

Reading Comprehension Practice Questions

1. Questions 1-7.

In the sixteenth century, an age of great marine and terrestrial exploration, Ferdinand Magellan led the first expedition to sail around the world. As a young Portuguese noble, he served the king of Portugal, but he became involved in the quagmire of political intrigue at court and lost the king's favor. After he was dismissed from service to the king of Portugal, he offered to serve the future Emperor Charles V of Spain.

A papal decree of 1493 had assigned all land in the New World west of 50 degrees W longitude to Spain and all the land east of that line to Portugal. Magellan offered to prove that the East Indies fell under Spanish authority. On September 20, 1519, Magellan set sail from Spain with five ships. More than a year later, one of these ships was exploring the topography of South America in search of a water route across the continent. This ship sank, but the remaining four ships searched along the southern peninsula of South America. Finally they found the passage they sought near a latitude of 50 degrees S. Magellan named this passage the Strait of All Saints, but today we know it as the Strait of Magellan.

One ship deserted while in this passage and returned to Spain, so fewer sailors were privileged to gaze at that first panorama of the Pacific Ocean. Those who remained crossed the meridian we now call the International Date Line in the early spring of 1521 after ninety-eight days on the Pacific Ocean. During those long days at sea, many of Magellan's men died of starvation and disease.

Later Magellan became involved in an insular conflict in the Philippines and was killed in a tribal battle. Only one ship and seventeen sailors under the command of the Basque navigator Elcano survived to complete the westward journey to Spain and thus prove once and for all that the world is round, with no precipice at the edge.

The sixteenth century was an age of great ___ exploration.

- A. cosmic
- B. land
- C. mental
- D. common man
- E. none of the above

2. Magellan lost the favor of the king of Portugal when he became involved in a political ___.

- A. entanglement
- B. discussion
- C. negotiation
- D. problems
- E. none of the above

3. The Pope divided New World lands between Spain and Portugal according to their location on one side or the other of an imaginary geographical line 50 degrees west of Greenwich that extends in a ___ direction.

- A. north and south
- B. crosswise
- C. easterly

- D. south east
- E. north and west

4. One of Magellan's ships explored the ___ of South America for a passage across the continent.

- A. coastline
- B. mountain range
- C. physical features
- D. islands
- E. none of the above

5. Four of the ships sought a passage along a southern ___.

- A. coast
- B. inland
- C. body of land with water on three sides
- D. border
- E. answer not available

6. The passage was found near 50 degrees S of ___.

- A. Greenwich
- B. The equator
- C. Spain
- D. Portugal
- E. Madrid

7. In the spring of 1521, the ships crossed the ___ now called the International Date Line.

- A. imaginary circle passing through the poles
- B. Imaginary line parallel to the equator
- C. area
- D. land mass
- E. answer not found in article

8. Questions 8-14

Marie Curie was one of the most accomplished scientists in history. Together with her husband, Pierre, she discovered radium, an element widely used for treating cancer, and studied uranium and other radioactive substances. Pierre and Marie's amicable collaboration later helped to unlock the secrets of the atom.

Marie was born in 1867 in Warsaw, Poland, where her father was a professor of physics. At the early age, she displayed a brilliant mind and a blithe personality. Her great exuberance for learning prompted her to continue with her studies after high school. She became disgruntled, however, when she learned that the university in Warsaw was closed to women. Determined to receive a higher education, she defiantly left Poland and in 1891 entered the Sorbonne, a French university, where she earned her master's degree and doctorate in physics.

Marie was fortunate to have studied at the Sorbonne with some of the greatest scientists of her day, one of whom was Pierre Curie. Marie and Pierre were married in 1895 and spent many productive years working together in the physics laboratory. A short time after they discovered radium, Pierre was killed by a horse-drawn wagon in 1906. Marie was stunned by this horrible

misfortune and endured heartbreaking anguish. Despondently she recalled their close relationship and the joy that they had shared in scientific research. The fact that she had two young daughters to raise by herself greatly increased her distress.

