Name: _____

Nonfiction Reading Test
The Cobra Effect

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

The British colonized India from 1858 to 1947. That means that they ruled the country. They governed the Indian people. They used India to make wealth for the British Empire. But they also developed India. They built canals and railroads. They tried to make India more like the United Kingdom.



Yet India was different from the UK. It was more rustic. The ecology was different too. Some British colonists had a hard time adapting. The snakes were particularly troubling. The capital area of Delhi was overrun with venomous cobras.

Encountering a cobra is quite frightening. It's even worse getting bit by one. The cobras killed many colonists. Enough died that the British government took action. They paid a bounty for every dead cobra.

The program was a success at first. Many people hunted and killed the cobras for the rewards. The number of cobras dropped. The colonists felt safer. But then it became harder to catch cobras. So enterprising people started breeding them. After all, it is easier to catch a pet cobra than a wild one.

News of this scheme got back to the British government. They learned that people were breeding cobras to earn rewards. This is not what the British wanted to happen. They felt foolish. They scrapped the program.

Now the breeders were angry. Raising cobras can

The British plan seemed like a good idea at first. In practice though, it made things much worse. This is the cobra effect. The cobra effect is when a solution worsens a problem.

Many well-intentioned programs backfire. In 2014 the City of Chicago banned lightweight plastic bags. Single use bags are bad for the environment. They end up in the water. They pollute the land. City officials wanted people to reuse bags. So they put a tax on lightweight bags.

Retailers did not want to anger customers with the new tax. So they made their bags much thicker. The new bags were 150 times thicker than the old bags. The thicker bags were no longer lightweight, so they weren't taxed. But most customers did not reuse these bags. They just threw away the really thick plastic bags.

be challenging. They were doing it for the money. When the program ended, the snakes were worthless. So the breeders released them into the wild. Now there were more wild cobras than when the program started.

This is another example of the cobra effect. The city intended to reduce plastic waste, yet the tax worsened it 150 fold. Our actions do not always have the consequences that we expect.

1. Which best defines the word *colonize* as used in the FIRST paragraph?

a) To destroy or ruin a foreign land
b) To trade or do business with other people
c) To inhabit and rule a foreign land
d) To do battle or fight with another group of people

2. Which conclusion can be supported with text from the passage?

a) India had more poisonous snakes than the UK.
b) India had fewer poisonous snakes than the UK.
c) India had the same amount of poisonous snakes as the UK.
d) India DID NOT have poisonous snakes.

3. Which event happened LAST?

a) The number of snakes decreased.
b) The government began paying a bounty for dead snakes.
c) The snake breeders released their cobras into the wild.
d) People started breeding snakes.

4. What was the overall effect of the bounty program on the cobra population in Delhi?

a) The number of snakes decreased.
b) The number of snakes increased.
c) The number of snakes stayed about the same.
d) The snakes were completely wiped out.

5. Which best defines the term *cobra effect* as described in the text?

a) A response to a problem that has no effect.
b) A response to a problem that makes it better.
c) A response to a problem that completely solves it.
d) A response to a problem that makes it worse.

6. Which is NOT a reason why the City of Chicago put a tax on plastic bags?

a) The city wanted people to reuse bags.
b) Lightweight plastic bags pollute the water.
c) Lightweight plastic bags are toxic to children.
d) Lightweight plastic bags pollute the land.

7. How did retailers respond to the tax on lightweight plastic bags?

a) They gave thick plastic bags to customers.
b) They gave paper bags to customers.
c) They stopped giving bags to customers.
d) They passed the tax on to the customers.

8. How did the tax affect the problem with plastic bags in the City of Chicago?

a) It helped reduce the problem a lot.
b) It made the problem worse.
c) It helped reduce the problem a little bit.
d) It solved the problem completely.

9. With which statement would the author most likely AGREE?

a) There's no point in trying to fix anything.
b) There is no such thing as a bad idea.
c) The fastest solution to a problem is always the best solution.
d) Think through solutions carefully before trying them.

10. What lesson can readers learn from this text?

a) Outcomes don't matter as long as you try your best.
b) Our actions can have unexpected consequences.
c) Things will always work out in the end.
d) Intentions are more important than consequences.

1. Explain the cobra effect in your own words. Use an example from the text or your experience to describe the cobra effect.

2. How is what happened in Chicago with plastic bags similar to what happened in New Delhi with cobras? Write in complete sentences and refer to the text in your response.