Geography and History Activity
Creating a Nation, Beginnings to 1877

Vicksburg and Gettysburg

The Siege of Vicksburg
In May 1863, General Ulysses Grant marched his troops 180 miles in 17 days, during which they fought five battles, inflicted 7,200 casualties, and forced the Confederates to take refuge behind their defenses in Vicksburg. Grant then launched two assaults on Vicksburg, but the city’s defenders repulsed both attacks and inflicted high casualties. Grant decided to lay siege to the city, cutting off its food and supplies to force a surrender. During the siege, the Union worked to break down the defenses at Vicksburg by surrounding the city, digging approach trenches to get close to the Confederate fortifications, and bombarding the city from gunboats positioned in the river. On July 4, after six weeks of siege, the Confederate commander at Vicksburg surrendered. This victory gave the Union control of the Mississippi River and cut the Confederacy in half.

The Battle of Gettysburg
While the Siege of Vicksburg was taking place, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia invaded the North. General Robert E. Lee’s troops arrived in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on July 1, forcing Union troops to flee to the hills south of the town, where they reinforced their position and built a defensive line. The Union forces controlled the high ground and were deployed in such a way that troops could easily be moved from one part of the line to another depending on where the enemy attacked. On July 2, Lee tried to seize a hill that would have allowed his artillery to fire down the length of the Union line, but the attack was repulsed. Lee, believing that the Union had shifted a large number of troops to repulse his attack, was vulnerable in the center, so he ordered an attack of over 12,000 troops the next day. After savage fighting, this attack was also beaten back, forcing Lee to retreat to Virginia. This was the last time the Confederates invaded the North.

Caption: These maps show the routes taken by Union and Confederate troops in two Civil War battles that took place around the same time in 1863.
Understanding Concepts

1. What geographic advantages did the Union Army have during the Siege of Vicksburg?

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2. Why was the Battle of Vicksburg an important turning point in the Civil War?

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3. Why was the Union Army in such a strong position in the Battle of Gettysburg?

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Applying Concepts

4. At Vicksburg, the siege was successful, but under what circumstances might a siege be risky for the attackers?

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5. Why do you think General Robert E. Lee chose a direct attack at Gettysburg rather than a siege?

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