

Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (1863)

President Lincoln presented his memorable Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863, at the dedication of a national cemetery on the battlefield of Gettysburg. His eloquent words express his hopes for a war-torn nation.

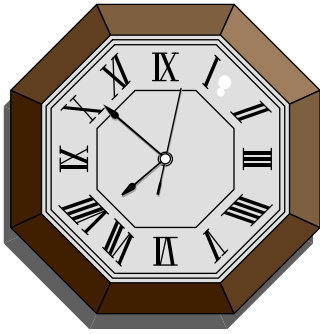
Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

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, 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 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.

Clip Art from Microsoft Office

Text taken from McDougal Littell's America's Past and Promise



Two Memorable Minutes

"Depth, not length, is important." 51,000 were killed, wounded, or missing at the Battle of Gettysburg. A national cemetery was proposed and a consecration service was planned to dedicate the cemetery. A great orator Edward Everett who was known for his cultured words, patriotic fervor, and public appeal was invited to give the dedication speech. He accepted; however, President Lincoln, who was not expected to leave the capitol during wartime, also announced that he would attend the ceremonies. Out of courtesy, the commissioners asked President Lincoln to deliver "a few appropriate remarks."

The President worried over his words and confided to a friend that his speech was not going well. He had dinner the night before the ceremonies with all the dignitaries, but excused himself early to go back to his room to work on his speech. At midnight, a telegram arrived from his wife letting him know that their son Tad was not doing well. They had already lost two of their four sons.

About nine o'clock the next morning, Lincoln copied his address onto two small pages. After the invocation, Everett was introduced. His words were eloquent, and Lincoln stared in fascination. After one hour and fifty-seven minutes, the orator took his seat. At two o'clock in the afternoon, President Lincoln was introduced. As he stood he turned to his Secretary and said, "They won't like it." He never moved his feet or made any gestures with his hands, as did Everett. In no more than two minutes after he had begun he stopped, but people were listening on tiptoe.

Over one hundred twenty years have passed and no one can recall one line of Everett's speech. Yet, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address has become the most memorable two minutes in U.S. history. Depth, not length, is important!

Taken from Charles Swindoll's The Quest for Character. Multnomah Press, Portland, Oregon. 1987.

The idea of an “Economy of Words” is taken from an FCAT WRITING workshop in which the overuse and inappropriate use of adjectives is illustrated as one reason for lower scores on the FCAT WRITING test.

FCAT WRITING Prompt

Writing Situation

Many people criticized Lincoln’s speech when they heard it or read it. Most of these people were Confederates. Lincoln never names the two great issues of the war—preserving the Union and ending slavery—yet they are clearly implied in his speech.

Writing Directions

If you were a Confederate during this era, how would you respond to Lincoln’s speech?

Now write to explain why you would criticize this speech based on its language and ideas.

Any prompt can be used or written for this activity depending on what you are studying at the time.