Curie's feeling of desolation finally began to fade when she was asked to succeed her husband as a physics professor at the Sorbonne. She was the first woman to be given a professorship at the world-famous university. In 1911 she received the Nobel Prize in chemistry for isolating radium. Although Marie Curie eventually suffered a fatal illness from her long exposure to radium, she never became disillusioned about her work. Regardless of the consequences, she had dedicated herself to science and to revealing the mysteries of the physical world.

The Curies' ____ collaboration helped to unlock the secrets of the atom.

- A. friendly
- B. competitive
- C. courteous
- D. industrious
- E. chemistry

9. Marie had a bright mind and a __personality.

- A. strong
- B. lighthearted
- C. humorous
- D. strange
- E. envious

10. When she learned that she could not attend the university in Warsaw, she felt ____.

- A. hopeless
- B. annoyed
- C. depressed
- D. worried
- E. none of the above

11. Marie ____ by leaving Poland and traveling to France to enter the Sorbonne.

- A. challenged authority
- B. showed intelligence
- C. behaved
- D. was distressed
- E. answer not available in article

12. ____ she remembered their joy together.

- A. Dejectedly
- B. Worried
- C. Tearfully
- D. Happily
- E. Sorrowfully

13. Her ____ began to fade when she returned to the Sorbonne to succeed her husband.

- A. misfortune
- B. anger
- C. wretchedness
- D. disappointment
- E. ambition

14. Even though she became fatally ill from working with radium, Marie Curie was never ____.

- A. troubled
- B. worried
- C. disappointed
- D. sorrowful
- E. disturbed

15. Questions 15-19.

Mount Vesuvius, a volcano located between the ancient Italian cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, has received much attention because of its frequent and destructive eruptions. The most famous of these eruptions occurred in A. D. 79.

The volcano had been inactive for centuries. There was little warning of the coming eruption, although one account unearthed by archaeologists says that a hard rain and a strong wind had disturbed the celestial calm during the preceding night. Early the next morning, the volcano poured a huge river of molten rock down upon Herculaneum, completely burying the city and filling in the harbor with coagulated lava.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the mountain, cinders, stone and ash rained down on Pompeii. Sparks from the burning ash ignited the combustible rooftops quickly. Large portions of the city were destroyed in the conflagration. Fire, however, was not the only cause of destruction. Poisonous sulphuric gases saturated the air. These heavy gases were not buoyant in the atmosphere and therefore sank toward the earth and suffocated people.

Over the years, excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum have revealed a great deal about the behavior of the volcano. By analyzing data, much as a zoologist dissects a specimen animal, scientists have concluded that the eruption changed large portions of the area's geography. For instance, it turned the Sarno River from its course and raised the level of the beach along the Bay of Naples. Meteorologists studying these events have also concluded that Vesuvius caused a huge tidal wave that affected the world's climate.

In addition to making these investigations, archaeologists have been able to study the skeletons of victims by using distilled water to wash away the volcanic ash. By strengthening the brittle bones with acrylic paint, scientists have been able to examine the skeletons and draw conclusions about the diet and habits of the residents. Finally, the excavations at both Pompeii and Herculaneum have yielded many examples of classical art, such as jewelry made of bronze, which is an alloy of copper and tin.

The eruption of Mount Vesuvius and its tragic consequences have provided us with a wealth of data about the effects that volcanoes can have on the surrounding area. Today volcanologists can locate and predict eruptions, saving lives and preventing the destruction of cities and cultures.

Herculaneum and its harbor were buried under ____ lava.

- A. liquid
- B. solid
- C. flowing

- D. gas
- E. answer not available

16. The poisonous gases were not ___ in the air.

- A. able to float
- B. visible
- C. able to evaporate
- D. invisible
- E. able to condense

17. Scientists analyzed data about Vesuvius in the same way that a zoologist ___ a specimen.

- A. describes in detail
- B. studies by cutting apart
- C. photographs
- D. chart
- E. answer not available

18. ___ have concluded that the volcanic eruption caused a tidal wave.

