The Stamp Act

Between 1754 and 1763, the British fought the French and Indian War. They fought the French for control of land in North America. Although the British eventually won, their victory came with some serious costs.

The British government had borrowed a lot of money to fight this war. A lot of that money had been spent on protecting the colonists from the French and their Native American allies. All of the money had to be paid back, and the British government felt that the colonists should pay their share. In addition, more money was continually needed to protect the colonies as well as the newly acquired land.

To raise the needed funds, the British government imposed new taxes, including several that would have to be paid by the colonists. In 1765, King George III and his government proposed the Stamp Act.

The Stamp Act was a tax on printed materials. Colonists were required to buy stamps when they bought printed items such as newspapers, pamphlets, even playing cards. These were not gummed stamps, but rather impressions imprinted or embossed on paper. Many people were upset about the Stamp Act. They thought it was unfair that the king and his government in London were making decisions about taxes the colonists had to pay, while the colonists had no say in the matter.
The British government had generally allowed the colonies to raise taxes themselves. For example, if the government of Virginia needed money, an assembly of representatives from different parts of Virginia would meet. This assembly was called the House of Burgesses. Members of the House of Burgesses would determine the best way to raise money. They would propose taxes, and they would vote. If many representatives thought the taxes were unfair, they would not vote for them and, therefore, the taxes would not be approved. Because the House of Burgesses included representatives from different parts of Virginia, most everyone felt the process was fair.

Every colony had an assembly similar to the Virginia House of Burgesses. The assemblies weren’t all called the House of Burgesses, but they did the same thing: a group of representatives met to discuss new laws and taxes.

Although the colonists continued to raise their own taxes even after 1765, they felt that, rather than imposing a new tax on the colonies, the king and his government should have asked these assemblies to find a way to raise the money that was needed. Instead, without even as much as a dialogue, the king and his government created the Stamp Act. They did not send it to the colonial assemblies, but directly to Parliament, part of the British government responsible for passing laws and raising taxes.

The Stamp Act was very unpopular.

The colonists agreed that there were bills that had to be paid, and they wanted to contribute.

But they also wanted some say in how the money was raised. They were concerned that important decisions about taxes were being made thousands of miles away, by a parliament...
that had no colonial representatives. This process didn't seem fair to them.

[. . .]

When the colonists became upset about the Stamp Act, they expressed their unhappiness in various ways. They held protest meetings. They wrote pamphlets. They sent petitions to London. They tried to explain why they thought the Stamp Act was unfair.

"The Stamp Act was seen as an unfair tax."
The British Parliament made decisions on laws and taxes, including those that affected the colonies.

Many of the colonists were proud British subjects. But they also felt that they had rights—rights that the king and his government could not take away. Opposition to the Stamp Act spread. Colonists began protesting the tax. Tensions between colonists and the British grew. . . and they would only grow more with time.
Name: ___________________________ Date: _______________

1. What was the Stamp Act?
   A. a tax on mailed letters
   B. a tax on printed materials
   C. a tax on art materials
   D. a tax on travel

2. What was a cause of the British government imposing new taxes on its North American colonists?
   A. The British needed to raise funds to pay back the money it had borrowed to fight the French and Indian War.
   B. The North American colonists had failed to pay taxes in the past and the British wanted to punish them.
   C. The British wanted to prove they were more powerful than the people in their North American colonies.
   D. The cost of stamps was rising in Britain, and the British needed to make back the money it was spending on stamps.

3. The colonists were upset about the Stamp Act because of the way the British government imposed the tax. What evidence from the text supports this conclusion?
   A. "When the colonists became upset about the Stamp Act, they expressed their unhappiness in various ways. They held protest meetings. They wrote pamphlets."
   B. "The colonists agreed that there were bills that had to be paid, and they wanted to contribute. But they also wanted some say in how the money was raised."
   C. "Colonists were required to buy stamps when they bought printed items such as newspapers, pamphlets, even playing cards... Many people were upset about the Stamp Act."
   D. "Colonists began protesting the tax. Tensions between colonists and the British grew... and they would only grow more with time."
4. Based on the text, what was one thing that was very important to colonists during the time of the Stamp Act?
   A. not having to pay money for past wars
   B. finding reasons to fight with the British
   C. saving as much money as possible
   D. having a say in how they were ruled

5. What is the main idea of this text?
   A. The Stamp Act that the British placed on American colonists upset the colonists because they had no say in the decision.
   B. Although the British won the French and Indian War, the costs of the war were too much for them to handle without raising taxes.
   C. Before the Stamp Act, colonists in America were able to raise their own taxes and discuss their own laws.
   D. When colonists became upset with the British, they expressed their unhappiness through protests, pamphlets, and petitions.