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Teaching with Movies & Literature

GETTYSBURG

Good for the following school subjects:

- ✓ American History
- ✓ The American Civil War

Directed by Ronald F. Maxwell
1993; Rated PG; Drama; 254 minutes; Color;
Available from www.OwlTeacher.com bookstore

Synopsis: This movie showcases the battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War, a battle which is considered by many historians to be the turning point of the war. It is the most brutal battle ever fought in America, lasting three days in the summer of 1863. The film is based on Michael Shaara's bestselling historical novel, *The Killer Angels*. It is also very historically accurate and true to the events of the battle.

Educational Benefits of this movie: Young adults studying the Civil War will gain a true, vivid picture of it while viewing this film. It is historically accurate and meticulous in detail. Students will become familiar with the colonels and generals of the battle, military tactics, and fateful decisions. The film does not shy away from the horror and bloodshed of those three days in July, but students need to understand how difficult the war was and how tragic as well. Although the film only focuses on the battle of Gettysburg, history students will come away with an understanding of the war, its causes, results, and costs.

Historical Background: In the summer of 1863, the South had been mostly triumphant. However, they were having many problems getting food, clothing, weapons, and ammunition to its soldiers. At the same time, the Union army of the North was gaining strength in both numbers as well as materials, thanks to the North's industries. Confederate general, Robert E. Lee figured he could either retreat to Richmond, Virginia, the Confederacy's capitol, to face a siege or he could invade Pennsylvania and attempt to gain the upper hand in the war. Since Lee knew that a retreat to Richmond would guarantee defeat, he took his chances and decided to invade Pennsylvania, praying for a victory that would result in the North's surrender or at the very least, entice England to join the war on the South's side. None of these hopes came true. During the battle, General Lee made a horrendous mistake and ordered Pickett's division to charge uphill into well-established Union lines. The book by Michael Shaara explains Lee's reasoning for this decision.

Study Questions:

1. What if the South had won the battle of Gettysburg? How do you think the war would have changed from there?
2. List the reasons that Confederate troops were fighting the Civil War:
3. List the reasons that Union troops were fighting the Civil War:



4. In the beginning many believed that the war would be over quickly and would involve only a couple of big battles. Explain why this was the standard belief and list the reasons why it was wrong.
5. Describe the reason behind Longstreet and Lee's difference of opinions throughout most of the battle:
6. Was General Lee correct in blaming himself and only himself for the Southern defeat at Gettysburg? Why or why not?
7. What effect did the Battle of Gettysburg have on the entire Civil War? Be specific and give reasons for your answer.

Project:

Analyze the different men involved in the Battle of Gettysburg. Think about each character's motivations, relationships, and conflicts. In a graphic format (see below for an idea, but you may display the elements any way you like) you will create a Character Map on one individual of your choice. The character map should focus on all of the following elements/traits: appearance, words and actions, background, personality, motivations, relationships, conflicts, and how they have changed over the course of the three days of the battle. Also include what leadership skills they displayed during the battle, if any. Your description of each trait should be concise (about 25 words). Include a quotation from the character during the battle and place it somewhere on the map. You can use my example of a character map for guidance or you can create one on your own using your imagination and creativity. You must include a photo of your character and his ultimate fate when the war was over. Your character map must be neat, creative, and colorful. Choose from the following important people:

- ✓ Lewis Armistead
- ✓ Robert E. Lee
- ✓ George G. Meade
- ✓ John Buford
- ✓ James Longstreet
- ✓ George Pickett
- ✓ Joshua Chamberlain
- ✓ Winfield Scott Hancock
- ✓ James Ewell Brown Stuart

Sample Character

Map

graphic:

