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Remembering the Civil War: A Primary Source Comparative Study of Rhetoric and Author Purpose

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Introduction

Issues in Teaching the American Civil War

Perhaps one of the most difficult issues educators face when teaching the Civil War, or any defining historical event, is the flawed nature of American memory. In her article challenging the historicizing of the American Civil Rights movement, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall describes the act of remembrance as a “form of forgetting.” Hall argues that American memory, through acts of remembrance like “heritage tours, museums, public rituals, textbooks, and various artifacts of mass culture” has created a popular narrative of the Civil Rights movement that “distorts and suppresses as much as it reveals.”¹ Her words ring true in remembering, or perhaps misremembering, the American Civil War, too. In all acts of remembering and commemorating America’s bloody battle between brothers, the causes and consequences of the Civil War have been reshaped by American memory.

Collective memory is a term made up of vastly different definitions among scholars in the humanities and social studies fields. For some scholars, collective memory is a static narrative that represents how a cultural group remembers a historical event. For other scholars, collective memory is the opposite of a static narrative, and rather, a process of collective remembering defined as a “repeated reconstruction of representations of the past.” What most scholars can agree on is that collective memory is “a form of memory that transcends individuals and is shared by a group.” Often, the group that creates the dominant collective memory through narration and commemoration of a historical event is the group with power and social status.²

For the purposes of this unit, I will refer generally to the “American memory” to represent the dominant, collective memory of the Civil War as a static, simplistic narrative shaped by heroes and villains that resulted in a tidy triumph for freedom. The American memory that I refer to in the unit will represent the ways in which the war is commemorated in cultural artefacts such as statues, as well as the ways in which the war is remembered through the canonization of texts, such as Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address*. In this unit, students will challenge the notion of the dominant American memory of the Civil War, and develop a more nuanced understanding of what the people living and participating in the war felt they were fighting for.

The formation of America's collective memory of the Civil War began almost immediately upon the conclusion of the war. According to David Blight, Northern and Southern American society came to a reconciliation over mutual soldier sacrifice and the "gallantry" of the brave men, on both the Confederate and Union sides. The nation's reconciliation over a shared grief of its nearly 600,000 dead, white soldiers effectively "airbrushed Emancipation out of the picture." As Emancipation was increasingly pushed aside in the American memory, so too was the duty of the nation to ensure true equality for her newly emancipated African American citizens.³ With the wholehearted embrace of the North, the former slave society of the South quickly developed black codes to prevent equality for Black Americans, and the Jim Crow era emerged. Thus, teaching the Civil War from a collective American memory eager to move on in the post-Civil War era has the potential to not only create a misunderstanding of the Civil War era itself, but may also lead to an arguably more damaging misunderstanding-- the consequences of America's failure in the post-Civil War era to fulfill its promise of equality for all Americans, a failure that persists today.

Moreover, American memory has a way of canonizing selective literature as wholly representative of an era, and then teaching that canon to its school children. The nature of literature textbooks and the demand of curriculum pacing guides often provide little context for historical documents, and even less variety of texts for students to analyze and interpret. As a result, students may develop limited understanding of highly complex events that leave them ill prepared to understand the events and social movements that follow and persist in the wake of these events.

One example of this type of canonization exists in my ninth grade English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum, which dictates that students read and analyze Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*. Lincoln's speech is praiseworthy, and certainly a historical text deserving student attention and analysis. The speech is eloquent, and Lincoln's message is clear-- the fight at Gettysburg was a fight for union and freedom. If asked to interpret this speech in the context of what soldiers were fighting for at the Battle of Gettysburg, or in the Civil War more generally, a student might suggest that the Union army fought for freedom and the express purpose of emancipating enslaved African Americans. While this interpretation holds some truth, it does not account for the varied motivations of Union soldiers fighting in the Civil War, nor the wide spectrum of Northern sentiments regarding slavery and equal rights for emancipated African Americans. The thin understanding of Northern society during the Civil War inferred solely from an analysis of Lincoln's speech would not adequately represent the divergent and dynamic views of the war during the war years, nor does this interpretation adequately account for the decades-long struggle for freedom and equality that followed the Civil War.

The problem is not that Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* is canonized as a seminal U.S. history text in 9th grade ELA classrooms. Rather, the problem is that the popular canon for teaching Civil War literature is too narrow and simplistic, and contributes to the act of forgetting the visible and invisible outcomes of the Civil War.

Solutions to Teaching the American Civil War

In an effort to address the challenges I have outlined, I aim to develop a curriculum unit that contextualizes the social climate leading up to Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* and expands the canon of literature related to the Battle of Gettysburg. In addition to analyzing and interpreting Lincoln's speech, students will investigate a number of primary source documents from military leaders, soldiers, women, and African Americans to better understand and respond to the question-- what were the people at Gettysburg fighting for?