- A. Scientist who study oceans
- B. Scientist who study atmospheric conditions
- C. Scientist who study ash
- D. Scientist who study animal behavior
- E. Answer not available in article

19. Scientist have used ___ water to wash away volcanic ash from the skeletons of victims.

- A. bottled
- B. volcanic
- C. purified
- D. sea
- E. fountain

20. Questions 20-24.

Conflict had existed between Spain and England since the 1570s. England wanted a share of the wealth that Spain had been taking from the lands it had claimed in the Americas.

Elizabeth I, Queen of England, encouraged her staunch admiral of the navy, Sir Francis Drake, to raid Spanish ships and towns. Though these raids were on a small scale, Drake achieved dramatic success, adding gold and silver to England's treasury and diminishing Spain's omnipotence.

Religious differences also caused conflict between the two countries. Whereas Spain was Roman Catholic, most of England had become Protestant. King Philip II of Spain wanted to claim the throne and make England a Catholic country again. To satisfy his ambition and also to retaliate against England's theft of his gold and silver, King Philip began to build his fleet of warships, the Armada, in January 1586.

Philip intended his fleet to be indestructible. In addition to building new warships, he marshaled one hundred and thirty sailing vessels of all types and recruited more than nineteen thousand

robust soldiers and eight thousand sailors. Although some of his ships lacked guns and others lacked ammunition, Philip was convinced that his Armada could withstand any battle with England.

The martial Armada set sail from Lisbon, Portugal, on May 9, 1588, but bad weather forced it back to port. The voyage resumed on July 22 after the weather became more stable.

The Spanish fleet met the smaller, faster, and more maneuverable English ships in battle off the coast of Plymouth, England, first on July 31 and again on August 2. The two battles left Spain vulnerable, having lost several ships and with its ammunition depleted. On August 7, while the Armada lay at anchor on the French side of the Strait of Dover, England sent eight burning ships into the midst of the Spanish fleet to set it on fire. Blocked on one side, the Spanish ships could only drift away, their crews in panic and disorder. Before the Armada could regroup, the English attacked again on August 8.

Although the Spaniards made a valiant effort to fight back, the fleet suffered extensive damage. During the eight hours of battle, the Armada drifted perilously close to the rocky coastline. At the moment when it seemed that the Spanish ships would be driven onto the English shore, the wind shifted, and the Armada drifted out into the North Sea. The Spaniards recognized the superiority of the English fleet and returned home, defeated.

Sir Francis Drake added wealth to the treasury and diminished Spain's _____.

- A. unlimited power
- B. unrestricted growth
- C. territory
- D. treaties
- E. answer not available in article

21. Philip recruited many _____ soldiers and sailors.

- A. warlike
- B. strong
- C. accomplished
- D. timid
- E. non experienced

22. The _____ Armada set sail on May 9, 1588.

- A. complete
- B. warlike
- C. independent
- D. isolated
- E. answer not available

23. The two battles left the Spanish fleet _____.

- A. open to change
- B. triumphant
- C. open to attack
- D. defeated
- E. discouraged

24. The Armada was ____ on one side.

- A. closed off
- B. damaged
- C. alone
- D. circled
- E. answer not available in this article

25. Questions 25-29.

The victory of the small Greek democracy of Athens over the mighty Persian empire in 490 B. C. is one of the most famous events in history. Darius, king of the Persian empire, was furious because Athens had interceded for the other Greek city-states in revolt against Persian domination. In anger the king sent an enormous army to defeat Athens. He thought it would take drastic steps to pacify the rebellious part of the empire. Persia was ruled by one man.

