

Thomas Paine and Common Sense Reading Comprehension

Thomas Paine was born in England in 1737. He was the son of uneducated English farmers. In his early years, he served as an apprentice in his father's corset-making business but eventually served as a merchant seaman before starting his own corset business. In 1759, Paine married Mary Lambert, who would soon die during childbirth.

After the death of his wife, Paine moved around England and took several different jobs such as a servant, tax collector, and teacher. In 1771, Paine married Elizabeth Ollive, his landlord's daughter. It was during this time, while living in Lewes, East Sussex, that he became involved in local politics. In 1772, he published his first political work, known as *The Case of the Officers of Excise*, which championed better pay and working conditions for tax collectors. That same year, Paine met Benjamin Franklin, who encouraged him to move to America and wrote him a recommendation to do so. Paine arrived in Philadelphia on November 30, 1774, just days after obtaining a legal separation from his second wife. Upon his arrival in America, he was near death from typhoid, which had claimed the lives of five other passengers on the ship.

Although it took six weeks for Paine to recover from the trip to America, he quickly made his mark on American politics and sentiments. On January 10, 1776, he anonymously published *Common Sense*, a pro-independence pamphlet that would galvanize the colonists against the British and that would greatly influence the expediency of the Declaration of Independence. Paine's pamphlet quickly spread through the colony's literate population and became the international voice of the pro-independence colonies. *Common Sense* would quickly become the top-selling publication of the 18th century. That same year, he penned *The Crisis*, which greatly helped to inspire the Continental Army. Below is a famous quote from *The Crisis*:

“These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier
and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink
from the service of their country; but he that stands it now,
deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.
Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we
have this consolation with us, that the harder the
conflict, the more glorious the triumph.”

During and after the Revolution, Paine worked in France on French-American foreign affairs. It was during this time that he began to advocate the French Revolution. On January 29, 1791, he published *The Rights of Man*, a pamphlet encouraging the French Revolution and criticizing European monarchies. At first, he was seen as a great asset to the revolutionaries of France and was appointed to the French Convention and was named an honorary French citizen. However, as powers shifted in revolutionary France, Paine quickly became unpopular, was arrested, and scheduled to be executed (though he escaped execution by chance). During his incarceration, Paine penned *The Age of Reason*, a pamphlet that condemned organized religion. This pamphlet ultimately alienated many of his former supporters and resulted in his virtual ostracism from politics upon his return to America. Paine died in New York City in 1809. According to record, only six people came to his funeral.

1.) Which of the following did Thomas Paine NOT do in his early years?

- a.) Go to war
- b.) Work as an apprentice
- c.) Run a business
- d.) Serve on a boat

2.) What did Thomas Paine's first publication support?

- a.) Education for all
- b.) The war for independence
- c.) Better pay for tax collectors
- d.) Marriage

3.) Based on the passage, in what condition was Thomas Paine's health when he arrived in Philadelphia?

- a.) He was in good health.
- b.) He was in okay health.
- c.) He was in bad health.
- d.) He was near death.

4.) When did Thomas Paine publish *Common Sense*?

- a.) Before he arrived in America
- b.) Before he obtained a legal separation from his second wife
- c.) After he recovered from typhoid
- d.) 1791

5.) Which of the following would best describe the main idea of *Common Sense*?

- a.) America should seek peace with England.
- b.) America should fight to become an independent nation.
- c.) Americans should support their king.
- d.) Obtaining freedom will be easy.

6.) Which of the following would describe Paine's "sunshine patriot" as in the following lines:

The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country...

- a.) Someone who likes warm weather
- b.) Someone who fights to the death
- c.) Someone who is inspirational
- d.) Someone who fights only when it is easy

7.) Where was Thomas Paine after the Revolution?

- a.) France
- b.) Philadelphia
- c.) England
- d.) None of the above

8.) Which of the following best describes how the French felt about Thomas Paine?

- a.) At first he was a nuisance, then an asset.
- b.) They always considered him a nuisance.
- c.) At first he was an asset, then a nuisance.
- d.) They always considered him an asset.

9.) Which of Thomas Paine's pamphlets angered his former supporters?

- a.) *The Age of Reason*
- b.) *Common Sense*
- c.) *The Case of the Officers of Excise*
- d.) *The Crisis*

10.) Which happened last?

- a.) Paine published *The Age of Reason*
- b.) Paine was nearly executed.
- c.) 1810
- d.) Paine's funeral