

*Resource 17:*  
**Readers  
 Theatre—  
 "Gettysburg and  
 Mr. Lincoln's  
 Speech"**

## **Gettysburg and Mr. Lincoln's Speech**

Script developed by Rasinski, T. (2004). Kent State University.  
 1304.109h/326.091

**Parts (5): Narrators 1 and 2, Southern Soldier, Northern Soldier, Abraham Lincoln**

**Possible additional materials:** A map, blue and gray caps for the soldiers, stovepipe hat for Mr. Lincoln

**Narrator 1:** The Civil War was a tragic time in America. It pitted the southern states against the northern states.

**Narrator 2:** It also pitted brother against brother and friend against friend.

**Northern Soldier:** I fight to end slavery and to make our country whole again—although we may come from many states, we are one nation and always will be one nation.

**Southern Soldier:** I fight against the Northerners who try to impose their will on the South, telling us that we have to put an end to slavery, telling us that we cannot live our lives the way that we wish.

**Narrator 1:** The war was a bloody one. More soldiers died in the Civil War than in any other war that the United States has ever taken part in.

**Narrator 2:** Through the first few years of the Civil War, the southern or Confederate army, under General Robert E. Lee, won battle after battle against the North.

**Southern Soldier:** One of us rebels can whip the tar out of ten Yankees!

**Northern Soldier:** We are good soldiers and we're ready to fight. Our generals, however, are no match for the confederate generals—Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

**Narrator 1:** By 1863 General Lee felt strong enough to invade Pennsylvania, an important northern state. By taking the war to the north, Lee thought that he could convince the North to give up its attempt to reunite the states and end slavery.

**Narrator 2:** The Union Army under General George Meade knew that it had to stop the Confederates. It met up with the southern army during the first three days of July, 1863 in a small Pennsylvania town called...

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**All:** GETTYSBURG!

**Narrator 1:** For three days, under the hot summer sun the two huge armies struggled.

**Southern Soldier:** Long live the Confederacy!

**Northern Soldier:** Union forever! Rally round the flag boys!

**Narrator 2:** The battle swung back and forth over those blistering hot days. It finally ended in a failed attempt by the confederates to break through the line of Northern soldiers.

**Southern Soldier:** We called it Pickett's Charge. It was a disaster. Thousands of gray clad soldiers were cut down in the murderous fire coming from the Yankee lines.

**Narrator 1:** Pickett's Charge failed and Lee knew he had lost the battle. He knew he had to withdraw his army to Virginia, his home state... friendlier territory.

**Narrator 2:** And so Lee moved his battered and defeated army from Pennsylvania on the evening of July third. He had to leave so quickly that many of the dead and wounded southern soldiers were left lying on the battlefield.

**Southern Soldier:** We didn't want to leave our fallen brothers lying on Northern soil. But we had to retreat south or risk being annihilated by the victorious Yankees.

**Narrator 1:** Meade's Army of the Potomac followed Lee out of Pennsylvania, hoping to catch up with him and complete the destruction of the southern army. He too left many of his dead lying on the Gettysburg Battlefield. All told, nearly forty-thousand soldiers, northern and southern were killed, wounded or missing at Gettysburg.

**Northern Soldier:** We tasted sweet victory at last. Now we wanted to finally put an end to this bloody war. We had to chase the enemy wherever he may go.

**Narrator 2:** But for the people living in Gettysburg, the battle was far from over. When the few thousand residents of Gettysburg returned to their homes, they were greeted by the sight and stench of death.

**Narrator 1:** Imagine the scene... Thousands of bodies of dead soldiers and animals, lying out in the middle of the battlefield and in shallow graves under the broiling July sun. Something had to be done quickly to prevent the spread of disease from all the dead and decaying bodies.

**Narrator 2:** In previous battles, bodies of dead soldiers were sent to their hometowns for burial.

**Narrator 1:** But this was not possible at Gettysburg. There were simply too many dead and not enough workers to

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prepare the bodies for transport home. It would take too long.

**Narrator 2:** The governor of Pennsylvania then made an important decision: the dead soldiers would be buried in a new cemetery in Gettysburg. Burying the bodies in Gettysburg could be accomplished quickly. The threat from the spread of disease could be averted. All the northern states were asked to contribute money for the cemetery for the Gettysburg dead.

**Northern Soldier:** And so, from July to November, in that year 1863, workers gathered the bodies of our fallen comrades and buried them in the new cemetery.

**Southern Soldier:** Even some of our southern martyrs were buried at Gettysburg.

**Narrator 1:** By November, the cemetery was finished. By November, the country understood just how important the battle of Gettysburg was. No more would the confederate army threaten the northern states. The confederacy had reached its high mark and was now in decline.

**Narrator 2:** Thus it was decided that a dedication for the cemetery should take place to honor those northern soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice at Gettysburg.

**Narrator 1:** Dignitaries from around the country were invited. President Lincoln came. The greatest orator, or speech maker, of the day, Edward Everett, was also asked to give a grand speech. He spoke for over two hours.

**Narrator 2:** Those who came to the dedication were tired and wanted to go home by the time that Everett had finished his long speech.

**Narrator 1:** But then President Lincoln was asked to make a few brief remarks.

**Narrator 2:** Slowly, and so very deliberately, President Lincoln stood up and made his way to the podium. Quietly, he faced the crowd of public dignitaries and ordinary citizens standing in front of him. Somberly, he looked over the countless rows of dead soldiers behind him. And, in just 272 words, Mr. Lincoln helped all of us, those living in 1863 and those of us alive today, understand what is special about our country and why it could not be broken up into free and slave, Union and Confederate, north and south.

**Lincoln:** *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.***

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**Narrator 1:** Lincoln uses words from the Declaration of Independence to remind us why the United States was founded in the first place.

**Lincoln:** 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 the 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 beyond our poor power to add or detract.

**Narrator 2:** Although the dedication that Lincoln was speaking at was meant to make this land special, Lincoln knew, and he told the audience, that the brave soldiers who fought here that summer had made it much more special through their actions than by anything Lincoln could say or do.

**Lincoln:** 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.

**Narrator 1:** Although the soldiers who died here saved the Union, much fighting, and much hard work still needs to be done before the nation is made whole again.

**Narrator 2:** Lincoln realized that the United States was a grand and never-tried-before experiment for all the world to see—can a government created by its citizens and run by its citizens truly work? The world was watching and waiting to find out.

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**Lincoln: 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.**

Permission is granted to duplicate this script for classroom use.  
Timothy Rasinski.

