



John C. Calhoun Printable Reading Comprehension

Word Count: 285 | Lexile 1000

Early Life

John Caldwell Calhoun was born on March 18, 1782, in Abbeville, South Carolina. He grew up in a farming family of Scotch-Irish descent. Calhoun attended local schools and later studied at Yale College, graduating in 1804. Afterward, he studied law and began practicing as a lawyer in South Carolina.

Political Career

Calhoun entered politics in 1808 and quickly became influential. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives and gained attention for his strong support of the War of 1812. Later, he became Secretary of War under President James Monroe. In 1824, Calhoun was elected Vice President of the United States, serving under both John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson.

Beliefs and Nullification Crisis

Calhoun is best known for his defense of states' rights and slavery. He believed that each state had the power to nullify, or reject, federal laws it found unconstitutional. This idea became central during the Nullification Crisis of the early 1830s when South Carolina opposed federal tariffs. Calhoun resigned as Vice President in 1832 to fight for his state's position.

Later Life and Legacy

Calhoun continued to serve in the U.S. Senate and as Secretary of State under President John Tyler. He strongly defended slavery as a "positive good," which made him a leading voice for the South before the Civil War. He died on March 31, 1850, in Washington, D.C., just over a decade before the war began. Calhoun remains a controversial figure in American history for his role in promoting states' rights and slavery.

1. What is the main idea of the passage?

- A. John C. Calhoun was an influential American politician known for his defense of states' rights and slavery.
- B. John C. Calhoun fought in the War of 1812 and later became President of the United States.
- C. John C. Calhoun believed that federal tariffs should be abolished entirely.
- D. John C. Calhoun was a lawyer who never held political office.

2. Which statement best describes Calhoun's early life?

- A. He grew up in a wealthy city family and attended Harvard.
- B. He grew up on a farm and later studied at Yale College.
- C. He began his career as a soldier in the War of 1812.
- D. He was raised in Washington, D.C., and became a politician early.

3. Why did Calhoun resign as Vice President?

- A. He wanted to run for President.
- B. He disagreed with Andrew Jackson about federal tariffs and states' rights.
- C. He opposed the War of 1812.
- D. He believed slavery should be abolished.

4. Based on the passage, what can be inferred about the Nullification Crisis?

- A. It was a debate about whether to keep slavery legal.
- B. It involved conflict between federal authority and state authority.
- C. It occurred after the Civil War ended.
- D. It was caused by Calhoun's resignation as Vice President.

5. Which of the following best describes how Calhoun's beliefs influenced history?

- A. They helped unite the country before the Civil War.
- B. They made him a leading Southern voice for states' rights and slavery.
- C. They caused the War of 1812 to begin.
- D. They convinced President Tyler to abolish tariffs.

6. Compare Calhoun's early career to his later years. Which is most accurate?

- A. His early career focused on law, while his later years focused on defending slavery and states' rights.
- B. He began as a soldier and ended as a lawyer.
- C. He started as Vice President and ended as a Representative.
- D. His views changed from supporting slavery to opposing it.

7. Why is Calhoun considered a controversial figure today?

- A. He opposed tariffs during the War of 1812.
- B. He strongly supported slavery and states' rights, which divided the nation.
- C. He was accused of corruption as Secretary of War.
- D. He left politics before taking a clear stand on slavery.

Page 3 – Answer Key

1. **A** – John C. Calhoun was an influential American politician known for his defense of states' rights and slavery.
2. **B** – He grew up on a farm and later studied at Yale College.
3. **B** – He disagreed with Andrew Jackson about federal tariffs and states' rights.
4. **B** – It involved conflict between federal authority and state authority.
5. **B** – They made him a leading Southern voice for states' rights and slavery.
6. **A** – His early career focused on law, while his later years focused on defending slavery and states' rights.
7. **B** – He strongly supported slavery and states' rights, which divided the nation.