



**STILL AT RISK:  
What Students Don't Know, Even Now**

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17-year-olds recently earned a "D" when tested on the basics of American history and literature. See how you fare:

**1. The Watergate investigations resulted in the resignation of President:**

- A) Harry Truman
- B) Dwight Eisenhower
- C) Lyndon Johnson
- D) Richard Nixon

**2. When did Christopher Columbus sail for the New World?**

- A) Before 1750
- B) 1750-1800
- C) 1800-1850
- D) 1850-1900
- E) 1900-1950
- F) After 1950

**3. Who were Plato and Aristotle?**

- A) Hebrew prophets
- B) Greek philosophers
- C) Medieval poets
- D) Roman playwrights

**4. The first permanent English colony in North America was:**

- A) Salem, Massachusetts
- B) Jamestown, Virginia
- C) Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- D) Providence, Rhode Island

**5. During the Second World War, the major enemies of the United States were:**

- A) Vietnam and Korea
- B) the Soviet Union and China
- C) Germany and Japan
- D) Cuba and Iran

**6. Who was the commander of the American army in the Revolutionary War?**

- A) Paul Revere
- B) Thomas Jefferson
- C) Thomas Paine
- D) George Washington

**7. When was the Civil War?**

- A) Before 1750
- B) 1750–1800
- C) 1800–1850
- D) 1850–1900
- E) 1900–1950
- F) After 1950



**8. Which group of United States citizens was forced into relocation camps during the Second World War?**

- A) German-Americans
- B) Italian-Americans
- C) Japanese-Americans
- D) Russian-Americans

**9. Who was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence?**

- A) Paul Revere
- B) Thomas Jefferson
- C) Thomas Paine
- D) George Washington

**10. The Renaissance was the period in European history noted for:**

- A) religious persecution
- B) technological and cultural advances
- C) widespread famine and pestilence
- D) the rise of democracy

**11. Where do you find the guarantee of freedom of speech and religion?**

- A) Common Sense
- B) The Constitution
- C) The Bill of Rights
- D) The Articles of Confederation

**12. President Abraham Lincoln wrote:**

- A) The Bill of Rights
- B) The Emancipation Proclamation
- C) The Missouri Compromise
- D) *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

**13. When was the First World War?**

- A) Before 1750
- B) 1750–1800
- C) 1800–1850
- D) 1850–1900
- E) 1900–1950
- F) After 1950

**14. The idea that each branch of the federal government should keep the other branches from becoming too strong is called:**

- A) strict constructionism
- B) the system of checks and balances
- C) federalism
- D) implied powers

**15. Who was Adolf Hitler?**

- A) The German munitions manufacturer between the two World Wars
- B) The Kaiser during the First World War
- C) The Premier of Austria who advocated union with Germany
- D) The Chancellor of Germany during the Second World War

**16. The purpose of the authors of The Federalist papers was to:**

- A) win foreign approval for the Revolutionary War
- B) establish a strong, free press in the colonies
- C) gain ratification of the United States Constitution
- D) confirm George Washington's election as the first president

**17. In its *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954, the Supreme Court:**

- A) required the hiring of more minority teachers
- B) ruled racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional
- C) forbade the practice of discrimination in hotels and motels
- D) mandated busing of students to achieve racial balance in public schools



**18. What event led to the entry of the United States into the Second World War?**

- A) the sinking of the *Lusitania*
- B) the German occupation of France
- C) the bombing of Pearl Harbor
- D) the signing of a secret Nazi-Soviet pact

**19. "I have a dream my...children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." These words are from a speech by:**

- A) Lyndon Johnson
- B) Martin Luther King, Jr.
- C) Frederick Douglass
- D) Abraham Lincoln

**20. Which of the following novels helped the anti-slavery movement by depicting the evils of slavery?**

- A) *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe
- B) *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck
- C) *Cry the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton
- D) *Native Son* by Richard Wright



