

Suggestions for the Teacher

1. Conduct a Socratic discussion about Lincoln and the Gettysburg Address, using on the strata of confidence to organize the discussion. The strata of confidence are the three questions:

What do we know?

What do we think we know?

What do we not know?

Begin asking the first question, and work your way to the third. Of the three questions, the most important one is the third. In every great field, scholars master the known and then devote their lives to the examination of the unknown. It is the unknown that motivates learning. In this discussion, the teacher is not partisan, or charged with determining which students are correct; rather the teacher is even handed and guides the class in an enjoyable, open-ended exploration of the facts and ideas and possibilities surrounding Lincoln and the Gettysburg Address.

2. Give an essay-based evaluation, as follows. Tell the students that the test will be made of four of the essay study questions above, and that one will be mandatory. They have several days to think and prepare their answers. On test day, tell them which four questions are on the test, and which one of the four is mandatory. They will write essays on the mandatory one and one other of their choosing from the three remaining. The test is open book. They will be graded, if it is a graded exercise, on the basis of their English, their essay form, and the quality of the case they make with facts and quotations.

3. Establish a special reading option for students who want to do personal follow-up reading that springs from this topic. Students benefit from having choice in what they read, and you can easily establish an outside reading program to reward students who read biographies or histories of the battle or the Civil War. It is also good to have nice book talks with students, rather than have them write a book report. Suggestion: if students read extra books because they want to explore the topic more deeply, award a full fixed amount of points if you can see that they read the book, rather than giving grades. Make the assignment rewarding, risk free, and fun. Students enjoy talking about books they have read when they can just share ideas in a fun setting..