By providing students with the opportunity to analyze and interpret primary documents from a wider cast of

actors, they will not only develop a more holistic understanding of Gettysburg, the focal event from which these documents emerge, but they will develop a better understanding of the different meanings that different people assigned to the Civil War as they lived through and participated in the war. Moreover, these documents and activities will help students build a fund of knowledge from which to make connections to social movements that preceded and succeeded the Civil War era.

Students will make comparisons between these texts throughout this unit to prepare them for the culminating writing task. The final writing task of the unit will prompt students to compare Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* and Frederick Douglass' *Our Work is Not Done*. Students will specifically infer each author's reason for fighting or otherwise participating in the war effort based on textual evidence. Additionally, students will analyze how Douglass' rhetoric and author's purpose aligns, or does not align, with Lincoln's address.

My overall goal for the unit is for students to reflect on the complexities of the Civil War that account for the continued struggle for equality in the post-Civil War era. Students will need to grapple with the varied motivations for fighting and how these diverse interests could coalesce into a Union victory, but would also prove largely indifferent to ensuring equality for African Americans in the years following the war.

Rationale

As a high school English language arts teacher of English learners, teaching students about history is a responsibility that frequently crops up in my syllabus, as both a district requirement and a necessary scaffold to provide access and to support comprehension of grade-level texts that reference historical and/or cultural events. Teaching seminal, primary source documents from U.S. history is a standards-based cornerstone of my district ELA curriculum that presents unique challenges in my classroom. Many of my students are English learners with developing English language proficiencies, ranging from beginner to high-intermediate. Historical documents often contain archaic words, phrases, and references to objects and ideas that impede comprehension. As a result, there is a temptation to simplify texts or overly-generalize complicated events in an effort to aid English learners' comprehension of material. Further, a number of my students are immigrants to the United States, and do not possess the historical and cultural knowledge that their native-speaking peers have learned and been immersed in since early childhood. However, it is these very barriers my students face that make the conscious and careful effort of building background knowledge and teaching the skills for analyzing and interpreting historical documents all the more important.

Learning Objectives

This unit is designed for my 9th grade English language arts class for English learners and will address the requirements of my district's 9th grade ELA curriculum that state students will read and analyze Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*. In addition to meeting language proficiency and curricular objectives, this unit aims to challenge students in making conclusions about the causes and consequences of the Civil War through an inquiry-based analysis of a broad range of primary and secondary documents. Students will learn about primary sources, how they compare to secondary sources, and apply a protocol for investigating

sources, including their authors and origins. Students will also learn how to determine the author's purpose across a variety of text types, using textual evidence to support their conclusions. Additionally, students will analyze rhetoric and how authors select, organize, and employ word choice to convey a central message. Students will then draw comparisons between speeches by Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass to determine the similarities and differences in rhetoric and author's purpose. In this comparison, students will also reflect on how these two authors and their backgrounds influence the ways in which they draw meaning from the fight at Gettysburg and the overall sacrifices of the Civil War.

To achieve these learning objectives, the unit will progress in three main sections. Within each section, students will participate in activities intended to strengthen their academic and social English language proficiency in the domains of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The complexity of activities that students engage in will increase as the unit progresses. Each activity is intended to scaffold the language, skills, and knowledge students will need to complete successive tasks. Moreover, the unit will gradually move from broader perspectives to individual accounts of the Civil War. Throughout the unit, students will continually grapple with the question-- what were people fighting for? As students seek to answer this question, it is my hope that they note both the overall motivations of the Northern and Southern societies, as well as the divergent perspectives of groups and individuals within those societies.

Content Objectives

The Road to Gettysburg: Building Background

The causes of the Civil War that were set in motion over two centuries ago are still hotly contested today. Modern historians and commentators continue to offer their interpretations in an ever-growing body of literature about the Civil War. Since its conclusion, approximately 65,000 books have been written on the conflict.⁴ Some authors posit that the war was fought over states' rights to secede, or not. Others argue that the conflict exploded over irreconcilable ideologies on the moral issue of slavery. Still others claim the war was fought over political and economic control in a rapidly expanding nation.⁵ What all of these arguments have in common is the conflict over the use of slave labor, an enterprise that had been thriving in America for over two centuries. Therefore, students will first need to understand the political, economic, and social implications of slavery that fueled discord between free states and slave states in the pre-Civil War era.

In the years preceding the Civil War, Northern states were building an increasingly industrialized economy based on free labor. In the Southern slave-holding states, wealth was concentrated on plantations driven by slave labor. As the United States gained territory to the West, interested parties from Northern states argued that new territories should protect the interests of free white labor and prohibit slavery, while the representatives of Southern states argued for the expansion of slavery into new territories. This dispute over the expansion of slavery only grew more intense and sectionalism between the North and South increased. Moreover, slave-holders and abolitionists both invoked Christian ideology in their heated moral arguments that supported or rebuked slavery respectively. When Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860 without any electoral votes from Southern states, slave-holding states began to secede to form the Confederacy.⁶

To begin unpacking the tensions over slavery that ignited and sustained the Civil War, students will complete a station activity in which they will investigate the economic, political, and social consequences of slavery. In

this station activity, students will view maps, photographs, government documents and excerpts of narratives, as well as secondary sources that describe the Civil War's causes. This background information will be crucial in student understanding of the dynamic Northern war aims and the events that culminated in the Battle of Gettysburg, the focal event students will study in the second section of the unit.

