Name_____

Pirates of the South China Sea

Cheng I led what may have been the largest pirating confederation in history. Chinese pirating peaked during the late 1700s. Cheng I organized six pirate fleets, each sailing under a different color flag: red, white, black, yellow, blue, and green. He commanded the red fleet and had over 200 sailing vessels, called junks. Shortly after the turn of the century, Cheng I had built his fleet to include 600 junks. Over 30,000 pirates sailed at his command, and his fighting force had over 150,000 men. To avoid conflict, Cheng I assigned each fleet its own territory. They were stationed over a massive area. His enterprise threatened the whole of southern China.

After Cheng I's death, his wife, Cheng I Sao, took over command. Cheng I Sao operated under strict rules. Pirates were required to buy, rather than steal, goods from coastal villages. In turn, villagers had to sell their goods to the pirates. Anyone who disobeyed was treated very harshly. All ships entering the South China Sea had to pay tribute to Cheng I Sao's command or suffer.

In some cases, Cheng I Sao took prisoners and sold them for ransom. British Chief mate John Turner was one of those taken prisoner. He returned to England alive with gory tales about how the Chinese pirates treated their prisoners.

The pirates were not particular about what they ate. It is said that, at times, pirates encouraged the rats on board ship to breed so they could eat them.

Cheng I Sao's rule, like most pirates, was short-lived. In 1809, the black flag fleet attacked Cheng I Sao's red fleet and won.

Text Questions

1. What does the word *confederation* mean as it is used in the text?
   a. independent nations with a common defense
   b. a group of associates in unlawful acts
   c. a group of soldiers
   d. organization of rogue vagabonds
2. What did Cheng I do to decrease the potential for conflict among his fleets?
   a. He assigned each to its own territory.
   b. He stationed them great distances from each other.
   c. He only sent out one fleet at a time.
   d. He had a fighting force to help keep the peace.
3. What is the main idea of the second paragraph?
   a. It gives details about Cheng I's pirate fleets.
   b. It describes the strict rules Cheng I's wife established when she took command.
   c. It tells about a British prisoner who escaped and returned to England.
   d. It summarizes the end of Cheng I's pirate command.
4. Which of the following is <u>not</u> true about Cheng I's pirate command?
   a. Over 30,000 pirates sailed with his fleets.
   b. He had 150,000 men in his fighting force.
   c. He commanded the black fleet.
   d. He led a large pirate confederation.
5. What might be some reasons for pirate leaders' commands to be short-lived?

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LIVEWORKSHEETS