Choices That Mattered

How Civil War commanders shaped the fighting

8.C.12.2.B "Describe the significance of military leadership and experience (e.g., Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one decision by Lee and one by Grant. Circle a result of each decision to show why their leadership mattered.

Two Commanders, Different Choices

1 In the Civil War, a general's past experience could shape decisions that affected thousands of people. Robert E. Lee, who led the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, had trained as an engineer and served in the Mexican-American War. He learned to study terrain and move troops across difficult ground. Ulysses S. Grant, who later commanded all Union armies, had also served in that war. As a quartermaster, he helped arrange supplies and transportation. Those skills mattered because an army could not keep fighting without food, ammunition, and a way to move them.

2 Lee often took bold risks against larger Union forces. In May 1863, at Chancellorsville, he divided his smaller army, allowing troops under Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson to strike the Union flank. The Confederate victory showed how Lee could use surprise and movement to offset a disadvantage in numbers. Yet bold tactics could also fail. At Gettysburg in July, Lee ordered an attack across open ground against the center of the Union line. Union fire crushed the assault, and Lee retreated to Virginia. His choices brought major victories but also costly losses.

3 Grant favored steady pressure on Confederate forces and understood the importance of supplies. In 1863, he moved his army across the Mississippi River, won battles inland, and then surrounded Vicksburg. After a long siege, the Confederate garrison surrendered. Vicksburg's surrender helped the Union gain control of the Mississippi River, splitting the Confederacy and making it harder to move goods and troops across the river. In 1864, Grant coordinated attacks by several Union armies instead of letting the Confederates shift troops freely between fronts. This approach took heavy Union losses but kept pressure on Confederate armies.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Lee's decision to divide his army at Chancellorsville help him overcome a disadvantage?

2. What does the outcome of Lee's attack at Gettysburg show about the risks of his leadership style?

3. How did Grant's Vicksburg campaign affect the movement of Confederate goods and troops?

4. Why did Grant coordinate attacks by several Union armies in 1864?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a Civil War commander who must choose between a surprise attack and a long siege. In four or five sentences, recommend one choice using a lesson from Lee and a lesson from Grant, then explain one possible benefit and one risk of your plan.

ANSWER KEY

Choices That Mattered

GRADE 8 · 8.C.12.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one decision by Lee and one by Grant. Circle a result of each decision to show why their leadership mattered. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Lee's decision to divide his army at Chancellorsville help him overcome a disadvantage?	**It let Jackson's troops surprise the Union flank, helping Lee's smaller army win.**
2	What does the outcome of Lee's attack at Gettysburg show about the risks of his leadership style?	**A bold attack could fail and cause costly losses, as it did when Union fire crushed the assault.**
3	How did Grant's Vicksburg campaign affect the movement of Confederate goods and troops?	**Vicksburg's surrender helped the Union control the Mississippi River, making it harder for the Confederacy to move goods and troops across it.**
4	Why did Grant coordinate attacks by several Union armies in 1864?	**Coordinated attacks kept pressure on Confederate armies and made it harder for them to shift troops between fronts.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I recommend a long siege rather than a surprise attack. Lee's surprise at Chancellorsville helped defeat a larger force, but his assault at Gettysburg shows that a bold attack can bring costly losses. Grant's siege of Vicksburg ended in a Confederate surrender and helped the Union gain control of the Mississippi River. A siege might avoid an assault across open ground, but keeping troops supplied for a long time could be difficult.

Accept other supported explanations of how a commander's choice affected an army or the war. For Part 3, accept either recommendation if the student uses lessons from both commanders and explains a plausible benefit and risk.