Before students engage in the station activities, I will model the primary source protocol that students will employ throughout the rest of the unit. As a class, we will analyze and interpret excerpts from the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. Through whole-class modeling, students will learn how to engage with a primary source, while also learning about slavery and its brutal implications for enslaved persons.

Additionally, students will learn key vocabulary and language arts content to aid them in comprehending many of the primary and secondary sources they will encounter in the unit. Two of the key English language arts concepts students will need to understand in this unit are author's purpose and rhetoric. Author's purpose is an author's motivation for writing based on an expectation of an audience's reaction. Author's select their purposes for writing, and the mode of writing, based on what they want their audience "to believe, know, feel, or do." Broadly, an author's purpose can generally be categorized as a desire to inform, persuade, and/or entertain, and authors often have more than one purpose in writing. Rhetoric is the way in which people communicate to achieve an intended purpose; it is a system in which an author combines a "control of language and knowledge of culture" to send a message to an audience. This system combines "author purpose, audience, topic, writer, context, and genre" to produce a text.⁷

Because most of my students are developing reading and writing proficiency in English, an explicit study of rhetoric and author purpose will strengthen their analytical and interpretive skills, as well as their abilities to construct meaningful texts purposefully. Moreover, the study of rhetoric and author purpose overlap with skills students will use in their investigation of primary sources. For example, students will research background information about each author of the texts they will analyze-- this is not only a skill commonly used to investigate primary sources, but a skill that aids the reader in understanding an author's rhetoric and purpose.

A Clash of Purposes: A Primary Source Exploration

The Battle of Gettysburg has come to represent one of the most important symbols in Civil War history. The battle is considered by most historians to be the "turning point" in the Civil War that ultimately led to Union victory, and is also renowned for its stunning number of casualties.⁸ The Gettysburg symbolism was solidified in American memory in November of 1863 when Abraham Lincoln dedicated the battlefield as a cemetery and place of remembrance in his famous *Gettysburg Address*.

Battle came to the small town of Gettysburg in the summer of 1863 after Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1st, 1863. With this new wartime order, Northern society was able to successfully coalesce around the cause of fighting the Civil War to end slavery. It is worth noting however, that the Northern objective at the beginning of the Civil War was not to abolish slavery. As Edward Ayers describes in his book on the Civil War that in 1863, "...a North long complicit in slavery would turn a struggle against disunion into a war against bondage."⁹ In the years before the Civil War, many Northerners were indifferent to slavery's existence in Southern states and were content to keep the institution for the sake of union. Thus, the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation was a groundbreaking event that successfully pivoted the Northern cause of preserving a union of states to one of abolishing the institution of slavery.

The three day battle between July 1 and July 3, 1863 at Gettysburg was brutal, and Union victory was tenuous. For three days, the Union forces engaged Confederate soldiers in a bloody struggle over the hills, farmland, and orchards of Gettysburg. On the first day of fighting, the Confederate army beat the Union army into a retreat. The second day of fighting yielded an uncertain result, as the Confederacy gained ground, but failed to force the Union to abandon their defensive positions. On the final day of battle, Union forces successfully beat the Confederates into retreat. The Union victory was solidified when General Lee led his army back to Confederate territory on July 4th. For Gettysburg, a day typically filled with the celebration of hard-won independence was spent surveying the carnage of a nation torn in two, an irony that was likely not lost on many of the survivors of battle. Nearly 51,000 men were killed, wounded, captured, or missing at the end of the three days of fighting.¹⁰

For the citizens of Gettysburg who were unable or unwilling to leave before fighting broke out, the end of the battle gave little relief. Thousands of bodies of dead soldiers littered the battlefield and even more wounded soldiers crowded makeshift hospitals where many men would continue to die or become permanently physically disabled. The most common treatment for soldiers wounded by bullets in the extremities was amputation; soldiers that received gunshot wounds to the torso were rarely treated by surgeons as they were largely expected to die.¹¹

Months later, in November of 1863, President Abraham Lincoln delivered his *Gettysburg Address* that would transform the battlefield of Gettysburg into a national symbol of soldier sacrifice, and provide a balm to a small town shell-shocked by the destruction of war. Lincoln sought to explain the sacrifice in terms of “freedom” for all men “created equal” while elevating the “honored dead” to the status of heroes.¹²

Americans in the crowd at Lincoln’s speech could rally around these sentimental and noble causes of freedom and equality. These ideals elicited a sense of purpose that provided some comfort in the wake of profound loss. And yet, in its effort to recover, the American memory at Gettysburg quickly forgot or simply didn’t envision what a true “rebirth” of America would look like. Ayers succinctly summarizes how the redefined purpose of the North to destroy slavery was not necessarily a fight to destroy the deeply ingrained racism and inequality against African Americans. He writes, “The North turned against slavery as a military object but many whites, including some among the North’s leaders, could not imagine black people as free American citizens.”¹³ This would ultimately create enormous limitations on access to civil rights for recently emancipated African Americans in the years following the Civil War.

