Battle of Gettysburg Day 3 Reading Comprehension
Name: _____

Read the passage and answer the questions.

On the third and final day of fighting, Confederate General Robert E. Lee wished to maintain the offensive and crush the Union Army. His plan was nearly identical to the day before - Longstreet would attack the Union left flank and Ewell would assault and occupy Culp's Hill on the Union right flank.

Failure at Culp's Hill

At around 4:00 A.M. on the 3rd, however, Lee's plans were foiled when Union forces launched an artillery bombardment on the lower portion of Culp's Hill that the Confederates had occupied the day before, forcing the Confederates there into battle. By 11:00 A.M., Confederate forces had gained little, if any, ground and suffered significant casualties. The failure at Culp's Hill required Lee to change his plans. He decided on an artillery bombardment on the Union line at Cemetery Ridge, before sending a massive infantry charge, which came to be known as Pickett's Charge.

Preparing for a Massive Assault

The artillery bombardment, however, proved relatively ineffective, even though the 150 guns used represented the largest such bombardment in the entire war. The massive amounts of smoke produced from the thundering cannons obscured targets, causing gunners to overshoot. Union forces eventually countered with 80 cannon of their own, adding to the chaos and confusion. To save ammunition, Union Brigadier General Henry Hunt ordered cannon fire to be gradually phased out, confusing Confederate gunners into believing they had been destroyed. The Confederate artillery bombardment was totally unsuccessful, and failed in its objective to soften Union defenses before the ill-fated infantry assault.

Pickett's Charge up Cemetery Ridge

At 3:00 in the afternoon, some 12,500 Confederate soldiers under the command of James Longstreet started their nearly mile-long uphill march to Union positions on Cemetery Ridge behind a stone wall. Interestingly, Longstreet had desperately tried to convince Lee to abandon the assault, believing it to be the equivalent of suicide, but Lee refused, intent on piercing the center of the Union line. Major General George Pickett's brigade was chosen to lead the charge, giving rise to the event's popular name: Pickett's Charge.

Unimaginable Carnage

The Confederates marching through the open fields were easy targets for Union guns and cannons, which fired from all directions on the nine brigades of Rebel soldiers. Huge gaps quickly formed in the Confederate lines from devastating artillery fire that killed or wounded groups of soldiers in a single blast. The carnage quickly demoralized the Confederate soldiers, many of whom turned around and ran. Others were gunned down by musket fire as they neared the stone wall. "Pickett's Charge" was a massacre. Of the 12,500 soldiers who advanced upon Cemetery Ridge, over half were killed or wounded. Union forces suffered about 1,500 casualties. Between 3,000 and 4,000 Confederate soldiers were reportedly captured. Lee, fully aware of the massacre, and worried about a Union counterattack, attempted to rally his soldiers crying out "it's all my fault," but there would be no rally, nor would there be a serious counterattack against the retreating Rebels.

A Decisive Union Victory in the Largest Battle in American History

On July 4, a truce was called so each side could collect their dead and wounded. In the July heat, the stench of the decomposing bodies which littered the fields caused many in Gettysburg to become violently ill.

As many as 51,000 casualties were documented at the end of the Battle of Gettysburg, with the Confederacy suffering as many as 28,000, and the Union about 23,000. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia retreated back to Virginia and would never fight again on Union soil. President Abraham Lincoln urged General Meade to pursue and attack the reeling Confederates, but the half-hearted pursuit proved ineffective and the Confederates escaped to Virginia. Meade would be soundly criticized for failing to deliver a decisive blow to the Confederates in their retreat.

1. Which of the following was NOT a disadvantage the Confederate forces during the third day of fighting?
a) The Union's surprise attack on Culp's Hill
b) The Confederates' failed artillery bombardment
c) The capture of Lee at Cemetery Ridge
d) The massacre of Pickett's Charge

2. Which strategy was used by the Union during the third day of fighting?
a) Creating the illusion of destroyed cannons
b) A combined bayonet and musket attack
c) Seizing the low ground for an advantage
d) A raid on the Confederate artillery base

3. Why did Lee cry out "it's all my fault" to his soldiers?
a) To reveal his part in causing the Civil War
b) To take responsibility for sending soldiers on a suicide mission
c) To encourage them to retreat from the battle and fight another day
d) To punish the soldiers deserting the army

4. Which statement is true?
a) Pickett's Charge began at sunrise.
b) More Union soldiers died in the Battle of Gettysburg than Confederate soldiers.
c) The Union had fewer cannons than the Confederates at Cemetery Ridge.
d) Less than 30,000 people total died at Gettysburg.

5. Which statement about Pickett's Charge is true?
a) It was ultimately unsuccessful
b) The massacre scared many Confederates into running from the scene.
c) Over half of the Confederate soldiers died or were injured.
d) All of the above

6. Which of the following is the best synonym for "reeling" as used in the passage?
a) Revolving
b) Vulnerable
c) Steady
d) Approaching

7. Why was Meade criticized at the end of the Battle of Gettysburg?
a) For failing to defeat Pickett's Charge
b) For failing to prevent the Confederates from regrouping in Virginia
c) For disobeying Lincoln's direct orders to attack the retreating Confederates
d) For acting cowardly during the Battle of Gettysburg

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