In Athens, however, all citizens helped to rule. Ennobled by this participation, Athenians were prepared to die for their city-state. Perhaps this was the secret of the remarkable victory at Marathon, which freed them from Persian rule. On their way to Marathon, the Persians tried to fool some Greek city-states by claiming to have come in peace. The frightened citizens of Delos refused to believe this. Not wanting to abet the conquest of Greece, they fled from their city and did not return until the Persians had left. They were wise, for the Persians next conquered the city of Etria and captured its people.

Tiny Athens stood alone against Persia. The Athenian people went to their sanctuaries. There they prayed for deliverance. They asked their gods to expedite their victory. The Athenians refurbished their weapons and moved to the plain of Marathon, where their little band would meet the Persians. At the last moment, soldiers from Plataea reinforced the Athenian troops.

The Athenian army attacked, and Greek citizens fought bravely. The power of the mighty Persians was offset by the love that the Athenians had for their city. Athenians defeated the Persians in archery and hand combat. Greek soldiers seized Persian ships and burned them, and the Persians fled in terror. Herodotus, a famous historian, reports that 6400 Persians died, compared with only 192 Athenians.

Athens had ____ the other Greek city-states against the Persians.

- A. refused help to
- B. intervened on behalf of
- C. wanted to fight
- D. given orders for all to fight
- E. defeated

26. Darius took drastic steps to ____ the rebellious Athenians.

- A. weaken
- B. destroy
- C. calm
- D. placate
- E. answer not available

27. Their participation ____ to the Athenians.

- A. gave comfort
- B. gave honor
- C. gave strength
- D. gave fear
- E. gave hope

28. The people of Delos did not want to ____ the conquest of Greece.

- A. end
- B. encourage
- C. think about
- D. daydream about
- E. answer not available

29. The Athenians were ____ by some soldiers who arrived from Plataea.

- A. welcomed
- B. strengthened
- C. held
- D. captured
- E. answer not available

30. Questions 30-32.

The Trojan War is one of the most famous wars in history. It is well known for the ten-year duration, for the heroism of a number of legendary characters, and for the Trojan horse. What may not be familiar, however, is the story of how the war began.

According to Greek myth, the strife between the Trojans and the Greeks started at the wedding of Peleus, King of Thessaly, and Thetis, a sea nymph. All of the gods and goddesses had been invited to the wedding celebration in Troy except Eris, goddesses of discord. She had been omitted from the guest list because her presence always embroiled mortals and immortals alike in conflict.

To take revenge on those who had slighted her, Eris decided to cause a skirmish. Into the middle of the banquet hall, she threw a golden apple marked "for the most beautiful." All of the goddesses began to haggle over who should possess it. The gods and goddesses reached a stalemate when the choice was narrowed to Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Someone was needed to settle the controversy by picking a winner. The job eventually fell to Paris, son of King Priam of Troy, who was said to be a good judge of beauty.

Paris did not have an easy job. Each goddess, eager to win the golden apple, tried aggressively to bribe him.

"I'll grant you vast kingdoms to rule," promised Hera. "Vast kingdoms are nothing in comparison with my gift," contradicted Athena. "Choose me and I'll see that you win victory and fame in war." Aphrodite outdid her adversaries, however. She won the golden apple by offering Helen, Zeus' daughter and the most beautiful mortal, to Paris. Paris, anxious to claim Helen, set off for Sparta in Greece.

Although Paris learned that Helen was married, he accepted the hospitality of her husband, King Menelaus of Sparta, anyway. Therefore, Menelaus was outraged for a number of reasons when Paris departed, taking Helen and much of the king's wealth back to Troy. Menelaus collected his loyal forces and set sail for Troy to begin the war to reclaim Helen.

Eris was known for ___ both mortals and immortals.