In a sweeping overview of the Civil War, individual sentiments and motivations for fighting in the war may seem insignificant and get lost in the overall narrative. However, it is the very fact that individuals were affected by the war in different ways and fighting for different reasons that sheds light on the outcomes of the Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln’s sentiments have stood the test of time for a number of reasons, including his rhetorical skill, his powerful status, and his leadership that culminated in a victory for the Union cause. Additionally, Lincoln’s words allude to the ideals that sit comfortably in the American memory: freedom, equality, honor. However, it is within these broad generalizations that the American memory is able to forget the many divergent sentiments and motivations for fighting. People fought in the war or on behalf of the war effort for many different reasons. Gettysburg had different meanings for different individuals. Thus, collapsing these reasons into a singular understanding of Gettysburg as represented by Lincoln’s famous and generalized ideals creates an inaccurate narrative of the Civil War as a resolute triumph in the fight for freedom.

To scaffold students to this nuanced understanding of how individual experience, politics, class status, race,

and other factors contributed to the range of motivations and reactions of participants in the war, they will conduct a primary source exploration of the Battle of Gettysburg from eye-witness accounts before, during, and after the battle. These accounts are from military leaders and soldiers from both the Union and Confederate sides, as well as Gettysburg women. The lack of primary sources detailing the experiences of African American residents of Gettysburg will be a key Socratic seminar topic that students will discuss in the context of Tillie Pierce's remarks about the "amusing" scene of African American residents fleeing before the battle. Additionally, students will read Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* and Frederick Douglass *Our Work is Not Done* speech and compare these texts to the eyewitness accounts of participants who experienced Gettysburg firsthand. Throughout the primary source investigation, students will ponder the question-- what were people fighting for?

For General George Meade, Union leader of the Army of the Potomac, fighting in the Civil War was a "duty" to the Union cause, but possibly an opportunity for glory as well. After Gettysburg, Meade describes to his wife how his duty came with a great deal of flattery after his victory at Gettysburg. Meade's letter to his wife after the Battle of Gettysburg describes how he "did and will continue to do my duties to the best of my ability." Meade describes his humble embarrassment at the attention he receives as a result of his victory, but also describes finding himself "a lion" in the days after Gettysburg.¹⁴

General Robert E. Lee states clearly his purpose for fighting in a letter to Confederate president Jefferson Davis. Lee. In August 1863, Lee attempted to resign as leader of the Army of Northern Virginia following his embarrassing defeat at Gettysburg; Davis refused his resignation. In response to Davis' refusal, Lee responds that he will continue to serve and "devote myself to the defense of our violated country's rights."¹⁵

Some soldiers, like Union soldier Samuel Hodgman, may have been fighting to prove their bravery, a quality central to the concept of ideal masculinity in the 19th century. Hodgman also mentions his ability to send home money to support the family, another potential motivation that some soldiers had to enlist in the war.¹⁶

Other soldiers, such as Confederate soldier William W. Edwards, may have fought to protect their way of life from certain "destruction." In his letter, Edwards also gives a harrowing account of dead and wounded soldiers at Gettysburg, and describes his difficulty in seeking medical treatment after being wounded. Edwards' letter is candid about his fear of dying far from home, yet states that he will continue fighting with the Confederacy.¹⁷

Though women did not participate in the war in direct battle, they were nonetheless participants in the war effort. In addition to raising children and running homesteads, many of the women of Gettysburg took on the additional responsibilities of feeding soldiers, caring for the wounded, and even burying the dead.¹⁸ Students will view secondary sources of Elizabeth Thorn's statue at Gettysburg and a short description of her part in the war effort during Gettysburg. Thorn, the wife of the cemetery caretaker, was responsible for burying close to 100 dead soldiers after the Battle of Gettysburg. Thorn's husband was away fighting for the Union army and she was six months pregnant at the time. She was also maintaining a home and caring for her children and elderly father.¹⁹ I plan to have students consider why we do not have many firsthand accounts of Thorn's experience; students will consider Thorn's class status and life circumstances in their Socratic seminar discussion. Students will debate Elizabeth Thorn's motivation for participating in the war effort-- as a lower-class woman responsible for maintaining the town's cemetery in her husband's absence, did she have a choice?

Students will compare their understanding of Thorn's experience to Tillie Pierce's account as a 15-year-old girl from a middle-class family who gives an account of the events before, during, and after the battle. In her

recollection of events preceding the battle, she recalls the “amusing” scene of African American residents fleeing their homes before Confederate forces arrived. Pierce also describes feelings of elation after the battle to be “free and independent of the tyranny upheld by an enemy”.²⁰

Students will not only draw comparisons between Elizabeth Thorn and Tillie Pierce’s experiences, but will also consider the absence of primary source materials for African American residents of Gettysburg, especially in light of Pierce’s recollection. In Socratic seminar, students will discuss what they believe Tillie Pierce was fighting for as a supporter of the Union. They will also compare how Pierce’s class and race may have contributed to her attitude toward the African American residents of Gettysburg who were fleeing for their lives and to maintain their tenuous freedom in Northern society. Students will grapple with Pierce’s support of the Union cause in abolishing slavery and her indifference toward the wellbeing and safety of her African American neighbors.

