Jefferson Davis Reading Comprehension

Jefferson Davis was born in Christian County, Kentucky, on June 3, 1808. He was the youngest of ten children. In 1818, Davis attended Jefferson College in Mississippi before transferring to Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. In 1824, Davis entered the United States Military Academy and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1828.

The next fifteen years of Davis's life were rather uneventful. In 1844, however, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1845, Davis married Varina Howell. After fighting bravely in the Mexican-American War, in particular, at the Siege of Monterrey, Davis was appointed acting senator of Mississippi when Senator Jesse Spright died suddenly in 1847. Soon after, the Senate made Davis chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs. Davis, however, resigned his seat in the Senate and ran for governor of Mississippi in 1851. He was defeated by Henry Stuart Foote by 999 votes.

Left without political office, Jefferson Davis campaigned strongly for Franklin Pierce's bid for the presidency. Davis and Pierce shared a strong view that the federal government should not interfere with the states' rights. Pierce was elected as America's 14th president and made Jefferson Davis his secretary of war. Although Pierce served only one term as president, Davis successfully reentered the Senate in 1857.

As talk of secession ruminated throughout the Southern states concerning the issues of states rights and slavery, Davis urged preservation of the Union. Nevertheless, with the election of Abraham Lincoln as president (a slavery opponent), South Carolina officially seceded from the Union. Though he was fundamentally against secession, Jefferson Davis then announced the secession of Mississippi from the Union and resigned from the Senate.

Four days after announcing secession, Davis was commissioned as major general of Mississippi troops in the Confederate Army. On February 9, 1861, Davis was made provisional president of the Confederacy. Davis and his family then took up residence at the White House of the Confederacy at Richmond, Virginia, in May of 1861. Davis was elected to a six-year term and promptly put General Robert E. Lee in command of the Confederate Army.

After initial success in the Civil War, it soon became clear that the Confederacy was at a major disadvantage. In July of 1863, after the Confederate defeat at the Battle of Gettysburg, Davis refused Lee's offer to surrender to Union forces. Most scholars believe that Davis's leadership was poor during the Civil War. He was responsible for the idea that all lands in the Southern territory should be defended with equal strength and firepower. This theory played directly into the hands of the Union Army, which was able to coordinate efforts to strike lethal blows at crucial Southern locations. Davis is also blamed for allowing Confederate generals to invade hostile Northern territory while essential ports along the Confederate portion of the Mississippi River were falling into Union hands. Davis was also seemingly poor at handling his generals and judging their competence.

As the Confederacy fell, Davis escaped to Danville, Virginia. While trying to flee to Meridian, Mississippi, Davis was captured and imprisoned along the Virginia coast. He was indicted for treason in 1866 but was released from jail after bail was posted by prominent politicians. In 1870, Davis became president of the Carolina Life Insurance Company. After writing several books about the Confederacy, Davis died in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the age of 81 in 1889.

1.) What was the nature of the relationship between Jefferson Davis and Franklin Pierce?

a.) They supported the same views
b.) They supported different views
c.) They both were presidents of the Confederacy
d.) They were both presidents of the United States

2.) What does the following sentence imply?

"Most scholars believe that Davis' leadership was poor during the Civil War."

1.) All thought he was a poor leader
2.) Some thought he was a poor leader and some thought he was a good leader
3.) A few scholars may believe he was not a poor leader
4.) His leadership was acceptable during the Civil War

3.) Jefferson Davis was never…

a.) president of the Confederacy
b.) major General of Mississippi troops
c.) governor of Mississippi
d.) a senator

4.) What word could replace "promptly" in the following sentence?

Davis was elected to a six-year term, and promptly put General Robert E. Lee in command of the Confederate Army

a.) slowly
b.) angrily
c.) carefully
d.) quickly

5.) Which of the following WAS NOT a reason why Jefferson Davis was considered a poor leader?

a.) He was poor at judging the competence of his generals
b.) He was poor at handling his generals
c.) He authorized an invasion of the north while southern ports were into Union hands
d.) He put Robert E. Lee in command of the Confederate army.

6.) What question is answered in the second paragraph?

a.) Who made Jefferson Davis Secretary of War?
b.) When did Jefferson Davis run for governor?
c.) Did Jefferson Davis support secession?
d.) When was Jefferson Davis appointed as a second lieutenant?

7.) What does the passage tell about Jefferson Davis' release from jail?

a.) The passage doesn't tell anything about it
b.) The passage doesn't tell the specific names of those who bailed Jefferson Davis from jail
c.) The passage tells the specific names of those who bailed Jefferson Davis from jail
d.) The Carolina Life Insurance Company bailed Jefferson Davis from jail

8.) Jefferson Davis...

a.) did not believe in secession
b.) did not believe is states rights
c.) did not believe in slavery
d.) believed in secession

9.) What happened first?

a.) Mississippi seceded from the Union
b.) Davis was commissioned as Major General of Mississippi troops
c.) July of 1863
d.) Davis re-entered the Senate

10.) Which of the following fields was Jefferson Davis NEVER involved in?

a.) Insurance
b.) Military
c.) Medicine
d.) Government