**21. What is the novel *1984* about?**

- A) The destruction of the human race by nuclear war
- B) A dictatorship in which every citizen was watched in order to stamp out all individuality
- C) The invasion and ultimate takeover of the earth by creatures from outer space
- D) A man who went back in time and changed history

**22. Which of the following is a novel by Ralph Ellison about a young man's growing up in the South and then moving to Harlem?**

- A) *Souder*
- B) *The Invisible Man*
- C) *The Fire Next Time*
- D) *Soul on Ice*

**23. The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is about:**

- A) a boy who had to learn how to hunt in order to be accepted by his older brothers
- B) a young woman who had to learn to adapt to a simple life as she taught rural children in the early 1900's
- C) two children who were affected by the conflict in their community when their father defended a black man
- D) a young man who was returned to his family after he had grown up among the Indians

**24. Who is the character in an ancient Greek play who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother?**

- A) Agamemnon
- B) Oedipus
- C) Orestes
- D) Prometheus

**25. Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities* took place during the:**

- A) English Civil War
- B) War of the Roses
- C) French Revolution
- D) Crimean War



**26. Which mythical Greek hero demonstrated his bravery and cunning during his long journey homeward after fighting in the Trojan War?**

- A) Theseus
- B) Achilles
- C) Odysseus
- D) Telemachus

**27. In the Bible, Job is known for his:**

- A) skill as a builder
- B) patience in suffering
- C) prowess in battle
- D) prophetic ability

**28. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." These words are from:**

- A) Common Sense
- B) The Declaration of Independence
- C) Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address
- D) The Rights of Man



**29. Which president said, "And so my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country"?**

- A) Richard Nixon
- B) Theodore Roosevelt
- C) Lyndon Johnson
- D) John F. Kennedy

**30. Which American poet wrote the volume of poetry *Leaves of Grass*, which includes the line "I celebrate myself, and sing myself"?**

- A) Robert Lowell
- B) Edna St. Vincent Millay
- C) Archibald MacLeish
- D) Walt Whitman

**31. The novel *The Scarlet Letter* is the story of:**

- A) the correspondence between a woman and her fiancé during the Civil War
- B) the correspondence between a Revolutionary War spy and George Washington
- C) a woman who was unfaithful and had to observe the effects of her sin on others
- D) a woman in a New England town who was executed for being a witch

**32. Who wrote the *Canterbury Tales*, a poem written in Middle English and containing stories told by people on a pilgrimage?**

- A) Andrew Marvell
- B) Sir Thomas Malory
- C) Edmund Spenser
- D) Geoffrey Chaucer

**33. The controversy surrounding Senator Joseph McCarthy focused on:**

- A) investigations of individuals suspected of Communist activities
- B) agitation to secure civil rights for Irish immigrants
- C) leadership of the movement protesting the war in Vietnam
- D) leadership of the movement to improve veterans' benefits

ANSWERS

1-D, 2-A, 3-B, 4-B, 5-C, 6-D, 7-D, 8-C, 9-B, 10-B, 11-C, 12-B, 13-E, 14-B, 15-D, 16-C, 17-B, 18-C, 19-B, 20-A, 21-B, 22-B, 23-C, 24-B, 25-C, 26-C, 27-B, 28-B, 29-D, 30-D, 31-C, 32-D, 33-A.

- A = 30-33 correct
- B = 27-29 correct
- C = 23-26 correct
- D = 20-22 correct
- F = 0-19 correct

HOW DID YOU DO?

If your results weren't exactly stellar, you may want to take a minute to ponder what American education should be aiming for. This is especially true if there are kids in your life. Are they familiar with our common history and great works of art and literature? How can you help to broaden their experience and understanding of the arts and sciences? **Click here** to take a look at our picks on the Common Core website to see some programs, schools, and curricula that we think have the kind of rich-content that students need. And then go to a museum or play this weekend!