Christmas Reading: The First Christmas Card

Grade 5



Name _____ Date _____

Read the passage carefully. The paragraph numbers will help you find evidence.

The First Christmas Card

1 Today, millions of people send Christmas cards every December. But until 1843, nobody had ever bought one in a shop. The first Christmas card for sale was the idea of a busy Englishman named Henry Cole.

2 Cole lived in London and worked for the government. He loved new ideas, and he had helped to improve the British postal service. In 1840, Britain started the Penny Post. For the first time, a person could send a letter anywhere in the country for just one penny. Sending mail was suddenly cheap and easy, and people sent much more of it.

3 That created a problem for Cole. Every December, piles of letters arrived from friends and family wishing him a happy Christmas, and good manners said he should answer each one. Writing all those replies by hand would take hours.

4 Cole had a clever solution. He asked his friend John Callcott Horsley, an artist, to design a picture card with a short greeting already printed on it. All Cole had to do was sign each card and post it. The finished card showed a family gathered around a table, raising their glasses to the person receiving the card. On each side were smaller pictures of people giving food and clothing to the poor, a reminder to be kind at Christmas. Underneath were the words “A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You.”

5 About 1,000 copies were printed. Cole used the cards he needed and sold the rest for one shilling each. That was a lot of money at the time, so not many people bought them.

6 Even so, the idea did not disappear. As printing became faster and cheaper, more companies began to make Christmas cards, and prices fell. By the end of the 1800s, sending cards had become a holiday tradition, first in Britain and then in many other countries.

7 Only a few of Cole's original cards survive today. Because they are so rare, collectors have paid thousands of pounds for a single one. That is not bad for an idea that began as a way to save time!

The First Christmas Card: Questions

Grade 5



1. What is the main idea of the passage?

(A) Henry Cole worked for the government in London.

(B) The first Christmas card was created in 1843 to save time, and the idea grew into a tradition.

(C) Christmas cards were very expensive in the 1800s.

(D) John Callcott Horsley was a famous artist.

2. Why was the Penny Post important to this story?

(A) It made stamps more colourful.

(B) It meant Cole could not afford to send letters.

(C) Cheap postage meant people sent many more letters, so Cole received piles of them.

(D) It was where the first cards were sold.

3. In paragraph 7, the word survive means...

(A) still exist

(B) were destroyed

(C) were copied

(D) were sold

4. Why did not many people buy the first cards?

(A) They had spelling mistakes.

(B) They cost a lot of money at the time.

(C) Nobody liked the picture.

(D) There were only ten cards.

5. Cause and effect. Complete each effect.

Cause	Effect
Cole received piles of Christmas letters.	
The cards cost one shilling each.	
Printing became faster and cheaper.	

6. Number the events 1 to 4 in the order they happened.

☐ Sending cards becomes a tradition in many countries.	☐ Britain starts the Penny Post.	☐ Collectors pay thousands of pounds for an original card.	☐ The first Christmas card is printed and sold.

7. What did the small side pictures on Cole's card show, and why were they there? Use evidence from the text.

8. Fact or opinion? Circle one.

The first Christmas cards were sold for one shilling each.	fact	opinion
The picture on Cole's card was the most beautiful Christmas picture ever made.	fact	opinion
Henry Cole lived in London.	fact	opinion
Sending a card is better than sending a text message.	fact	opinion

9. Would you rather send a Christmas card or a text message? Give two reasons.

Answer Key

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1. What is the main idea of the passage?

(A) Henry Cole worked for the government in London.

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5. Cause and effect. Complete each effect.

Cause	Effect
Cole received piles of Christmas letters.	**He had cards printed so he only had to sign them.**
The cards cost one shilling each.	**Not many people bought them.**
Printing became faster and cheaper.	**More companies made cards and prices fell.**

6. Number the events 1 to 4 in the order they happened.

3	1	4	2
Sending cards becomes a tradition in many countries. **late 1800s**	Britain starts the Penny Post. **1840**	Collectors pay thousands of pounds for an original card. **today**	The first Christmas card is printed and sold. **1843**

7. What did the small side pictures on Cole's card show, and why were they there? Use evidence from the text.

The side pictures showed people giving food and clothing to the poor. They reminded people to be kind at Christmas (paragraph 4).

8. Fact or opinion? Circle one.

The first Christmas cards were sold for one shilling each.	**fact**	opinion
The picture on Cole's card was the most beautiful Christmas picture ever made.	fact	**opinion**
Henry Cole lived in London.	**fact**	opinion
Sending a card is better than sending a text message.	fact	**opinion**

9. Would you rather send a Christmas card or a text message? Give two reasons.

Answers will vary. Look for a clear choice and two reasons, for example: a card can be kept and displayed; a text is faster and free.