

The Election of 1860 Reading Comprehension

Name: _____

By 1860, the United States was in the midst of serious political turmoil. The issue of slavery threatened to rip the nation apart. The 1860 presidential election was THE critical issue. The Democratic Party had been split into two factions, the Northern Democrats and the Southern Democrats. The Northern Democrats nominated Stephen A. Douglas from Illinois for president, and the Southern Democrats nominated John C. Breckinridge from Kentucky. Douglas would become the first presidential candidate to "campaign," by embarking on a national speaking tour. The newly formed anti-slavery Republican Party nominated Abraham Lincoln, a Representative from Illinois, legendary for his oratory. Lincoln won the nomination over three more well-known candidates, William Seward, Salmon P. Chase and Edward Bates (all of whom would become members of his cabinet). The Constitutional Union Party nominated John Bell from Tennessee.

On November 6, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was officially elected as president, despite the fact that he wasn't even listed on the ballot in nine southern states. Because the bulk of the voting population lived in the Northern states, those states had higher electoral values. Lincoln won the three states with the highest electoral values, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. He won 17 states in all. John C. Breckinridge won every southern state except Virginia and Tennessee. Those states were won by John Bell. The election of 1860 turned out to be the second highest on record in terms of voter turnout. The results of the election brought the country to Civil War. South Carolina, whose voters believed that a Republican president would restrict slavery in the new territories, and then attempt to prohibit it completely, supported secession. They believed slavery was an American "institution," and that their agricultural economy would collapse without it. On December 20, 1860, South Carolina issued a Declaration of Secession from the United States. Ten other states would follow its lead within a few months. The new President had a mighty task of preserving a fractured Union. War was the only way.

1. Which statement about the 1860 presidential candidates is false?

- a) Lincoln represented the Republican party.
- b) John C. Breckinridge represented the Northern Democrats.
- c) Stephen Douglas did not represent the Republican Party.
- d) John Bell represented the Constitutional Union Party.

2. Which is the best synonym for “oratory,” used to describe Lincoln in the first paragraph?

- a) Public speaking
- b) Law-making
- c) Leading
- d) Traveling

3. How did Lincoln win the election despite not being listed on the ballot in some Southern states?

- a) He was a write-in candidate in the southern states.
- b) Breckinridge conceded the election to Lincoln.
- c) He won many Northern states with large populations.
- d) He won every other Southern state except Virginia and Tennessee.

4. Which statement about the Election of 1860 is true?

- a) It had a low turnout.
- b) It had an unsurprising victor.
- c) It had historic consequences.
- d) It ruined Lincoln’s political career.

5. Why did South Carolina secede from the Union?

- a) They were afraid that Lincoln would abolish slavery as president.
- b) They felt their agricultural economy could do better on its own.
- c) They were angry that their candidate, Douglas, lost the election.
- d) They wanted a president who opposed slavery.

6. South Carolina believed that slavery was an American “institution.” Infer what this means.

- a) A replaceable aspect of the economy
- b) A well-designed education system
- c) A social construct created by the government
- d) A staple of American society

7. Which statement about Abraham Lincoln is supported by the passage?

- a) He was part of an anti-slavery political party.
- b) He was unopposed when competing for the Republican nomination.
- c) Both of the above
- d) None of the above

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