

History of Baseball Printable Reading Comprehension

Name _____

Abner Doubleday

Abner Doubleday was a military general who was thought to have fired the first shot in the Civil War at Fort Sumter in 1861. He was also a Union general at the Battle of Gettysburg. Despite his actions in the Civil War, Doubleday is most famous for “inventing” baseball. Doubleday was said to have invented the game in a cow pasture in Cooperstown, New York, in 1839 according to the Mills Commission - a group of business executives who convened for the purposes of discovering the true roots of baseball. Despite the weak and circumstantial evidence that pointed to Doubleday as the inventor of baseball, their “findings” were generally accepted by the American public. Doubleday, in fact, never claimed to have anything to do with the invention of baseball and was unsure why it was attributed to him. According to records, when Doubleday died, he left no mention of himself as the inventor of baseball in his detailed records or papers. Furthermore, in his formal obituary published in the *New York Times*, there was no mention of baseball.

Reality

Baseball more likely evolved in the streets and ball yards of the eastern United States and was probably influenced by the English sports of rounders and cricket. Rounders was a game similar to baseball in which players hit a ball with a paddle and ran bases. In 1845, a group of New Yorkers founded the New York Knickerbockers Baseball Club. One of its founding members, Alexander Joy Cartwright, is credited with establishing rules that began to shape baseball into the game we know today. Cartwright designed the diamond-shaped field, invented the three-strike rule, and set the lines for fair and foul balls. The first game governed by his rules was played in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1846. Under Cartwright’s rules, players could no longer throw the baseball directly at players to get them out.

In 1857, several baseball clubs from the east coast convened to establish official rules for baseball. Known as the “Laws of Base Ball,” the 12-page document is the first known account of a baseball rule book. Among other things, the book established the nine-inning game, the 90-foot distances between bases and that each team was to field nine starting players. The original “Laws of Base Ball” document recently sold at auction for more than \$3,000,000.

Civil War and Beyond

Baseball quickly grew in popularity. During the Civil War, it was introduced to soldiers from the western and southern parts of the country, who in turn, brought it back to their hometowns after the war. Soldiers often played baseball at their encampments as did prisoners of war who played in front of spectators and guards. Following the Civil War, the Cincinnati Red Stockings became the first professional baseball team with full-time players who were paid for their services. The Red Stockings played their first game on May 4, 1869, against the Cincinnati Great Westerns. They won 45-9. The Red Stockings would end their first season with 65 wins and zero losses – the only perfect season in baseball history.

1. Abner Doubleday...

- A. was proven to be the inventor of baseball.
- B. tried to convince people he was the inventor of baseball.
- C. invented baseball while fighting in the Civil War.
- D. wasn't sure why people thought he invented baseball.

2. Why does the author use quotes for the words “findings” and “invented”?

- A. Because these were the words that were actually used
- B. To emphasize that the actual use of these words would probably be inaccurate
- C. To ensure the reader understands the words
- D. To make sure the reader actually reads the words

3. Which of the following best describes the early history of baseball?

- A. It was invented by the New York Knickerbockers Club in 1845
- B. The game was influenced by English games before it was shaped into the game we know in the 1840s
- C. Baseball was invented by Abner Doubleday in 1839 and was shaped into modern baseball over the course of the many years
- D. Baseball evolved into the game we know after the three-strike rule and the nine-innings rules were implemented

4. What happened first?

- A. The first game governed by Cartwright's rules was played in Hoboken, New Jersey
- B. The New York Knickerbockers Baseball Club was formed
- C. The Battle of Fort Sumter was fought
- D. December, 1844

5. Which of the following best describes the evidence the Mills Commission used to establish Abner Doubleday as the inventor of baseball?

- A. Very weak
- B. Strong
- C. Very Strong
- D. Allowed

6. Which is NOT a rule of baseball?

- A. There are 90 feet between bases
- B. There are nine innings per game
- C. Runners are considered out when hit with a thrown ball
- D. Teams have nine starting players

7. Which could be a title for the first paragraph?

- A. Doubleday: A Case of Mistaken Identity
- B. Doubleday: The True Inventor of Baseball
- C. Doubleday: An American Fraud
- D. Doubleday: The Death of American Legend