

John Brown Rebellion Reading Comprehension

Name: _____

Read the passage and answer the questions.

A Hatred of Slavery

John Brown was born on May 9th, 1800, in Torrington, Connecticut. At age 5 he moved to Ohio and acquired a hatred for the institution of slavery from his father. When he was 12, he stayed with a Michigan family who continuously beat their slaves. The image would haunt Brown for the rest of his life. Brown soon became a staunch abolitionist (an advocate for the banning of slavery) and even started a school to help educate young black people in 1834.

A Murderous Act of Vengeance

In 1855, John Brown followed five of his sons to "Bleeding Kansas", where a number of abolitionists had recently been murdered. Brown and his sons subsequently murdered five slavery advocates at Pottawatomie, Kansas on May 24, 1856. Brown and his sons immediately became fugitives and withstood a mob of attacking Missourians at Osawatomie. Brown's actions, together with his stand at Osawatomie, made him a legendary figure and a nationally recognized opponent of slavery.

Planning for an Insurrection

When Brown returned east, he formulated a plan to free slaves by force. He had financial support from many wealthy abolitionists in the northeast. Brown's plan included a refuge for runaway slaves in the mountains of Virginia. On October 16, 1859, John Brown, his sons, and a small number of loyal supporters, launched an attack against the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. He believed word of the arsenal's capture would inspire slaves throughout Virginia to rebel against their owners. The group easily took the town and the arsenal. Brown, however, failed to launch any further offensives and took a defensive position within the arsenal. Brown's group was quickly surrounded by the local militia, and then, a day later, by U.S. marines led by Robert E. Lee. The ensuing battles resulted in the death of two of his sons, his own injuries, and an unconditional surrender.

A Martyr

As a result of his actions, Brown was charged with murder and treason. He was hanged at Charleston, Virginia on December 2, 1859. Nevertheless, his rebellion was one of the primary causes of the Civil War. Many southern sympathizers believed Brown's rebellion was a conspiracy against slavery advocates of the south staged by the U.S. Government. Others feared Brown's rebellion would indeed cause a slave insurrection. For many years after his death, Brown was considered a martyr and hero to the abolitionist cause.

1. Infer the meaning of the prefix ab- as used in the word “abolitionist.”

- a) Off, away from
- b) Towards
- c) With
- d) Across

2. Why did Brown grow up with a hatred of slavery?

- a) His childhood growing up in Connecticut
- b) A visit to a violent family in Ohio
- c) Influence from a parent
- d) Personal experience as a slaveowner

3. Which event happened first?

- a) John Brown and his sons go to Bleeding Kansas
- b) Brown attacks Harper’s Ferry
- c) Brown starts a school to educate young Black individuals
- d) Two of Brown’s sons die

4. Why did Brown’s raid at Harper’s Ferry fail?

- a) Brown failed to capture the arsenal.
- b) Brown and his followers failed to act after raiding the arsenal.
- c) One of Brown’s sons told Robert E. Lee of the impending attack.
- d) U.S. Marines were waiting at the arsenal when Brown and his sons arrived.

5. Which statement about John Brown’s rebellion is true?

- a) It had no impact on the state of the union leading up to the Civil War.
- b) It resulted in the continued decline of relations between North and South.
- c) It motivated slaves to begin uprising against their owners.
- d) It was condemned by abolitionists.

6. Which best describes John Brown?

- a) A hot-headed diplomat
- b) A violent freedom fighter
- c) A reckless Southern sympathizer
- d) A peace-seeking abolitionist

7. A student wants to learn more about John Brown’s plans to raid Harper’s Ferry. Which source would be the best for this purpose?

- a) A map of Union and Confederate states in the Civil War
- b) Letters from John Brown to his wife leading up to the raid
- c) A blueprint of the arsenal at Harper’s Ferry
- d) The curriculum used at John Brown’s school

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1. (a)
2. (c)
3. (c)
4. (b)
5. (b)
6. (b)
7. (b)