

Reading Comprehension Practice Questions

Questions 1 through 7 refer to the following passage:

In the 16th century, an age of great marine and terrestrial exploration, Ferdinand Magellan led the first expedition to sail around the world. As a young Portuguese noble, he served the king of Portugal, but he became involved in the quagmire of political intrigue at court and lost the king's favor. After he was dismissed from service by the king of Portugal, he offered to serve the future Emperor Charles V of Spain.

A papal decree of 1493 had assigned all land in the New World west of 50 degrees W longitude to Spain and all the land east of that line to Portugal. Magellan offered to prove that the East Indies fell under Spanish authority. On September 20, 1519, Magellan set sail from Spain with five ships. More than a year later, one of these ships was exploring the topography of South America in search of a water route across the continent. This ship sank, but the remaining four ships searched along the southern peninsula of South America. Finally they found the passage they sought near 50 degrees S latitude. Magellan named this passage the Strait of All Saints, but today it is known as the Strait of Magellan.

One ship deserted while in this passage and returned to Spain, so fewer sailors were privileged to gaze at that first panorama of the Pacific Ocean. Those who remained crossed the meridian now known as the International Date Line in the early spring of 1521 after 98 days on the Pacific Ocean. During those long days at sea, many of Magellan's men died of starvation and disease.

Later, Magellan became involved in an insular conflict in the Philippines and was killed in a tribal battle. Only one ship and 17 sailors under the command of the Basque navigator Elcano survived to complete the westward journey to Spain and thus prove once and for all that the world is round, with no precipice at the edge.

1. The 16th century was an age of great _____ exploration.

- A. cosmic
- B. land
- C. mental
- D. common man
- E. None of the above

2. Magellan lost the favor of the king of Portugal when he became involved in a political _____.

- A. entanglement
- B. discussion
- C. negotiation
- D. problem
- E. None of the above

3. The Pope divided New World lands between Spain and Portugal according to their location on one side or the other of an imaginary geographical line 50 degrees west of Greenwich that extends in a _____ direction.

- A. north and south
- B. crosswise
- C. easterly

- D. south east
- E. north and west

4. One of Magellan's ships explored the _____ of South America for a passage across the continent.

- A. coastline
- B. mountain range
- C. physical features
- D. islands
- E. None of the above

5. Four of the ships sought a passage along a southern _____.

- A. coast
- B. inland
- C. body of land with water on three sides
- D. border
- E. Answer not available

6. The passage was found near 50 degrees S of _____.

- A. Greenwich
- B. The equator
- C. Spain
- D. Portugal
- E. Madrid

7. In the spring of 1521, the ships crossed the _____ now called the International Date Line.

- A. imaginary circle passing through the poles
- B. imaginary line parallel to the equator
- C. area
- D. land mass
- E. Answer not available

Answers and Explanations

- 1. B:** "Terrestrial" means land. No choice here offers a synonym for "marine," e.g. nautical/naval/water/seagoing, and no other choices match either marine or terrestrial.
- 2. A:** "Quagmire" means literally a bog or marsh, and figuratively an involved situation difficult to escape; entanglement is a synonym, more specifically similar than the other choices.
- 3. A:** Longitudes are imaginary geographical lines running north and south. Latitudes run east and west. The other choices do not equal either latitude or longitude in direction.
- 4. C:** Topography means the physical features of a land mass. It does not mean coastline (A), mountain range (B), or islands (D).
- 5. C:** A peninsula is a piece of land connected to the mainland by an isthmus and projecting into the ocean such that it is surrounded on three sides by water. A peninsula is not a coast (A); it is not found inland (B); and it is not a border (D).
- 6. B:** The passage was found near 50 degrees S latitude. Latitudes are measured horizontally, in relation to the equator or central imaginary line, equidistant between the North and South Poles. Longitudes are measured vertically. Greenwich (A), the location of zero degrees longitude, adopted as the global standard, is both incorrect and never named in the passage. Spain (C), Portugal (D), and Madrid (E) in Spain are also incorrect.
- 7. A:** Meridians are imaginary geographical circles intersecting the poles. Imaginary lines parallel to the equator (B) are latitudes. The International Date Line is a specific meridian, not an area (C). It is not a land mass (D) as it crosses both water and land.