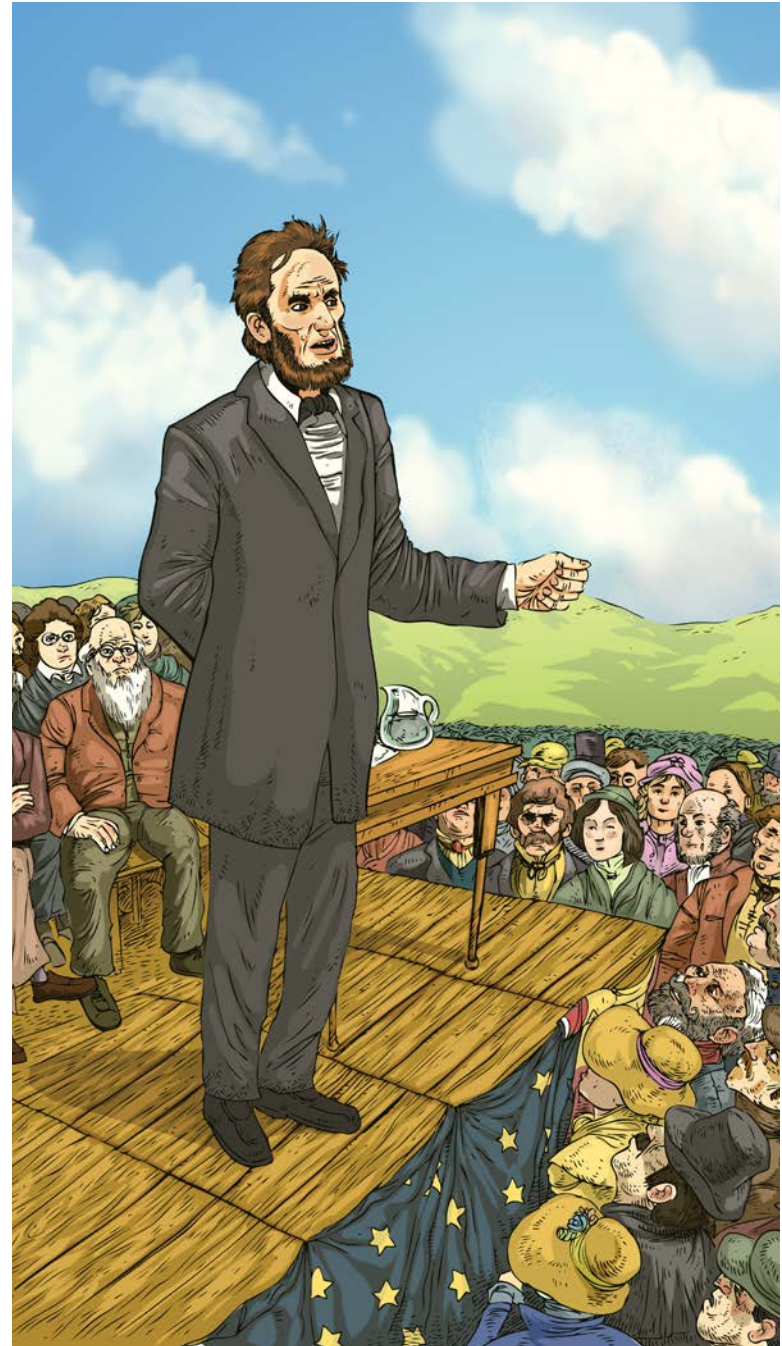
Today, the Gettysburg **Address** is considered one of the most **inspiring** speeches in American history. Since Lincoln gave his famous speech before tape recorders were invented, however, there's no proof of his exact words. Reporters at the cemetery wrote down what they heard and then sent it by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

### 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 fifth and last one. 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. It 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, or eighty, years plus another seven. The year was 1863; eighty-seven years before was 1776, the year of the Declaration of Independence.

When Lincoln says, "our fathers brought forth . . . a new nation," he means the Founding Fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson, who established the United States of America. Jefferson 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."

*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, revealing its strengths and weaknesses by putting it under strain.



Gettysburg National Cemetery is the final resting place for more than 3,500 Union soldiers killed in the Battle of Gettysburg. In the 1870s, the remains of 3,200 Confederate soldiers were sent to cemeteries in the South. A few Confederates do remain at Gettysburg, along with soldiers from later wars.



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

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

*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 was trying 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 his greater point.

Lincoln uses synonyms for *dedicate*: *hallow*, which means “to honor as holy,” and *consecrate*, which means “to make sacred.” The president doesn’t change his mind and decide that there can be no cemetery. He means that the soldiers’ deaths have already made the grounds as sacred and special as they can 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.

*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. He uses that respect to inspire listeners to **commit** again 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 again, Lincoln varies one phrase with simple prepositions to remind us what our government 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. Yet the audience reaction to Lincoln’s speech that day was quiet.

## 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.

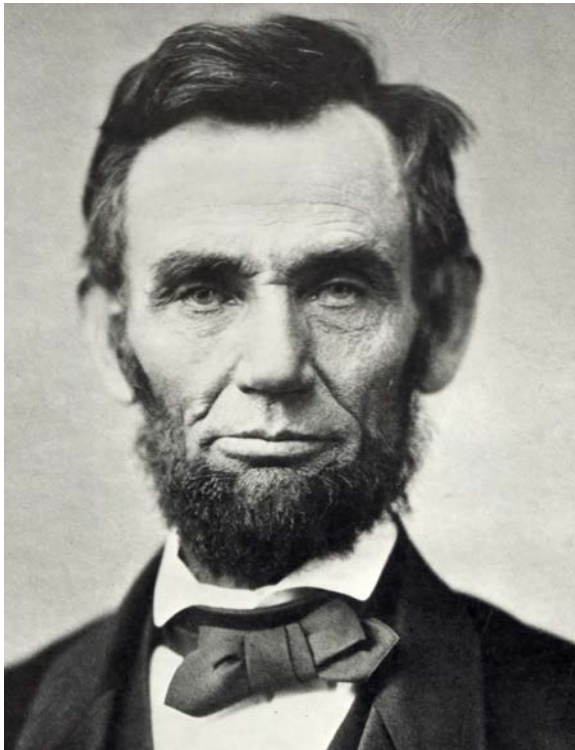
This 19-foot statue of Abraham Lincoln sits in the Memorial’s central hall. (If the statue were standing, it would be 28 feet tall.)



Some say there was delayed, scattered applause, barely enough to be polite. 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 not only the war but also the spirit of a nation.

We don’t know what the audience thought of his address that day. We only know that Americans have been inspired by it ever since.

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



## Glossary

<b>address</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a formal speech (p. 13)
<b>commit</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to pledge or dedicate oneself to someone or something (p. 21)
<b>conceived</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	thought of; imagined (p. 17)
<b>dedicated</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	committed to something; set aside for a special purpose (p. 8)
<b>detract</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to lessen the importance or value of someone or something (p. 19)
<b>devastation</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	great damage or destruction (p. 9)
<b>devotion</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	great love and commitment (p. 20)
<b>inspiring</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	encouraging a person to act (p. 13)
<b>perish</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to die, especially in a sudden, violent, or unexpected way (p. 20)
<b>proposition</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an idea to be thought about, explored, or proved (p. 17)
<b>resolve</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to decide; to settle a disagreement or find a solution to a problem (p. 20)
<b>secession</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the act of formally separating from or leaving an organization or government (p. 7)