At the outset of this section of the unit, students will read or watch a secondary description of the Battle of Gettysburg. Through the primary source exploration, students will reference this secondary account and consider how the account is similar and different from those documented in the primary sources. Additionally, students will compare how the authors of each account are similar and different, and how these differences may have influenced their experiences of the battle as well as their motivations for participation. In essence, students will engage in what Sam Wineburg defines as historical thinking, or “verification”, of different accounts of history, both primary and secondary.²¹ In addition to guiding students to develop historical thinking, I will spiral mini-lessons of language and grammar points essential to the genre of comparison in speaking and writing. This will scaffold the students’ collaborative, evidence-based responses when comparing documents and prepare students for their essay that compares Lincoln and Douglass’ rhetoric at the end of the unit.

In the latter section of the primary source exploration, students will read Abraham Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address* and Frederick Douglass’ *Our Work is Not Done*. Students will discuss in Socratic seminar how these accounts of Gettysburg are similar and different to those of the people who experienced Gettysburg firsthand. Similarly, students will begin to draw comparisons between these texts in preparation for the unit’s culminating task.

Determining Meaning in the Aftermath: Comparing Rhetoric

For Frederick Douglass, a formerly enslaved African American abolitionist, Gettysburg had an entirely different meaning than the symbolic heroism and bodily sacrifice that many have come to associate with Gettysburg. In his speech to the Anti-Slavery Society in December 1863, Douglass recalled a past trip to Gettysburg in which friends warned him to “remain in the house during the day-time, and travel in the night, lest I should be kidnapped and carried over into Maryland” to be re-sold into slavery.²² Douglass’ words not only indicate what was at stake for African Americans before and during the Civil War, but his specific reference to Gettysburg assigns an entirely different meaning to the place symbolized in the traditional American memory by an infamous battle.

The idea of freedom that Douglass derived from Gettysburg is not a vague ideal, but a fragile reality that faced constant threat. Moreover, in this speech entitled *Our Work is Not Done*, Douglass specified the “unfinished work” that Lincoln briefly referenced in his *Gettysburg Address*. In addition to calling out the “prejudice against color” that African Americans faced in Northern society and demanding equal pay for African American troops enlisted in the Northern army, Douglass argued that the purpose of the Civil War

would only be achieved when “the colored man is admitted a full member in good and regular standing in the American body politic.”²³ Thus, in his speech, Douglass made clear the meaning he assigned to the Battle of Gettysburg and what he was fighting for in the war effort-- truly realized equality for newly emancipated African Americans.

While Douglass’ rhetoric aligns in some ways with Lincoln’s, it diverges in its specificity calling for economic and political equality for the emancipated population. Furthermore, Douglass’ author’s purpose is similar in convincing an audience of the true meaning of the Civil War, a fight for freedom. However, Douglass is not vague in specifying who that freedom is for (African Americans) and how that freedom should be realized (in all aspects of citizenship). Because Douglass is direct and specific about the freedoms required to achieve equality, his speech cannot be reinterpreted in the American memory as a general call to fight for freedom, which was a claim made by both the Union and Confederate sides. The fight for freedom that the Confederate side claimed was reserved for white Southerners who felt oppressed by the federal government; ironically, this fight for freedom simultaneously defended the right to prevent enslaved persons from living freely. The undefined term “freedom” in Lincoln’s speech left just enough space for North and South to reconcile over their mutual valiant sacrifices in the years after the Battle of Gettysburg. As a result, Emancipation was pushed aside and the Confederate effort to preserve slavery was minimized in the American memory. As students work through their analysis and interpretation of the rhetoric and purpose of both speeches, students will consider how their understanding of Gettysburg changes when they read both Lincoln and Douglass’ speeches, rather than just Lincoln’s speech. Students will make conclusions as to why Lincoln’s speech has been canonized in literature textbooks and the American memory, while the Douglass’ speech has not.

In this final section of the unit, students will be experienced in analyzing and interpreting primary sources, and in employing the language of comparison in speaking and writing. Students will interact with Douglass and Lincoln’s speeches in the second part of the unit in order to determine what each man is fighting for in relation to the Battle of Gettysburg, and in the larger context of the Civil War. Students will prepare for a final Socratic seminar by identifying each author’s purpose and specific rhetoric that reveals the central message of each speech. In a final Socratic seminar, students will discuss and debate what these men were fighting for, and how their causes were similar and different, and how their backgrounds contributed to their author’s purposes and central messages. Students will then apply key ideas from the academic discussion and their own interpretation of these speeches to write a comparison essay that explores the alignment and divergence between Lincoln and Douglass’ speeches.

