Before refrigerators were invented to keep our food fresh, people needed to find more creative ways.

Some people would construct their houses with basements, so food could be kept cool there. Others built sheds that were used to store dried and preserved foods all year round. But there were certain items that needed to be kept cold—not cool or dry, but cold. For this reason people would harvest ice.

During the wintertime in places like Pennsylvania, freshwater lakes and streams would freeze. A one-foot thick sheet of ice would form on top of the water. Then the ice-cutters would ride their horse-drawn sleds to the lakes and streams.

Using different hand tools, including saws, picks and hooks, the harvesters would cut long sheets of ice. Using their horses, they would drag the ice onto the river or lake banks, and begin to cut the sheet into blocks. It was long and patient work. Once all the blocks had been cut, the ice harvesters would pack up their sleds and ride back to town. There, they would store the large blocks in an ice house. The ice house was usually a large, insulated building that would allow ice to be stored year-round without it melting.
Ice deliverymen, known as icemen, would make their rounds, bringing the ice to homes, stores and restaurants. Individual homes might have an icebox to store food. This icebox could be made out of wood, and would have a place to put the block of ice to keep food cold. Underneath the icebox would be a pan or pot for collecting any water that would drip down as the ice melted.

A very interesting practice for storing food with lake and river ice involved digging a very large hole. Buffalo hunters, after killing a buffalo during the winter months, would dig the hole and line it with blocks of ice. Once the hole was well lined, the meat would be lowered into it and covered up. Over the winter these cuts of meat would freeze solid and stay preserved well into the summer. During the height of the summer, the hunters would go back to these meat lockers and unearth some tender and well-preserved buffalo meat.

In the early 1900s there were many large businesses built around the harvesting, storage, and distribution of ice. There was a lot of money to be made by ice businessmen as cities grew larger and more people needed to keep food fresh in a single city block. But once the refrigerator was invented and became easier for more people to buy, there was little need for ice harvesting. Now in the United States large chunks of ice are only harvested rarely to make sculptures and other large artistic structures.
Name: ___________________________ Date: _______________________

1. Why did ice used to be harvested?

A to catch dripping water
B to build refrigerators
C to keep food cold
D to make sculptures

2. What is the sequence of events in an ice harvest?

A the ice is stored, the ice is sold, ice forms, water freezes, the ice is cut
B the ice is cut, the ice is stored, the ice is sold, water freezes, ice forms
C water freezes, ice forms, the ice is cut, the ice is stored, the ice is sold
D ice forms, water freezes, the ice is cut, the ice is stored, the ice is sold

3. People eventually started using refrigerators instead of blocks of ice.

What sentence from the passage supports this statement?

A “In the early 1900s there were many large businesses built around the harvesting, storage, and distribution of ice.”
B “But once the refrigerator was invented and became easier for more people to buy, there was little need for ice harvesting.”
C “A very interesting practice for storing food with lake and river ice involved digging a very large hole.”
D “The ice house was usually a large, insulated building that would allow ice to be stored year-round without it melting.”

4. How can ice harvesting be described?

A easy work that people of all ages could do with their hands
B work that required the use of buffalos, iceboxes, and sculptures
C long, hard work that was not very useful to anyone
D hard work that once allowed businessmen to make a lot of money

5. What is this passage mostly about?

A how and why ice used to be harvested
B wintertime in Pennsylvania
C the holes that buffalo hunters used to dig
D the invention of the refrigerator
6. Read the following sentence: “In the early 1900s there were many large businesses built around the harvesting, storage, and distribution of ice.”

What does the word “harvesting” mean in the sentence above?

A melting  
B collecting  
C attacking  
D traveling

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Many people used blocks of ice to keep their food fresh ______ they started using refrigerators.

A before  
B after  
C although  
D primarily

8. What is an icebox?

______________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________
9. Why did hunters put dead buffaloes into holes lined with ice?
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10. How are iceboxes and the holes hunters used to store dead buffaloes alike?
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Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1070

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8. What is an icebox?

Suggested answer: Answers may vary in level of detail. At minimum, students should identify an icebox as a container that holds a block of ice to keep food cold. They may add that it is sometimes made out of wood, has a receptacle underneath for catching water, and other details mentioned in the passage.

9. Why did hunters put dead buffaloes into holes lined with ice?

Suggested answer: Hunters put dead buffaloes into holes lined with ice to preserve their meat.

10. How are iceboxes and the holes hunters used to store dead buffaloes alike?

Suggested answer: Answers may vary. However, all should identify the fundamental similarity between iceboxes and buffalo holes: they were used to keep food cold.