

Nonfiction Reading Test

The Library of Alexandria

Directions: Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow. Refer to the text to check your answers when appropriate.

The Library of Alexandria was the greatest library of the ancient world. Built around 280 BC, this library held as many as 700,000 books and scrolls. Think of all that ancient wisdom! Some of it was timeless. Most of it was rare. Much of it was burned.

To appreciate the Library of Alexandria, you have to understand the rarity of books at that time. This library was built 1600 years before the invention of the printing press. Every text in the collection was handwritten. It took a lot more work to make a book back then. Books were very expensive. The collection of texts at the Library of Alexandria was priceless in every sense.

Naturally, this library was located in Alexandria, a seaport in Egypt. Alexander the Great established this city in 331 BC. He built a very large empire that respected and preserved knowledge. The Library of Alexandria grew from this empire.

The rulers of Alexandria wanted their library to be a collection of all the world's knowledge. That was a pretty big mission at the time. That's a mission that Google and others are still pursuing today. Can you imagine what it was like trying to collect all the world's knowledge before computers? The rulers of Alexandria took some extreme actions to pursue their mission.

They sent royal agents across the known world to collect texts. They gave these agents large sums of money and instructed them to buy any book that they could find. They preferred older texts, but they would buy books written by any author on any subject.

As time passed, the rulers of Alexandria became more aggressive in their mission. They searched for books on all ships that entered their ports. Alexandria was a trading hub and many ships came and went. Government agents seized every book that they found. They brought the books to the library and scholars would copy them. Sometimes the library kept the originals. And they returned the copies to the visitors.

Another interesting acquisition involved the Athenians. Athens was a neighboring city-state to Alexandria in the Macedonian Empire. The Alexandrians wanted some classic Greek texts from the Athenians. They convinced the Athenians to lend them the original copies of these texts. The Alexandrians claimed that they would copy these texts. The Alexandrians gave the Athenians a tremendous sum to secure the loan. They gave them over 1,000 pounds of silver as collateral. The Alexandrians did copy the books, but they returned the copies to the Athenians. The Alexandrians happily forfeited the collateral to keep the original texts.

One ill-fated night in 48 BC, the Library of Alexandria burned. Roman general Julius Caesar was fighting a civil war against the Roman Senate. While engaged in battle, Caesar felt it wise to set fire to his own ships and burn the docks at Alexandria. The fire spread and destroyed the Library of Alexandria. The flames consumed many texts. Some texts may have been saved. The full-damage of the episode is unknown. The library was later rebuilt, but was thereafter less noted in history.

1. Which statement is FALSE based on the text?
 - a) The city of Alexandria is located in Egypt.
 - b) Julius Caesar burned the Library of Alexandria.
 - c) The city of Alexandria was named after Alexander Hamilton.
 - d) Athens was a city-state in the Macedonian Empire.

2. Which statement is TRUE based on the text?
 - a) Books were a little more valuable in 250 BC than they are today.
 - b) Books were a lot more valuable in 250 BC than they are today.
 - c) Books were a little less valuable in 250 BC than they are today.
 - d) Books were a lot less valuable in 250 BC than they are today.

3. Which best explains why the author writes about Google in the FOURTH paragraph?
 - a) He is making a modern connection to the ancient library's mission.
 - b) He is persuading readers to use Google to learn more about the library.
 - c) He is informing readers that Google competes with libraries.
 - d) He is persuading readers to give more information about our world to Google.

4. Which event happened FIRST according to the text?
 - a) The printing press was invented.
 - b) The city of Alexandria was established.
 - c) Julius Caesar burned his boats.
 - d) The Library of Alexandria was built.

5. The Alexandrians did all of the following to obtain books EXCEPT which?
 - a) Seized books from visitors to their city
 - b) Tricked neighboring cities into surrendering classic texts
 - c) Spent lots of money buying any book they could find
 - d) Made every citizen write a book for their library

6. Which best explains the AUTHOR'S PURPOSE in writing the SECOND paragraph?
 - a) He is trying to inform readers of the value of the library's collection.
 - b) He is trying to persuade readers to visit the city of Alexandria.
 - c) He is trying to impress readers with poetic language about the library.
 - d) He is trying to explain the importance of the printing press.

7. With which statement would the author most likely DISAGREE?

- a) Julius Caesar burned the Library of Alexandria.
- b) Alexander the Great founded Alexandria.
- c) The Alexandrians paid more money for older books.
- d) The Athenians scammed the Alexandrians for their silver.

8. Based on the text, which best explain Alexandrians' attitude toward books?

- a) They wanted newer books because they were prettier than older books.
- b) They wanted older books because they smelled better than newer books.
- c) They wanted older books because they had fewer errors than newer books.
- d) They wanted newer books more because they were less worn than older books.

9. What can we INFER about the rulers of ancient Alexandria based on the text?

- a) They were more into warfare than study.
- b) They valued knowledge more than money.
- c) They thought that learning was a waste of time.
- d) They defended the property rights of all travelers.

10. Which lesson can readers learn from this text?

- a) One must always be honest when dealing with neighbors.
- b) Treating visitors with respect is the most important part of trade.
- c) Using fire during warfare will always go as planned.
- d) Carefully preserve knowledge as it could be lost forever.

1. The Alexandrians aggressively pursued the collection of knowledge? Do you think that they went too far? Why or why not? Refer to the text in your response.