Teaching Strategies

Modeling

Modeling is the explicit demonstration of a concept, and is an essential part of teaching students a new skill or in scaffolding them to achieve proficiency in a particular context²⁴ . I will use modeling in this unit to achieve both of these outcomes.

In order to successfully analyze and interpret primary sources, students will need to learn a protocol for approaching historical documents. This protocol will be based on the document analysis guidelines developed by the National Archives that encourage students to “meet the document, observe its parts, try to make sense

of it, and use it as historical evidence.”²⁵ In addition to explicitly showing students how to complete the analysis protocol, I will also model critical thinking skills in the process of investigating a primary source. For example, I will ask myself questions aloud about the document’s origin, author, and date to model inquiry. Then, as we read the document as a class, I will draw verbal conclusions about the author’s purpose and central message, using textual-evidence to support my claims. Thus, students will have an example of the physical and cognitive skills they will need to implement in an individual or small group primary source investigation.

Socratic Seminars

Socratic seminars are academic discussions in which students engage with peers and respond to open-ended questions about a text.²⁶ The Socratic seminar gives students opportunities to improve speaking and listening skills while reviewing, debating, and discussing key takeaways from a text.

The Socratic seminar will be an important teaching method in my unit as a formative assessment of students’ grasp of the material. Some of the sources students will investigate will reference people, places, and ideas that students may not be familiar with. I hope to use the seminar as a space for students to ask questions and seek answers within their peer group before intervening to supplement background information or give a direct answer. In addition to measuring student understanding, the seminars will help students build collective knowledge bases of the sources they are reading. Socratic seminars are also crucial in strengthening students’ academic and social English language proficiency in the domains of listening and speaking. Additionally, the seminar will serve as a whole class review of texts to support students that may need additional support in comprehending texts.

Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing is a highly-scaffolded approach to teaching writing that occurs in three phases. In the first phase of collaborative writing, the teacher and students “deconstruct” a mentor text as a class. Students examine the organization and grammatical features of the mentor text, and the instructor gives explicit lessons on these features as necessary. Then, the instructor leads the class in jointly constructing a text in the same genre as the mentor text. During this “joint construction” phase, the teacher models the language, organization, and grammatical features of the genre that were analyzed during the deconstruction phase. I often give students an additional opportunity to jointly construct a text in small groups or pairs. In this way, I can more closely assess what skills or concepts students need more practice with before writing independently. In the final phase of collaborative writing, students construct their texts independently. This phase of “independent construction” is highly scaffolded by the previous whole-class and small-group writing practice. Additionally, students have the benefit of referring to the jointly constructed texts (which serve as models) when constructing their own texts.²⁷

Collaborative writing will be an integral part of teaching the genre of comparison to my English learners. This method of teaching writing gives students multiple opportunities to negotiate and practice the comparison genre before they are expected to produce a comparison essay individually. Moreover, students will frequently work together in small groups during the primary source exploration. Collaborative writing will be key support to students as they apply newly learned grammar and language skills to compare texts with evidence-based responses. These short, comparative writing exercises in small groups will help students build skills and confidence to complete the final writing task, a comparative essay.

Activities

Building Background Learning Stations

The first activity in this unit is critical is garnering student interest and motivation, while also situating them in a historical context that occurred two hundred years ago. This is even more complicated for students who are missing some, or a great deal, of U.S. history knowledge, like many of my English learner students. In an effort to scaffold student understanding, I will begin the unit by helping them to make connections between their own lives, and the lives of those who lived two centuries before them.

We will begin the unit by defining primary sources and listing examples of primary sources they are familiar with: Twitter posts, text messages, emails, etc. Then, we will view some images from the Civil War era that depict daily social life. As a class, students will make observations about the people and objects in the images. They will consider how these people may have communicated, and list as many primary sources as possible. When we have brainstormed an adequate list of primary sources, I will introduce the concept of secondary sources and gather student responses of secondary source examples.

Once we have produced an adequate number of examples and some working definitions for primary and secondary sources, I will ask students to consider the benefits and drawbacks of each type of source when trying to understand a past event. If students have difficulty producing responses, I will prompt them with a specific event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and ask them to consider what an outsider could learn about the pandemic from a Tweet versus an encyclopedia entry about the pandemic. I expect students to understand that primary sources often give more insight into personal responses to events and that secondary sources generally give information from a less personal perspective. My hope with this opening activity is that students will understand the value of using both primary and secondary sources to learn about, question, and investigate historical events.

After establishing definitions and concrete examples of primary and secondary sources, students will preview images and/or a short film about the Civil War. In this activity, students will be asked to generate at least three observations and two questions about the time period. After presenting and discussing student observations about this time period, I will model research and investigative techniques as we explore student questions. This is a critical step in modeling how to search for information about sources and their authors. A key part of this exercise is to think aloud as I research, question, and verify information I find on the internet. As a class, we will discuss credible sources and how to investigate who or what influences the information a source produces.