- A. scheming against
- B. involving in conflict
- C. feeling hostile toward
- D. ignoring
- E. comforting

31. Each goddess tried ___ to bribe Paris.

- A. boldly
- B. effectively
- C. secretly
- D. carefully
- E. answer not stated

32. Athena ___ Hera, promising Paris victory and fame in war.

- A. denied the statement of
- B. defeated
- C. agreed with
- D. restated the statement
- E. questioned the statement

33. Questions 33-37.

One of the most intriguing stories of the Russian Revolution concerns the identity of Anastasia, the youngest daughter of Czar Nicholas II. During his reign over Russia, the Czar had planned to revoke many of the harsh laws established by previous czars. Some workers and peasants, however, clamored for more rapid social reform. In 1918 a group of these people, known as Bolsheviks, overthrew the government. On July 17 or 18, they murdered the Czar and what was thought to be his entire family.

Although witnesses vouched that all the members of the Czar's family had been executed, there were rumors suggesting that Anastasia had survived. Over the years, a number of women claimed to be Grand Duchess Anastasia. Perhaps the best-known claimant was Anastasia Tschaikovsky, who was also known as Anna Anderson.

In 1920, eighteen months after the Czar's execution, this terrified young woman was rescued from drowning in a Berlin river. She spent two years in a hospital, where she attempted to reclaim her health and shattered mind. The doctors and nurses thought that she resembled Anastasia and questioned her about her background. She disclaimed any connection with the Czar's family.

Eight years later, though, she claimed that she was Anastasia. She said that she had been rescued by two Russian soldiers after the Czar and the rest of her family had been killed. Two brothers named Tschaikovsky had carried her into Romania. She had married one of the brothers, who had taken her to Berlin and left her there, penniless and without a vocation. Unable to invoke the aid of her mother's family in Germany, she had tried to drown herself.

During the next few years, scores of the Czar's relatives, ex-servants, and acquaintances interviewed her. Many of these people said that her looks and mannerisms were evocative of the Anastasia that they had known. Her grandmother and other relatives denied that she was the real

Anastasia, however.

Tried of being accused of fraud, Anastasia immigrated to the United States in 1928 and took the name Anna Anderson. She still wished to prove that she was Anastasia, though, and returned to Germany in 1933 to bring suit against her mother's family. There she declaimed to the court, asserting that she was indeed Anastasia and deserved her inheritance.

In 1957, the court decided that it could neither confirm nor deny Anastasia's identity. Although we will probably never know whether this woman was the Grand Duchess Anastasia, her search to establish her identity has been the subject of numerous books, plays, and movies.

Some Russian peasants and workers ___ for social reform.

- A. longed
- B. cried out
- C. begged
- D. hoped
- E. thought much

34. Witnesses ___ that all members of the Czar's family had been executed.

- A. gave assurance
- B. thought
- C. hoped
- D. convinced some
- E. answer not stated

35. Tchaikovsky ___ any connection with the Czar's family.

- A. denied
- B. stopped
- C. noted
- D. justified
- E. answer not stated

36. She was unable to ___ the aid of her relative.

- A. locate
- B. speak about
- C. call upon
- D. identify
- E. know

37. In court she ___ maintaining that she was Anastasia and deserved her inheritance.

- A. finally appeared
- B. spoke forcefully
- C. testified
- D. gave evidence
- E. answer not stated

38. Questions 38-39.

King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette ruled France from 1774 to 1789, a time when the country was fighting bankruptcy. The royal couple did not let France's insecure financial situation limit their immoderate spending, however. Even though the minister of finance repeatedly warned the king and queen against wasting money, they continued to spend great fortunes on their personal pleasure. This lavish spending greatly enraged the people of France. They felt that the royal couple bought its luxurious lifestyle at the poor people's expense.

Marie Antoinette, the beautiful but exceedingly impractical queen, seemed uncaring about her subjects; misery. While French citizens begged for lower taxes, the queen embellished her palace with extravagant works of art. She also surrounded herself with artists, writers, and musicians, who encouraged the queen to spend money even more profusely.

