

SEMINAR PLAN: “The Gettysburg Address” (1863)

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

Ideas and Values: citizenship, democracy, sacrifice, social contract

Pre-Seminar

Content –

Post the speech in the classroom prior to the seminar.

As you begin pre-seminar, state directly that the purpose is to gain understanding of the ideas and values in the text, among others: *citizenship, democracy, sacrifice, social contract*.

Read (or have a student read) the text aloud as all other students follow along reading silently. Assign participants the task of taking two column notes while reading the text a second time. Have them set up for two column notes in this way:

Word or phrase from the text	Your thought or feeling
>	
>	
>	

Discuss the following background information:

- ☞ The Gettysburg Address is the most famous speech by Abraham Lincoln and one of the best known speeches in American history.
- ☞ It was delivered at the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery in Gettysburg, PA on the afternoon of Thursday, November 19, 1863, four and a half months after the Union army defeated the Confederates at the decisive Battle of Gettysburg.
- ☞ It followed a long and rambling oration by a famous speaker of the day (several hours long) and was so short and so direct that Lincoln had finished speaking and returned to his seat while most of the audience was still settling to listen.

Remind the seminar participants that this is a difficult but also an extraordinarily important text that will require their full attention. Anticipate that much of the discussion will focus on what key words mean.

Consider assigning students strategic seating—mix them up based on gender and habits of discussion. Have students take 3-4 minutes to share with a partner, one item from their two column notes.

Process –

Be sure participants are settled and seated where everyone can see each others' face. Then relay...

"A Paideia Seminar is a thoughtful discussion where we work with others to understand important ideas.

"The main purpose for discussion the Gettysburg Address is to better understand democracy and citizenship—to better understand what we think of these ideas as well as how others view them.

"During this discussion, we're really going to practice looking at the person speaking.

"You do not need to raise your hands in order to speak; try to stay focused on the main speaker and wait your turn to talk.

"We'll also practice building on what others say-- agree and disagree in a courteous, thoughtful manner.

"As the facilitator, my job is to ask challenging, open-ended questions. I will take some notes to keep up with the talk turns and flow of ideas.

"Now, let's do a little self-assessment. Based on our other discussions, I'm going to suggest that our group goal for today is TOLOOK AT THE PERSON SPEAKING.

[Display the group goal for all to see.]

"Now think about how you usually participate in our seminars. What would be a good goal for you today? Maybe you'd like to choose from one of these:

Use others' names

Refer to the text

Build on others' ideas

Keep an open mind

Ask an open-ended question

Please write your personal goal at the top of your copy of the text."

Seminar Questions

Opening –

Have someone read the speech aloud one more time.

Of the 266 words contained in this version of the “Gettysburg Address,” which *one* do you think is most significant? (round-robin response)

Why? (spontaneous discussion)

Core –

Lincoln opens the address by saying that America is a nation “conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” He follows by describing the Civil War as “testing whether ... any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure.” What does he mean? What forces would prevent a nation dedicated to equality from surviving?

Why does Lincoln say that they “cannot dedicate, ... cannot consecrate, ... cannot hallow this ground” when that is precisely the purpose of the ceremony?

Lincoln knew that, if popular, his speech would be reprinted in countless newspapers across America, in both the North and South. Beyond those who were physically present at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863, to whom do you think he was speaking? Why?

Based on the text, what do you think Lincoln wanted his audience to believe or do as a result of his speech?

Closing –

Lincoln closes the Gettysburg Address by challenging his audience: “it is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us.” Were he alive today, what “great task” do you think Lincoln would challenge us with?

In what ways could we rise to the challenge?

Post-Seminar

Process – Assess individual and group participation in seminar discussion:

“Thank you for your focused and thoughtful participation in our seminar.

“Take a few minutes to reflect on your relative success in meeting the personal process goal you set prior to beginning the discussion. Please review the goal you set for yourself and briefly reflect in writing to what extent you met the goal. In addition, note why you think you performed as you did. (Pause for reflection.)

“How did we do as a group? Let’s rate our seminar from 0-5, with 5 meaning perfect and 0 meaning we really need improvement. With a hand signal, how would you rate our seminar for today?

Now, would someone say why you gave us a rating of --- 3, 5, 0?

Our group goal was to LOOK AT THE PERSON SPEAKING. How did we do with that specifically?

(Pause for discussion.)

“Now would some volunteer to share your self-assessment and reflection....?”

(Invite students to share how they did as individuals and help them identify an appropriate goal for next seminar)

“What should we work on together next seminar? As always, our goal is continuous improvement: both as individual seminar participants and as citizens. Thanks again for your participation.”

Content –

After the seminar, divide the participants in groups of three to five students each and assign the various groups different perspectives from which to respond to the speech. They are to pretend that they were present in the audience on November 19, 1863 and heard Lincoln deliver the original “Gettysburg Address”:

- ☞ A wounded veteran of the Union army*
- ☞ An escaped slave living in the North*
- ☞ A Southern sympathizer who believes in a separate Southern nation*
- ☞ The mother of a son killed in the battle*
- ☞ An anti-war activist from the North*
- ☞ A Congressman who is Lincoln’s political enemy*
- ☞ A wounded veteran of the Southern army.*

Have the groups reread the Gettysburg Address looking for specific statements that would elicit a response from their perspective. Have them *compose* a letter to a friend who shares their perspective, describing Lincoln’s speech. (Use a standard writing rubric for letter writing and distribute along with this assignment.)

Seminar Plan Form

Text:

Ideas and Values:

Pre-Seminar

Content — Present relevant background information:

Process — Prepare participants to participate in seminar discussion:

Seminar

Opening — Identify main ideas from the text:

Core — Focus/analyze textual details:

Closing — Personalize and apply the textual ideas:

Post-Seminar

Process — Assess individual and group participation in seminar discussion:

Content — Extend application of textual and discussion ideas:

Paideia Seminar Text Rubric

This rubric was developed by a team of teachers who are experienced in selecting seminar texts for a variety of settings. Use this tool to establish the quality of a text by regarding “3” as indicating a strong text on that characteristic and “1” as indicating a weak text on that characteristic. For best results, involve several evaluators in applying this (or any) rubric.

Criteria	3	2	1
Ideas and Values	Addresses multiple ideas and values	Addresses some ideas and values	Addresses an idea or value
Degree of Challenge	Few participants comprehend without assistance	Some participants comprehend without assistance	All participants comprehend without assistance
Relevance	Clearly related to the curriculum and/or students' lives	Somewhat related to the curriculum and/or students' lives	Limited in relation to the curriculum and/or students' lives
Ambiguity	Is open to a wide variety of interpretations	Is open to some variety of interpretations	Is open to a few interpretations

Generic Seminar Questions

Opening Questions

- ☞ What word or phrase is most important in _____?
- ☞ What might be another good title for this?
- ☞ Do you agree or disagree with main idea or value in this text? (why or why not?)

Core Questions

According to the text, what does the term (or phrase) _____ mean?

- ☞ In what ways are _____ and _____ alike (or different)?
- ☞ What is the difference between _____ and _____?
- ☞ How do you think _____ was viewed by (or would be viewed by) _____?
- ☞ Does the text agree or disagree with this statement: _____?

Closing Questions

- ☞ What are the consequences or implications of this text or this discussion?
- ☞ How do the ideas in the text relate to today?
- ☞ What if _____ happened (or were true) instead of _____?