After modeling some research techniques and cognitive processes of good researchers, I will introduce students to the primary source protocol, developed by the National Archives. This tool requires students to “meet the document, observe its parts, try to make sense of it, and use it as historical evidence.”²⁸ In addition to these steps, students will apply the research techniques that I modeled to investigate the author of each primary source. Before releasing responsibility to small groups, I will model the primary source protocol for the class.

The first primary source that we will analyze as a class will be an excerpt from Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. I will select an excerpt that both demonstrates Douglass' personal experience as a slave and is comprehensible for my English learners. As we work with this

excerpt, I will model and elicit whole-class participation in researching Frederick Douglass and following the steps of document analysis. Students will be able to practice researching and analyzing a primary source while simultaneously learning about the brutality of slavery through Douglass' firsthand account. In this way, students will build analytical and interpretive skills as they construct background knowledge about the Civil War era.

In addition to modeling research and document analysis techniques, I will introduce students to the concept of author's purpose and the ways in which author's use rhetoric to achieve their purpose. We may look at short, modern examples to scaffold student understanding of the new concepts. When I am satisfied that students grasp the new concepts, we will work as a class to determine Douglass' author's purpose in his narrative, and point out specific rhetoric that supports our conclusions. Students will incorporate their understanding of author's purpose and associated rhetoric in the next activity of the unit.

Before moving on to the second, major unit activity, students will continue to build background knowledge about the Civil War and the main events leading up to the Battle of Gettysburg. In a station activity, students will work in small groups to interact with primary sources. From their analyses of these documents, they will interpret some of the causes of the Civil War and the "official" reasons for fighting on both the Northern and Southern sides.

The documents that students will analyze include maps showing the economic and political divide between the Northern free states and Southern slave-holding states. Students will work through a vocabulary station to define words critical for comprehension of texts within the unit. These words will include, but not be limited to: abolition, secession, slavery, Yankee, rebel, Union, and Confederacy. In another station, students will work together to sequence a timeline of major events leading up the Battle of Gettysburg. Students will also work through a station in which they read and interpret excerpts from Abraham Lincoln's April 15th proclamation of war on the South and the Confederate States of America's message to Congress on April 29th, 1861.²⁹

Students will determine the "official" reasons that each side states for fighting in the Civil War. Students will notice that Lincoln does not claim that "freedom" is the cause of fighting, but rather "union."³⁰ I will ask students to recall this wording later in the unit when they read Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*.

Upon the conclusion of this activity, we will review the responses students produced during each station activity. Students will collect their materials in a portfolio or an online Google folder so that they can reference their materials in future activities. Additionally, I will ask students to consider the unifying question that will thread its way through the entirety of the unit: what were people fighting for in the Civil War? These answers will likely change as students progress through the unit.

Primary Source Exploration

In the second activity in this unit, students will draw comparisons between primary sources. Therefore, I will open the unit by explicitly teaching students comparative adjectives and transition phrases through a series of mini-lessons. Students will apply the language of comparison in their writing throughout the activity as they develop evidence-based responses comparing primary source documents in small groups. Students will also use the language of comparison in speaking during Socratic seminars.

As students continue to develop language skills in comparing and contrasting, they will read and/or watch a secondary source that describes the Battle of Gettysburg. Students will again write down three observations and two questions they have about the Battle of Gettysburg. After gathering the questions, students will work in small groups to employ research methods learned in the first activity to answer one or two questions and

present their findings in a whole-class discussion. As the activity progresses, students will specifically consider how the information in the secondary source does and does not account for the conclusions drawn from the primary sources they studied.

Before engaging with primary sources from the participants at Gettysburg, students will make predictions about what the people at Gettysburg were fighting for. These predictions will be informed by the background activities that students completed in the first unit, though students will come to find a wider variety of responses compared to the “official” reasons outlined in the station activity. Students will discover that some participants were fighting for the “official” reasons stated by their respective leaders, while others were fighting for steady pay, honor, duty, or the abolition of slavery. Still others fought tirelessly for the total freedom of African Americans, including uninhibited access to their civil rights as citizens of the United States. Students will also discover how the Northern war aims changed from a war for union to a war for freedom after Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

Students will work in pairs and small groups as they work with each primary source. In their primary source exploration, students will follow a similar routine to analyze and interpret each source, as well as to prepare for a Socratic seminar to debrief and discuss findings from each source. When students receive their primary source documents, their first task will be to apply the research techniques learned in the first activity to develop short biographies for the author of each primary source. In the next task, students will apply the primary source protocol to analyze and interpret the document. Students will then determine the author’s purpose and central message. They will support these conclusions with textual evidence of the author’s rhetorical choices. In the final step of this routine, students will be given one or two questions to prepare for a Socratic seminar in which students will discuss their findings, as well as draw comparisons between primary sources and the secondary source they studied at the outset of this activity.