While the queen's favorites gluttoned themselves on huge feasts at the royal table, many people in France were starving. The French government taxed the citizens outrageously. These high taxes paid for the entertainments the queen and her court so enjoyed. When the minister of finance tried to stop these royal spendthrifts, the queen replaced him. The intense hatred that the people felt for Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette kept building until it led to the French Revolution. During this time of struggle and violence (1789-1799), thousands of aristocrats, as well as the king and queen themselves, lost their lives at the guillotine. Perhaps if Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette had reined in their extravagant spending, the events that rocked France would not have occurred.

The people surrounding the queen encouraged her to spend money ____.

- A. wisely
- B. abundantly
- C. carefully
- D. foolishly
- E. joyfully

39. The minister of finance tried to curb these royal ____.

- A. aristocrats
- B. money wasters
- C. enemies
- D. individuals
- E. spenders

40. Questions 40-45.

Many great inventions are greeted with ridicule and disbelief. The invention of the airplane was no exception. Although many people who heard about the first powered flight on December 17, 1903, were excited and impressed, others reacted with peals of laughter. The idea of flying an aircraft was repulsive to some people. Such people called Wilbur and Orville Wright, the inventors of the first flying machine, impulsive fools. Negative reactions, however, did not stop the Wrights. Impelled by their desire to succeed, they continued their experiments in aviation.

Orville and Wilbur Wright had always had a compelling interest in aeronautics and mechanics. As young boys they earned money by making and selling kites and mechanical toys. Later, they designed a newspaper-folding machine, built a printing press, and operated a bicycle-repair shop. In 1896, when they read about the death of Otto Lilienthal, the brother's interest in flight grew into a compulsion.

Lilienthal, a pioneer in hang-gliding, had controlled his gliders by shifting his body in the desired direction. This idea was repellent to the Wright brothers, however, and they searched for more

efficient methods to control the balance of airborne vehicles. In 1900 and 1901, the Wrights tested numerous gliders and developed control techniques. The brothers' inability to obtain enough lift power for the gliders almost led them to abandon their efforts.

After further study, the Wright brothers concluded that the published tables of air pressure on curved surfaces must be wrong. They set up a wind tunnel and began a series of experiments with model wings. Because of their efforts, the old tables were repealed in time and replaced by the first reliable figures for air pressure on curved surfaces. This work, in turn, made it possible for them to design a machine that would fly. In 1903 the Wrights built their first airplane, which cost less than one thousand dollars. They even designed and built their own source of propulsion- a lightweight gasoline engine. When they started the engine on December 17, the airplane pulsed wildly before taking off. The plane managed to stay aloft for twelve seconds, however, and it flew one hundred twenty feet.

By 1905 the Wrights had perfected the first airplane that could turn, circle, and remain airborne for half an hour at a time. Others had flown in balloons or in hang gliders, but the Wright brothers were the first to build a full-size machine that could fly under its own power. As the contributors of one of the most outstanding engineering achievements in history, the Wright brothers are accurately called the fathers of aviation.

The idea of flying an aircraft was ___ to some people.

- A. boring
- B. distasteful
- C. exciting
- D. needless
- E. answer not available

41. People thought that the Wright brothers had _____.

- A. acted without thinking
- B. been negatively influenced
- C. been too cautious
- D. had not given enough thought
- E. acted in a negative way

42. The Wright's interest in flight grew into a _____.

- A. financial empire
- B. plan
- C. need to act
- D. foolish thought
- E. answer not in article

43. Lilenthal's idea about controlling airborne vehicles was ___ the Wrights.

- A. proven wrong by
- B. opposite to the ideas of
- C. disliked by
- D. accepted by
- E. opposed by

44. The old tables were ___ and replaced by the first reliable figures for air pressure on curved surfaces.

- A. destroyed
- B. canceled
- C. multiplied
- D. discarded
- E. not used

45. The Wrights designed and built their own source of _____.

- A. force for moving forward
- B. force for turning around
- C. turning
- D. force to going backward
- E. none of the above