

We the People



THE CITIZEN & DEMOCRACY

FIRST EDITION

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LESSON 5

WHAT IS A DEMOCRACY?

LESSON PURPOSE

In this lesson, you will learn a very simple definition of democracy. It was made in a speech by Abraham Lincoln, who was one of our most famous presidents.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

When you have completed this lesson, you should be able to explain the meaning of Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy.

TERMS TO KNOW

- Abraham Lincoln
- Civil War
- elect
- Gettysburg Address
- majority
- minority
- Northern states
- of the people, by the people, for the people
- slaves
- Southern states



WHAT DID ABRAHAM LINCOLN SAY DEMOCRACY MEANS?

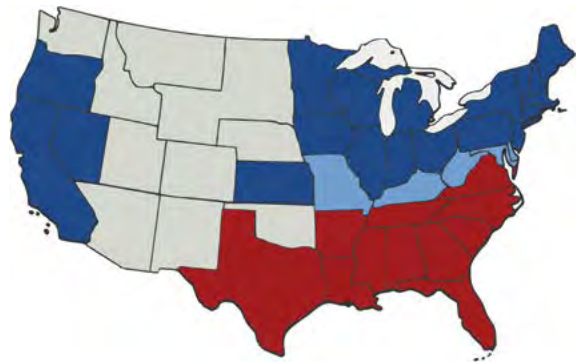




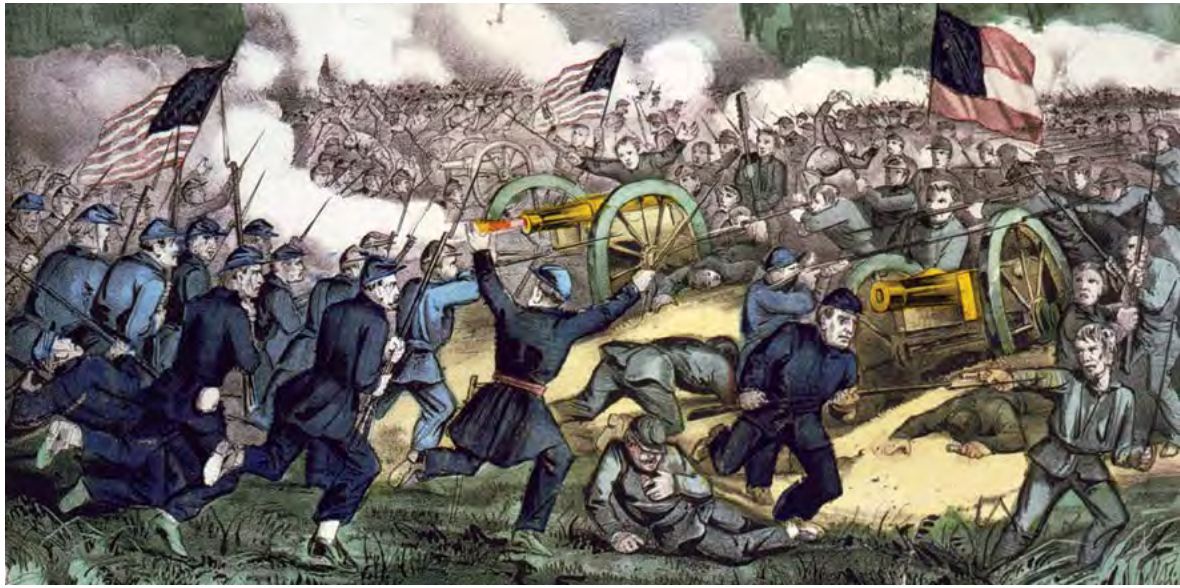
The Civil War began in 1861 and ended in 1865.

Abraham Lincoln was one of the greatest presidents of our United States. During the time he was president, our country had a terrible civil war.

The **Civil War** was between states in the North and states in the South. People in the North wanted to force people in the South to free their **slaves**. People in the South wanted to keep their slaves. They said they needed them to work for them on their farms. They also wanted to separate from the United States and begin their own country.



Northern and Southern states during the Civil War



The Battle of Gettysburg (1863)

In 1863, the army of the **Northern states** won a bloody battle against the army of the **Southern states**. It was held at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. After that, the Northern states won most of the battles with the Southern army.



The Northern states won in 1865.

Two years later, the army of the Southern states gave up. The Northern states had won. They forced the Southern states to give up their slaves. And they forced them to remain a part of the United States.



President Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg (1863)

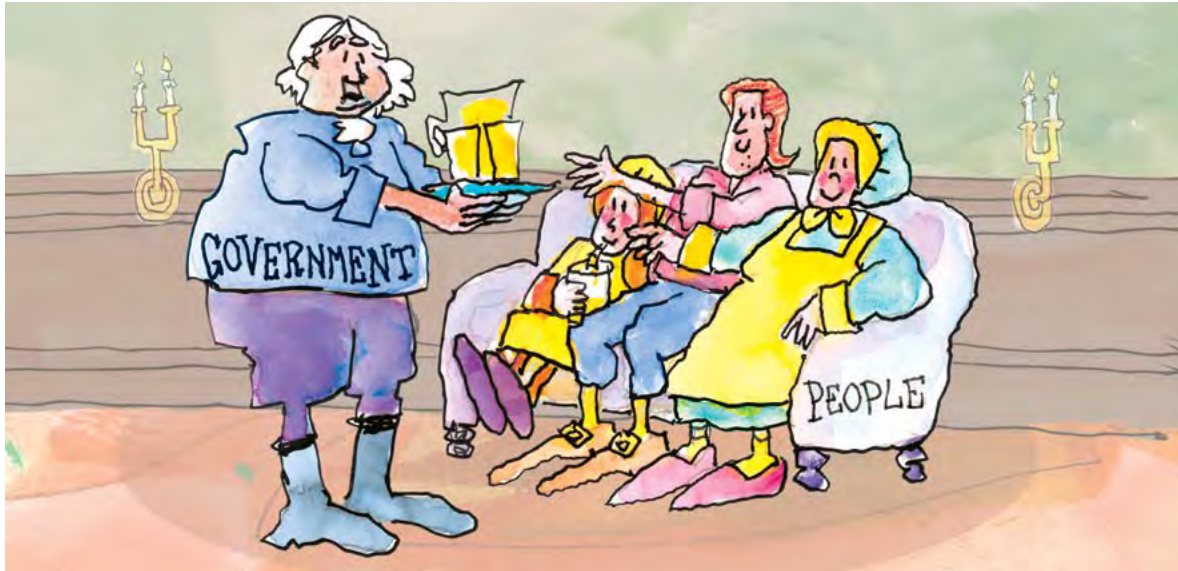
After the Northern states won the Battle of Gettysburg, President Lincoln gave a speech on the battleground. He spoke to honor the soldiers who had died fighting for their country. His speech is called the **Gettysburg Address**.

At the end of his speech, Lincoln gave a very simple definition of democracy. He said a democracy is a “government **of the people, by the people, for the people.**” Let’s see what these words mean.



Who are “We the People” in a democracy?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY A DEMOCRACY IS A GOVERNMENT OF, BY, AND FOR THE PEOPLE?



Of the people means that in a democracy, the people approve of the plan for their government. They agree or consent to be ruled by it. All the power of government comes from the people. The government is the servant of the people. And the people can control their government.



By the people means that in a democracy, all the laws are made by the people. Or they can be made by representatives the people **elect** to make laws for them.



It means that all people eighteen years old or older can vote. It does not mean that only a small group can vote.



It means each person's vote counts the same as every other person's vote.



It means that a majority rules. A **majority** means one person more than half of a group of people. For example, if there were ten people in a group, six would be a majority.



It does not mean a majority can take away the rights of a **minority**.



It means that anyone over a certain age can try to be elected.



It means that elections must be free and fair.



It means that people can meet together. And they can speak freely.



It means people can work with others to convince other people to support their ideas.



For the people means that people in government must try to do what most of the people want and need.

— WHAT DO YOU THINK? —

- 1 What do you think is the most important thing about democracy?
Why is it important?
- 2 What might happen to a democracy if only a few people participate?
- 3 What are some things about democracy that are fair?
Explain your answers.
- 4 Is majority rule fair? Why or why not?
- 5 How can you be sure majorities are not unfair to minorities?
- 6 Is there anything about democracy that is not fair?
Explain your answers.

IMAGE CREDITS

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Illustration by Richard Stein.

Lesson 5

P. 33, Abraham Lincoln, standing, full-length, facing right, holding rope of flag, arm upraised (cropped), Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USZC2-6378; 34, Abraham Lincoln Memorial 2, Kevin Burkett/Flickr/CC BY-SA 2.0; 35 (top), Battle of Franklin, November 30, 1864, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-pga-01852/Wikimedia Commons; 35 (bottom), Map of the United States in 1864, showing the division during the Civil War, Júlio Reis/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 3.0; 36 (top), *The battle of Gettysburg, Pa. July 3d. 1863*, hand-colored lithograph by Currier and Ives, circa 1863, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-pga-06132/Wikimedia Commons; 36 (bottom), *Lee Surrendering to Grant at Appomattox* by Alonzo Chappel, ca. 1870, oil on paperboard, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Nancy L. Ross in memory of Patricia Firestone Chatham, 1981.139; 37 (top), Lincoln's address at the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery, November 19, 1863, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-19926; 37 (bottom), Audience engagement (cropped), Oregon Department of Transportation/Flickr/CC BY 2.0; 38–43, Richard Stein.