In order to support student participation in each Socratic seminar, students will be provided with sentence starters and note-taking guides. Students will also receive questions in their small groups to prepare some answers before joining the Socratic seminar. The Socratic seminar will not only support student speaking and listening comprehension, but will also support student understanding of the previously analyzed documents. The Socratic seminar provides an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings, while also giving students the time and space to make new connections and form deeper understandings of the documents they analyzed. As students become more comfortable with the Socratic seminar process, I will gradually remove scaffolds as appropriate.

After researching, analyzing, and interpreting each individual primary source, students will draw comparisons between documents. Students will consider what each participant was fighting for at Gettysburg and how the author’s background contributed to their purpose. This point of consideration will be the opening of each Socratic seminar. Additionally, students will reflect upon similarities and differences between specific documents in a series of Socratic seminars. In order to scaffold student writing, students will be made gradually more responsible for collaborative writing tasks as they become more comfortable with the routine of research, analysis, and academic discussion.

I plan to have students compare the accounts of George G. Meade and Robert E. Lee, each a leader of the Union and Confederate armies respectively. After analyzing each document, students will consider how the officers’ accounts are similar or different from the “official” reasons for fighting in the Civil War as stated by their government leaders. Students will also consider the audience of each document, and how the author’s words may be different if their audience were a family member, a colleague, or a government leader. Toward

the end of our class discussion, I will provide students with a compare and contrast paragraph that compares these two documents. As a class, we will deconstruct the text, point out the grammatical features of comparative writing, and discuss how the paragraph is organized.

Students will compare the accounts of Union soldier Samuel Hodgman and Confederate soldier William Edwards. In addition to considering why these young men are fighting in the war, students will also ask themselves what these authors seem to be most concerned with in their correspondences. Students will also consider how the soldiers' accounts compare to those of their leaders and reflect on what could account for those differences. When our discussion has concluded, we will construct a compare and contrast paragraph that summarizes the similarities and differences between the Hodgman and Edwards' documents. I will elicit student input about how to organize the paragraph and employ transition words/phrases to demonstrate similarities and differences.

In a slight divergence from the typical routine, students will compare Tillie Pierce's account of Gettysburg in the years after the war to the statue of Elizabeth Thorn that was dedicated nearly 150 years later. Students will work together to construct a paragraph that compares these two women and their participation in the Battle of Gettysburg. Students will consider each woman's background, class status, and role in the battle as they consider Pierce's published account and the minimal record of Thorn's account. In this Socratic seminar, students will also note Pierce's reference to African Americans in her narrative. Students will seek to answer why there are so few accounts of African Americans during the Battle of Gettysburg and consider what Pierce's description of African Americans reveals about the attitudes of some white Northerners toward African Americans during the war.

Finally, in preparation for their compare and contrast essay, students will draw comparisons between Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* and Frederick Douglass' *Our Work is Not Done*. Students will specifically consider how Lincoln's purpose and central message changed from his April 15th proclamation that students read in the station activity. Students will also consider how Lincoln and Douglass' rhetoric and author's purposes are similar and different. Additionally, students will make evidence-based inferences about the meaning of Gettysburg for each author. Each student will work independently to prepare a short response that compares what each man was fighting for when they wrote their speeches. This will serve as a formative assessment to measure student understanding of the Lincoln and Douglass texts, as well as their ability to employ the language of comparison in their writing.

In the last Socratic seminar, students will respond to the following questions: Why is Lincoln's speech read in English classrooms today? How is your understanding of Gettysburg different when you read Douglass' speech in addition to Lincoln's speech? During this discussion, students will also consider how their predictions of what people at Gettysburg were fighting for compare to their understanding of the motivations for fighting after analyzing primary source material of the participants at Gettysburg. The focus of this final academic discussion is to reflect deeply on what students have gleaned from their primary source exploration, and how it differs from the information they learned from the secondary source description of the Battle of Gettysburg.

These primary source investigations, comparisons, and discussions will occur over several weeks. As the unit progresses, students will collect their classwork and notes from the Socratic seminars in a portfolio. They will utilize these notes in the final activity of the unit.

Compare/Contrast Essay

In the culminating activity of the unit, students will use their portfolio notes from Socratic seminars and learning activities to develop a compare and contrast essay. In this essay, students will compare and contrast the author's purpose, rhetoric, and central message of Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* and Frederick Douglass' *Our Work is Not Done*. Students will use the skills built during the second activity and their knowledge of comparative adjectives and transitions to successfully write their compare and contrast essays. In the concluding paragraph of their essays, students will employ their knowledge of each author and reflect on the meaning each man assigns to the symbol of Gettysburg.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

In my unit, I will focus on two basic content standards that are centered on investigating and interpreting primary sources, as well as identifying and analyzing use of rhetoric to achieve an author's purpose. Students will learn about and apply a protocol for analyzing and interpreting primary sources to address CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1, which states that students should be able to "Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information." Moreover, in analyzing the author's purpose and selected rhetoric for each primary source, students will "Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose." as stated by CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6. Finally, students will compare the ways in which authors with different perspectives approach a similar topic. This type of analysis will address CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6 which states that students should be able to "Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts."

Notes

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<https://teachers.yale.edu>

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