

Ludwig Van Beethoven Reading Comprehension

Name _____

Ludwig Van Beethoven is widely considered the most influential composer in history. Born in 1770, during the height of Mozart and Haydn's popularity, Beethoven's music is what we now think of as the bridge between the Classical period (ca. 1750-1800) and the Romantic period (ca. 1800-1900). The impact he had on the composers that came after him is immeasurable.

As a young adult, Beethoven moved to Vienna, Austria, with the hopes of being Mozart's composition student. Unfortunately, he was too late, so he studied with Franz Joseph Haydn instead. During this time, Beethoven's music was very reflective of Haydn and Mozart's work, while still maintaining originality.

Then, in 1802, Beethoven came upon an earth-shattering realization – the deafness he was experiencing, and hoped was temporary, was permanent. As a musician, one's hearing is arguably the most important thing to have. Imagine composing something and not being able to hear it! Beethoven retreated to the countryside in Austria, to a place called Heiligenstadt, where he wrote the now famous Heiligenstadt Testament. This was a letter to his brother in which he described his crossroads: he could give up, or he could overcome. In addition to his loss of hearing, Beethoven suffered from incapacitating abdominal pain. His devoted group of friends often competed with each other to take care of him as his suffering intensified.

The premiere of his third Symphony in 1803 revealed which option he chose. The response was gigantic – the Western world was stunned and excited by such a new sound. The opening features the melody in the cellos rather than the usual violins. Furthermore, the duration of the piece was more than double a typical Haydn symphony – almost one hour! This expansive form allowed for unexpected, dramatic harmonies to unfold, telling a story of a hero's struggle and triumph.

Nicknamed the *Eroica*, Beethoven originally dedicated this symphony to Napoleon Bonaparte, who he saw as a hero of his time. Like the founding fathers of the United States, Beethoven supported the ideals of the Enlightenment, such as individualism and personal freedom. Once Napoleon declared himself Emperor, Beethoven famously scratched out Napoleon's dedication. Beethoven arguably proved himself to be the true hero of the story. Not only did he hold fast to his progressive beliefs, but he also exhibited personal struggle and triumph in his monumental accomplishment through his growing deafness. Breaking norms was natural for Beethoven. Throughout his life, he expressed disdain for authority and was said to cut piano performances short if members of the audience were chattering or failed to give their full attention.

After the *Eroica*, and eventually the Ninth symphony, containing the famous "Ode to Joy" chorus, most composers tried to model their music after Beethoven's. His individualism sparked a revolution in classical music; history would never be the same!

1. **Which of the following best describes Beethoven's early work?**
 - A. Totally original and revolutionary for its time
 - B. Unoriginal; but similar to the styles of popular composers of the time
 - C. Original and different from the styles of popular composers of the time
 - D. Original; but similar in style to Mozart and Haydn
2. **How did Beethoven "come to terms" with his deafness?**
 - A. He expressed disdain for authority
 - B. He made the decision to overcome his disability
 - C. He moved to the Austrian countryside and hoped his deafness was temporary
 - D. He wrote a famous letter to his brother
3. **Based on how it is used in the passage, which of the following is the best description of the meaning of the word "crossroads?"**
 - A. Crossroads is the term used to describe when a person is facing a difficult choice that may determine something very important
 - B. Crossroads is the term used to describe when two situations occur simultaneously and one or both are positive
 - C. Crossroads is the term used to describe when the paths of two people cross in an unexpected way
 - D. Crossroads is the term used to describe when a person does something that has never been done before, or, something that changes history
4. **How was Beethoven's third Symphony different from musical works typical of the era? Select all that apply.**
 - A. The opening featured cellos instead of violins
 - B. It was much longer
 - C. It told a story of a hero's struggle
 - D. The style was more indicative of past musical works
5. **Why did Beethoven dedicate *the Eroica* to Napoleon Bonaparte?**
 - A. Because ultimately, Beethoven was the hero of the time
 - B. He believed that Napoleon was suppressing individualism and personal freedom
 - C. He saw him as a hero who shared his values
 - D. At first he saw him as a hero, but then, Napoleon declared himself Emperor

6. Which of the following would be an example of “disdain for authority?”

- A. Forgetting to complete a homework assignment for your science class
- B. Refusing to complete a homework assignment because you didn't like the teacher
- C. Packing a lunch for school instead of buying from the cafeteria
- D. Getting into an argument with a friend because you disagreed about something

7. Which question is NOT answered in the story?

- A. How many total symphonies did Beethoven produce?
- B. Which of Beethoven's symphonies contained “Ode to Joy?”
- C. How was Beethoven's third Symphony different from typical music of the time?
- D. Why did Beethoven “undedicate” *the Eroica* to Napoleon?