**Gettysburg Address**

**Background Information**

**Directions:** Preview the questions. Read the text while highlighting key ideas that help answer the questions.

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 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.

1. Why does Lincoln begin his eulogy to the soldiers buried at Gettysburg with a reference to “Four score and seven years ago”?

1. The Declaration of Independence says “all men are created equal” is a “self-evident” truth, suggesting that human equality is obvious to any unbiased person. Why does Lincoln at Gettysburg call human equality a “proposition,” meaning something that needs to be proven? (Hint: What does the Civil War suggest about American convictions regarding human equality?)
2. What does Lincoln say is the best way for the living to honor the dead at Gettysburg? (Hint: How does Lincoln use the idea of dedication to shift his audience from the ceremony at the battlefield cemetery to the audience’s responsibility once the ceremony is over?)
3. What is “the new birth of freedom” Lincoln calls for, and how does it differ from the nation’s original birth? (Hint: Who were the main beneficiaries of the original birth of freedom in 1776, and who does Lincoln think will experience the new birth of freedom if the federal military wins the war?)

**Criticism of Gettysburg Address**

**Background:** Abraham Lincoln faced some criticism by journalists for his Gettysburg Address. Southern journalists clearly opposed his speech to the strong delineations he makes between through implication about the North being the force for good. However, some Northern journalists criticized his words.

“THE PRESIDENT AT GETTYSBURG”

Chicago Times Editorial, “The President at Gettysburg” (November 23, 1863)

It is not supposed by any one, we believe, that Mr. Lincoln is possessed of much polish in manners or conversation. His adherents, however, claim for him an average amount of common sense, and more than an ordinarily kind and generous heart. We have failed to distinguish his pre-eminence in the latter, and apprehend the former to be somewhat mythical, but imagine that his deficiencies herein being less palpable than in other qualities constituting a statesman have led his admirers greatly to overestimate him in these regards. . . .

But aside from the ignorant rudeness manifest in the President’s exhibition of Dawdleism\* at Gettysburg,—and which was an insult at least to the memories of a part of the dead, whom he was there professedly to honor,—in its misstatement of the cause for which they died, it was a perversion of history so flagrant that the most extended charity cannot regard it as otherwise than willful. That, if we do him injustice, our readers may make the needed correction, we append a portion of his eulogy on the dead at Gettysburg:

“Four score and ten [sic] years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a nation consecrated [sic] to liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. [Cheers.] Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any other [sic] nation so consecrated [sic] and so dedicated can long endure.”

As a refutation of this statement, we copy certain clauses in the Federal constitution:

“Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included in this Union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other persons.”

“The migration or importation of such persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year 1808, but a tax or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person.”

“No amendment to the constitution, made prior to 1808, shall affect the preceding clause.”

“No person held to service or labor in one State under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.”

Do these provisions in the constitution dedicate the nation to “the proposition that all men are created equal”? Mr. Lincoln occupies his present position by virtue of this constitution, and is sworn to the maintenance and enforcement of these provisions. It was to uphold this constitution, and the Union created by it, that our officers and soldiers gave their lives at Gettysburg. How dared he, then, standing on their graves, misstate the cause for which they died, and libel the statesmen who founded the government? They were men possessing too much self-respect to declare that negroes were their equals, or were entitled to equal privileges.

\* Dawdleism – to “dawdle” means to idle or waste time; despite the brevity of Lincoln’s remarks, the author apparently thought Lincoln displayed poor etiquette by bringing a partisan interpretation of the war into a eulogy that should have focused on honoring the dead soldiers at the Gettysburg cemetery.

1. In the second paragraph of the editorial, what were the author’s criticisms of Lincoln’s address?
2. What does the author want to show when he quotes passages from the Constitution and then derides Lincoln for talking about equality of all human beings in his Gettysburg remarks?