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Auszug aus:

Speech Analysis: "Gettysburg Address" (Lincoln)

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Abraham Lincoln – "Gettysburg Address" (November 19th, 1863)

"Fourscore 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 battle-field 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."

TASKS

1. Outline the historical background of the speech at hand.
2. Analyse Lincoln's speech regarding the way he uses rhetorical devices to illustrate his vision of America and the American Dream.
3. Comment on the two following, contrasting statements: "Actions speak louder than words" and "The pen is mightier than the sword".

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Some arguments pupils might put forward:

- The pen is able to provoke actions in others, it is therefore mightier.
- Good deeds can inspire others, but their impact and effects are limited to immediate witnesses. In order to transcend the specifics of time and space, they need words to transport their message.
- The effects of words can last several lifetimes. Literature is immortal, and some works continue to inspire even after a millennia (see the Bible as an example). So, in the long run, the pen is mightier than the sword, whereas the latter may be more "convincing" (forceful) in a concrete situation.
- Written documents can be a tool of transmission for changing the world. The US Declaration of Independence continues to be an influence in American thought and politics till today. Also, the German "Grundgesetz" is a constitution and a reference point held in very high esteem.
- The notion that a pen, written materials or ideas in general are more powerful than actions is a noble, but sadly also an idealistic, ivory-tower one. For example, weapons of mass destruction, like the atomic bomb, annihilate the power of words.
- In order to become legends, actions need words and written accounts, both fictional and non-fictional, to become known and to gain influential power beyond their immediate context.
- Lincoln's Gettysburg Address puts its own spin on the meaning of the battle of the time. These words and his interpretation of its significance influenced history, and are still talked about today.



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