

Ask Not What Your Country Can Do For You

by John F. Kennedy

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: civility, conscience, mortal, oppressed, subversion, tempered, testimony, tribulation, twilight, tyranny

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Vocabulary Preview 2

Answer Key — Preview 3

Caution: share only if self-checking

OPTIONAL POST-READING QUIZ

Vocabulary in Context 4

Answer Key — In Context 5

Caution: do not share with students

About the Pre-Reading Activity (open-dictionary; ungraded or completion grade):

Students preview 10 words from the upcoming reading, each in a sentence that supports understanding. They choose the best meaning from 3 choices.

About the Optional Post-Reading Quiz (use after reading, or skip):

Same words, now in real excerpts from the text, with questions that build reading and analytical skills.



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Vocabulary Preview

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Read each prompt. Then choose the best meaning for the bold word.

1. Even during the heated debate, both speakers kept their **civility**.

- A. cheerful good humor
- B. polite, respectful behavior
- C. strict self-control

2. Her **conscience** would not let her keep the extra change.

- A. fear of getting caught
- B. inner sense of right and wrong
- C. memory of past mistakes

3. Even the greatest king is only a **mortal** man.

- A. human and bound to die
- B. cruel and ambitious
- C. wise and experienced

4. For years the **oppressed** had no voice in their own government.

- A. the youngest citizens
- B. people treated unjustly
- C. the foreign-born residents

5. The spy was accused of **subversion** against the government.

- A. theft of public funds
- B. open armed rebellion
- C. undermining from within

6. A childhood of hardship had **tempered** him by the time he was twenty.

- A. made stronger and tougher
- B. made cautious and fearful
- C. left weary and resentful

7. His quiet service over the years was a **testimony** to his loyalty.

- A. an open demonstration
- B. a fitting tribute
- C. a small clue

8. The refugees endured years of **tribulation** before finding safety.

- A. exhausting hard labor
- B. constant noise and chaos
- C. great suffering

9. The aging champion entered the **twilight** of his long career.

- A. final period of decline
- B. most celebrated phase
- C. long, restful pause

10. The rebels rose up to overthrow the king's **tyranny**.

- A. long-standing royal customs
- B. heavy system of taxes
- C. cruel, oppressive rule

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

split asunder — split into separate pieces

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY
1	B
2	B
3	A
4	B
5	C
6	A
7	A
8	C
9	A
10	C

Vocabulary in Context
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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____ Score _____ / 10

Read each excerpt carefully. Then choose the best answer to each question.

1 *"For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life."*

As it is used in the passage, the word "mortal" most nearly suggests that this great power is held by hands that are...

- A. capable of causing death
- B. certain to last forever
- C. human and fallible

2 *"... the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans, born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace ..."*

It can reasonably be inferred that the new generation "tempered by war" has been...

- A. made eager for new wars
- B. weakened by conflict
- C. strengthened by hardship

3 *"... we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny."*

The author most likely includes the phrase "a far more iron tyranny" in order to...

- A. warn of worse oppression to come
- B. celebrate the end of empire
- C. promise swift independence

4 *"Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas."*

According to the passage, the United States pledges to oppose, alongside open aggression, threats that involve...

- A. competing for trade and markets
- B. undermining governments from within
- C. spreading rival propaganda

5 *"So let us begin anew, remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof."*

The statement that "civility is not a sign of weakness" primarily functions to...

- A. show courtesy need not mean weakness
- B. claim sincerity cannot be proven
- C. warn that politeness invites attack

6 *"Let both sides unite to heed in all corners of the earth the command of Isaiah – to "undo the heavy burdens...and let the oppressed go free."*

Which detail from the speech best supports the idea that it appeals to a moral duty toward those treated unjustly?

- A. the pledge to "pay any price"
- B. the call to "explore the stars"
- C. Isaiah's command to free the suffering

7 *"Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty."*

As it is used in the passage, "give testimony to its national loyalty" most nearly means to...

- A. openly demonstrate one's loyalty
- B. testify in court about loyalty
- C. keep written records of service

8 *"... a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation" – a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself."*

The passage most strongly suggests that a "long twilight struggle" will be...

- A. sure to end in clear triumph
- B. prolonged and without clear resolution
- C. brief but intensely fought

9 *"... a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation" – a struggle against the common enemies of man ..."*

It can reasonably be inferred that remaining "patient in tribulation" means staying steady through...

- A. seasons of ease and reward
- B. times of great suffering
- C. moments of public celebration

10 *"With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."*

Which choice best describes the speaker's attitude as he closes with "a good conscience our only sure reward"?

- A. humble and morally resolved
- B. triumphant and sure of victory
- C. anxious and full of doubt

ANSWER KEY
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#	KEY	NOTE
1	C	The Word here is figurative — 'mortal' means human and fallible, not 'deadly.'
2	C	'Tempered' here is the metalworking sense — strengthened by hardship, not 'calmed' or 'moderated.'
3	A	
4	B	
5	A	
6	C	Theme comprehension. Ruling out the distractors requires seeing that those lines concern national commitment and cooperation, not injustice.
7	A	The Word here means an open demonstration of loyalty, not courtroom evidence.
8	B	'Twilight' is figurative — a dim, drawn-out struggle with no clear resolution, not a time of day.
9	B	
10	A	