First Battle of Bull Run Reading Comprehension

The first major battle of the American Civil War occurred on July 21, 1861, in Manassas, Virginia. The battle is known both as the First Battle of Bull Run, after the creek that ran through the battlefield, or the First Battle of Manassas. Union forces under General Irvin McDowell, hoping for a decisive blow against the newly formed Confederacy, planned a surprise attack against the left flank of Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard's forces at the railroad junction of Manassas. Both sides were unseasoned and unprepared for the carnage that would ensue. Hundreds of spectators from Washington lined the hills of the battlefield to cheer on the Union. McDowell, who was skeptical of the Union plan, amassed 35,000 soldiers—the largest land army ever assembled in America at the time—to attack the Confederate positions.

At 2:30 in the morning on July 21, McDowell sent two detachments from nearby Centreville toward Confederate positions. By 5:15, the first shots had been fired. Through the morning, Union forces had slowly pushed Confederate forces back until they broke through the Confederate right flank at about 11:30, sending them into a disorganized retreat. General McDowell elected not to pursue the retreating Confederates, who were able to regroup at the Henry Hill House. At 12:00, Confederate reinforcements under General Thomas J. Jackson arrived on the battlefield. It was at this moment when Confederate General Bernard Bee is said to have uttered the timeless words, "There is Jackson standing like a stone wall." From that point on, Thomas J. Jackson would be known as Stonewall Jackson. Some historians believe Bee was actually angry at Jackson for not sending his troops directly into battle. The tide of the battle soon changed when Confederate forces under Jackson and Calvary Commander J.E.B. Stuart captured Union artillery around 3:00. Jackson commanded his soldiers to press on, and for the first time in the war, Union forces would be horrified by the "rebel yells" screamed by Confederate soldiers on the attack. At 4:00, more Confederate reinforcements led by Kirby Smith and Jubal Early crushed a Union brigade and caused the collapse of McDowell's Union Army. Union forces began a disorderly and poorly managed retreat, accompanied by screaming spectators who clogged the retreat path. Confederate forces, also in a state of disarray, captured several hundred Union soldiers but failed to pursue the remaining forces back to Washington.

The First Battle of Bull Run proved to be the deadliest battle in American history to that point. Nearly 5,000 total casualties were recorded, with Union forces suffering roughly 1,000 more than the Confederates. The North was shocked and dismayed at the Union defeat, and many feared the Confederacy would move immediately on Washington. At the very least, the First Battle of Bull Run proved the war would be long and violent. President Lincoln was forced to sign a bill that allowed for the enlistment of up to 500,000 additional soldiers.

1.) Why did the Union Army attack at Bull Run?
  a.) They were hoping to end the war as quickly as it started.
  b.) They were hoping to prolong the war.
  c.) They had better generals.
  d.) They wanted to capture Confederate soldiers.

2.) At Bull Run, both the Union and Confederate Armies were…
  a.) battle tested.
  b.) ready for a long, violent war.
  c.) Inexperienced.
  d.) tired from fighting many battles.

3.) McDowell's army was…
  a.) small in comparison to other armies.
  b.) the largest ever assembled in America at the time.
  c.) fighting for the Confederacy.
  d.) smaller than Beauregard's.

4.) If the Battle of Bull Run had ended at 11:30 A.M., then…
  a.) the Confederacy would have been destroyed.
  b.) Washington DC would have been attacked.
  c.) the Union would have been considered victorious.
  d.) the Confederacy would have been considered victorious.

5.) Who coined the nickname "Stonewall" Jackson"?
  a.) Bernard Bee
  b.) Union soldiers
  c.) Thomas J. Jackson
  d.) Confederate prisoners

6.) When was the turning point in the First Battle of Bull Run?
  a.) 2:30 A.M.
  b.) 11:30 A.M.
  c.) When Stonewall Jackson arrived
  d.) About 3:00 P.M.

7.) Which of the following do you think is a major reason why the Confederates won the First Battle of Bull Run?
  a.) They received many reinforcements.
  b.) They had many more soldiers.
  c.) Their soldiers were more experienced.
  d.) They had better weapons.

8.) The First Battle of Bull Run proved…
  a.) the Confederacy would ultimately win.
  b.) the Civil War would be long and violent.
  c.) President Lincoln would ultimately be assassinated.
  d.) the Union would lose the will to fight.

9.) What happened first?
  a.) 4:00 P.M.
  b.) Stonewall Jackson arrived with reinforcements.
  c.) Kirby Smith arrived with reinforcements.
  d.) Spectators from Washington lined the hills to view the battle.

10.) Which of the following is NOT TRUE about the First Battle of Bull Run?
  a.) It is also called the Battle of Manassas.
  b.) It was the Civil War's first major battle.
  c.) It featured Stonewall Jackson, P.T. Beauregard, and Irvin McDowell as military officers.
  d.) Lincoln became reluctant to request mobilization of more soldiers for the Union cause.