The Gettysburg Address: An American Treasure
Lesson Plan for Website

Title: The Gettysburg Address: An American Treasure
Author: Adapted from lesson by Dr. Donald Roberts, ExplorePA History
School: 
Target audience: High School
Estimated Time: Two days

Overview:
Students will find evidence of the development of the ideals expressed in the Gettysburg Address in Lincoln’s speeches and letters, and in Republican Party statements. In a persuasive speech, they will borrow one or more of the ideals Lincoln used in the Gettysburg Address and then apply them to the current political, social, and/or economic realities of the 21st century. This lesson focuses on 1859 to 1865.

Objectives:
Students will:
1. Demonstrate an understanding of the key concepts expressed in the Gettysburg Address.
2. Categorize the concepts and political ideals presented in the Gettysburg Address.
3. Use effective research skills to locate political ideals in other primary sources created by Abraham Lincoln.
4. Apply conceptual information found in Lincoln’s writings to create a persuasive speech on a current topic.
5. Demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.

Standards of Learning:
Virginia and United States History
Skills: VUS.1. The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to
   a) identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary source documents, records, and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art to increase understanding of events and life in the United States;
   f) develop skills in discussion, debate, and persuasive writing with respect to enduring issues and determine how divergent viewpoints have been addressed and reconciled;
   h) interpret the significance of excerpts from famous speeches and other documents.

Content: VUS.7. Civil War and Reconstruction: 1860 to 1877. The student will demonstrate knowledge of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era and its importance as a major turning point in American history by
   b) analyzing the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the principles outlined in the Gettysburg Address.
Historical Background:
Lincoln’s skill with the English language permitted him to craft a powerful ten-sentence statement, but the speech is more than the arrangement of words. The words speak of ideas, not specifics of the recent battle.

The ideas were not new, but there is nothing wrong or un-American with that. In fact, you could argue that Declaration of Independence was the product of political theorists and philosophers of the Enlightenment, not Thomas Jefferson’s imagination.

So, too, were the words in the Gettysburg Address. The ideas so persuasively expressed on November 19, 1863, were not new. They were embedded in the Republican Party platforms of 1860 and 1864. They also found expression in other speeches that Lincoln gave during his political career, both before and after the Gettysburg Address, as well as in personal letters and other primary sources.

For additional background see Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of the Civil War [link]