



## Task Shell Example 14—Turning Points in History

### Social Studies Assessment Activity

April 9–15, 1865: The Week That Changed America



WAR CASUALTIES	
Gulf War:	383
Vietnam:	55,000
Korean:	50,000
W.W.I:	100,000
W.W. II:	250,000
Civil War:	650,000



#### Introduction: One Turning Point in History

No war was more costly in lives lost, and no war had such a profound impact on the character of the United States as the Civil War of 1861–1865. In the spring of the final year of the war, public opinion and the angry voices of senators and congressmen in Abraham Lincoln’s own party, the Republicans, were calling for revenge on the South and for the hanging of Southern political and military leaders as traitors. In the South, many generals and politicians wanted to continue the struggle, even if it meant years of guerrilla war, a prospect that would have prevented peaceful reunification of the nation.

On April 9, Confederate General Robert E. Lee and Union General Ulysses S. Grant met at the McLean home in Appomattox, Virginia, to sign the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee was one of several generals in the field of battle across the South, and he did not have the authority to end the war. He was, however, the most respected man in the South.

Only a week later, Lincoln would be assassinated. Calls for a military takeover of the U.S. government and a bloodbath of revenge on the South were louder than ever. Although events of that week did result in harsher treatment of the South by the conquering North, the South did surrender; both sides accepted the reunification of the country and moved on.

What was the turning point in that fateful week in April 1865 that shaped the future of America and prevented the worst and likeliest outcomes? Historians still ponder the complex factors, but the power of leadership of the two generals and the terms they decided upon in a famous exchange of letters during the days just before the meeting at Appomattox may have decided the fate of the nation.

#### Other Turning Points in History:

“The week That Changed America” is just one of the many turning points in history. You are about to explore such a turning point.

In this assessment activity, you will

- write an essay on a historical period and a turning point in that period; and
- make an oral presentation exploring the role of leaders in historical turning points.

(Continued)

### Social Studies Assessed

- The causal influence of historical factors on future societal developments
- The role of leadership in the dynamics of change
- The significance of effective historical interpretation in shaping the direction of society
- Integrating research into analytical writing and oral presentations

You and one or two partners will be assigned to explore a turning point in history.

In doing so, you are to do the following:

#### Part I—Write Your Essay

Research the historical moment in time and individually write an essay (approximately 500 words) including the following elements:

- The historical context
- Key factors
- The apparent turning point
- Key players involved
- Outcomes, both long and short term
- Bibliography of sources

#### Part II—Prepare a Group Oral Presentation on the Turning Point

Although your formal presentation should be only 5 to 10 minutes, the length of the class discussion could vary considerably. It is important to try to anticipate the questions likely to be asked by your classmates or your teacher.

- The oral presentation should be in outline form accompanied by supporting audiovisual materials.
- Include a brief biography of the person or persons you believe to be at the center of the forces of change. Only focus on biographical details that provide insight into their role in the moment in history under discussion.
- In addition to references to elements in your essay, also plan a discussion session for the class in which you encourage classmates to explore this question:

*“What do you believe is one or more major lessons for leaders seeking to bring about change from this turning point in history?”*

*Source:* Adapted from assessment developed as part of the Wyoming Body of Evidence Consortium & Wyoming Department of Education Performance Assessment Project—Grade HS (2002–2004). Image of Robert E. Lee (photographer unknown) from the Heritage Auction Archives. Image of Ulysses S. Grant by Edgar Guy Fawx from the Library of Congress.



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