

The Gettysburg Address and Shakespeare's St. Crispin's Day Speech

A Common Core Unit

by Lois MacMillan

Metadata

- Era: National Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)
- Theme: Global Connections
- Grade Level: 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
- Number of Class Periods: 1
- Coverage People: Abraham Lincoln, Shakespeare
- Coverage Documents: *The Gettysburg Address and St. Crispin's Day Speech*

Lesson Standards

Common Core State Standards

- ✓ Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.5 Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.
- ✓ Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

Unit Overview

This lesson is an extension to a lesson on the Gettysburg Address. The use of this lesson presumes that the students have already studied the Gettysburg Address. This lesson was created for the Gilder Lehrman's online graduate course from Dickinson's College, *Understanding Lincoln*.

Objectives of Lesson – “The Gettysburg Address and St. Crispin's Day Speech”

Essential Question:

How did Shakespeare's writings influenced Lincoln?

SWBAT

- Determine the meaning of words or phrases from St. Crispin's Day Speech
- Expand the central idea behind of the key phrases from the third paragraph of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address
- Disaggregate St. Crispin's Day Speech into four categories from the Gettysburg Address:
 - “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.”
 - “--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.”

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Background on "St. Crispin's Day Speech"

Caroline Kennedy, daughter of President John F. Kennedy, wrote that both her parents loved to read Shakespeare:

"While my mother was drawn to the love poetry, my father preferred the history plays. One of his favorite phrases was Henry V's St. Crispin's Day speech. It describes the honor of having risked one's life for one's country at a moment when it truly mattered. When my mother planned an evening of Elizabethan poetry and music at the White house, as a surprise for my father, she ended that evening's program with the speech from *Henry V*."

While we have no evidence that Lincoln's First Lady had the St. Crispin's Day speech performed, Lincoln was well acquainted with the words of Shakespeare. Shakespeare brought Lincoln special pleasure and he would regularly carry a copy of Shakespeare's works with him when traveling. After the death of his son, Willie, Lincoln "wept convulsively after reciting the lament of Constance for her dead son"¹ from Shakespeare's *King John*:

"And, Father Cardinal, I have heard you say
that we shall see and know our friends in heaven.
If that be true, I shall see my boy again."

Materials for "The Gettysburg Address and St. Crispin's Day Speech"

- Preview of Lincoln's Speech at Peoria -PDF
 - Sir Laurence Olivier's Version <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9fa3HFR02E>
 - Kenneth Branagh's Version <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-yZNMWFqvM>
- Summary Organizer and Analysis-Speech at Peoria-PDF
- Assessment of Text-Speech at Peoria-PDF

Procedure (Instruction and Assessment) for "The Gettysburg Address and St. Crispin's Day Speech"

- ✓ **Preview of St. Crispin's Day Speech PDF:** The lesson begins with a preview assignment. A preview assignment is a short, engaging task that foreshadows upcoming content. This preview assignment is the analysis of two performances of St. Crispin's Day Speech from two of the greatest Shakespeare actors ever, Sir Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh. After watching the two performances, the teacher will lead a discussion on the actor's prosody, inflection, and punctuation. The students will then do a "quick write" on which performance they prefer.

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✓ Summary Organizer and Analysis of Text PDF:

Part One: Summary Organizer

- The teacher will explain that the first objective is to select “Key Words” from each of the five selections. The teacher will explain that the endgame is that these key words will be used to summarize the excerpt.
 - Note: Key words are very important contributors to understanding the paragraph. Without those words the speech would not make sense. These words are usually nouns or verbs. The students with guidance from the teacher should pick between five to seven words.
- The next step is a whole-class discussion and negotiation process in constructing a summary sentence using the key words selected by the class. The final negotiated sentence (or sentences) is/are copied in the summary section of the organizer.
- After the summary, the teacher can question the students on Shakespeare's purpose of celebrating the fallen.

Part Two: Analysis

Using the students' work from the summary organizer, the students will disaggregate phrases from St. Crispin's Speech and categorize them into the following four categories from the Gettysburg Address:

- “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.”
- “--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.”

Part Three: Use of Textual Evidence Analysis

The student will choose his or her favorite phrase from Shakespeare's St. Crispin's Day speech and express how it gives new meaning to one of Lincoln's immortal phrases from the Gettysburg Address.

ⁱ Burlingame, Michael. “Abraham Lincoln.” The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. iBooks.