



History A Level bridging activity

Abraham Lincoln and the us civil war

Welcome to A Level History!

We start the course in 1865 with the United States of America emerging from a bloody civil war between the North and South, largely over the issue of slavery.

On the eve of victory for the North the President, Abraham Lincoln, is assassinated whilst at the theatre. The United States, shaken by war and the loss of its leader, looked to rebuild but the deep rifts are not easily healed…

The activities in this pack centre around Abraham Lincoln as a person and as a president. Although he has met his end by the start of our course, it is incredibly useful for us to know what he stood for and the actions that he took.

We will look at some sources and their portrayal of Lincoln and the causes of the Civil War as well as looking at Lincoln’s own words.

Let us begin…

If you have any questions about the course, do not hesitate to ask either

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#### Text sources and interpretations

The following are five interpretations of the issues behind the American Civil War.

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| **Interpretation A**: From *Twenty-Eight Years a Slave*, by Thomas Johnson, published in 1909. Johnson was born a slave in 1836 in Virginia where he was bought and sold several times. After the Civil War he was freed and moved north, where he became a church minister and eventually a missionary in Africa.  ‘In 1860, there was great excitement over the election of Mr Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States. The slaves prayed to God for his success. We knew that he was in sympathy with the abolition of slavery. The election was the signal for a great conflict in which the question was: Shall there be slavery or no slavery in the United States? The South said: Yes, there shall be slavery.’ |
| **Interpretation B**: From *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government,* by Jefferson Davis, published in 1881. Davis was the son of a plantation owner who, in 1845, entered Congress for the state of Mississippi. When Mississippi and six other states left the Union and set up their own Confederate government in 1861, Davis was elected as its President.  ‘The Confederates fought for the fundamental right to withdraw from a Union which they had, as independent states, voluntarily entered. On reading what has recently been written, people might conclude that the war was caused by efforts on the one side to extend and keep slavery, and on the other to resist it and establish human liberty. The Southern States and Southern people have been represented as "defenders" of slavery, and the North as the champions of universal freedom. This is false.’ |
| **Source C**: From a speech by George Julian in the American Senate on 14th January, 1862. Julian was a politician, lawyer, and writer who represented the state of Indiana in Congress.  ***‘***This rebellion is a bloody and terrible demonstration of the fact that slavery and freedom cannot live together in peace. I know that it was not the purpose of this administration, at first, to abolish slavery, but only to save the Union, and keep the old order of things. The policy of emancipation has come from the circumstances of the rebellion. I believe the popular demand now is, or soon will be, for the total abolition of slavery as the righteous purpose of this war, and is the only means of achieving a lasting peace.’ |
| **Source D**: From *The Vicksburg Mississippi Daily Whig* newspaper, January 1860  ‘The people of the South have allowed Yankees\* to monopolise trade with its huge profits. We have let the North do all the importing and most of the exporting business for the whole Union. Thus the North has grown more powerful to an astonishing degree, at the expense of the South. It is no wonder that their villages have grown into magnificent towns and cities.’  *\* Yankees - people from the Northern states of America* |
| **Source E:** From a letter written by President Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, 22nd August 1862. Greeley was the editor of *The New York Tribune* newspaper. ‘There are those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery. I do not agree with them. My overriding object in this struggle is to save the Union, and it is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving other slaves alone, I would also do that.’ |

#### Tasks:

1. Read sources and interpretations A-E. Underline the key points in each source.
2. What does each source/interpretation suggest about what caused the American Civil War?
3. How useful is each source/interpretation in helping you to answer the question ‘What caused the American Civil War?’ Think about:

* Who wrote the source/interpretation?
* When was it written?
* What was the purpose of the source/interpretation?
* Who was the audience for the source/ interpretation?

1. Why do you think that North and South fought each other in the American Civil War?

#### In Lincoln’s words:

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| **Words of Abraham Lincoln** | **In my own words:** |
| *“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new — North as well as South.”* |  |
| *“How can anyone who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favour of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except negroes." When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics." When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty — to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be take pure, and without the base alloy of hypocracy [sic].”* |  |
| *“I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored; the nearer the Union will be "the Union as it was." If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views.”* |  |

#### Tasks:

1. Summarise Abraham Lincoln’s position on slavery:

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1. Read Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address below. What reasons does Lincoln give for fighting the Civil War?

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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.

**Abraham Lincoln  
November 19, 1863**