



TENNESSEE HISTORY QUIZ

Think you know Tennessee history?
Test your knowledge with these 10 questions —
you might be surprised.



Last month, Tennessee History for Kids unveiled its first interactive online game. I didn't expect it to be as popular as it was: The first week, more than 3,500 students of various grades took a quiz.

Speaking before groups and, at times, giving students written tests, I frequently see firsthand what people think they know about Tennessee history — and their answers are often wrong. Based on what I've learned both from quizzes and my personal appearances, here are the top 10 Tennessee questions people ALWAYS seem to answer incorrectly:

1. What is the western boundary of Tennessee?

Most frequent answer: The Mississippi River

More accurate answer: Where the Mississippi River used to be

Comments: The Mississippi River has moved over time. Take Tipton County, for instance. Because the river has shifted, there are towns in Tipton County — Reverie, for instance — WEST of the Mississippi River. In Lauderdale County, Fort Pillow used to be alongside the Mississippi River. Now you can barely see the river from the fort. Because of constant shifts by the river, the U.S. Supreme Court was called upon to determine the boundary between Tennessee and Arkansas. Officially, the boundary is where the river channel was in 1836 (when Arkansas became a state).

Some people consider this to be pointless trivia. Here's why it's not: Students need to understand that the planet changes. Rivers aren't necessarily located today where they used to be.

2. With what war is Fort Loudoun associated?

Most frequent answer: The Civil War

Correct answer: The French and Indian War

Comments: Most people (students AND adults) forget that there even was a war on this continent before the American Revolution. No British outpost was further southwest than Fort Loudoun, and there is a wonderful re-creation of that fort at its original location in Monroe County. (Go to www.tnhistoryforkids.org, "Virtual Tours," and "Fort Loudoun" for a tour.)

3. On which side did most Cherokee fight in the American Revolution?

Most frequent answer: For the American revolutionaries

Correct answer: For the British

Comments: This is important. The Cherokee alliance with the British angered the colonists. It added to the bad relations between Cherokees and colonists after the war ended.

4. Who was president of the United States when the Trail of Tears occurred?

Most frequent answer: Andrew Jackson

Correct answer: Martin Van Buren

Comments: Jackson was president when the Indian Removal Act was passed in 1830 and put his weight behind removal throughout his presidency. But when Native Americans were actually forced out of the Southeast, his successor, Martin Van Buren, was president. I think this is worth pointing out because it reminds people that many agreed with Jackson's anti-Indian policies. It wasn't just HIM against the Native Americans (as so many students are now led to believe).

5. What river flows through downtown Nashville?

Most frequent answer: Tennessee River or Mississippi River

Correct answer: Cumberland River

Comments: The first time the Tennessee Titans were on Monday Night Football, a sportscaster said that the Titans' beautiful new stadium sat alongside the Mississippi River. It was a funny moment for Nashville, which spent so much money to bring the NFL to town. Students seem to miss this one also. For some reason, the Cumberland is anonymous in the history books — quite a disservice to Middle Tennessee history.



Tennessee History for Kids

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For more great stories of Tennessee history, go to www.tnhistoryforkids.org.



6. When the Civil War began, about one in how many Tennesseans were slaves?

Most frequent answer: 10

Correct answer: Four

Comments: Tennessee had a lot more slaves than people realize. I think part of the reason people get this wrong is that so many African-Americans migrated North in the latter part of the 19th century.

7. In 1900, which of Tennessee's four large cities was known as Rock City?

Most frequent answer: Chattanooga

Correct answer: Nashville

Comments: I like to point it out for two reasons: First of all, downtown Nashville is SO rocky (from whence came the nickname) that every major construction project undertaken there runs over budget because of it.

Second, it serves as a reminder that nicknames change, images change and the things a city wants to say about itself change. There was a time when being “built on a rock” was the kind of thing Nashville was proud of. Now the city prefers “Music City U.S.A.”

8. Senator George Norris, who worked tirelessly to get the president of the United States to form the Tennessee Valley Authority, was from what state?

Most frequent answer: Tennessee

Correct answer: Nebraska

Comments: Norris should have been named an honorary Tennessean because he did so much for the Volunteer State. But in truth, he was a U.S. Senator from Nebraska. He was also a powerful Republican who routinely opposed the Coolidge and Hoover administrations. Norris believed the federal government was better positioned to do something about the problems posed by the Tennessee River than were state governments and private industry. As a result, he is (rightfully) considered one of the creators of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

9. What is the name of the private institution in Grundy County that promoted labor unions and civil rights activism in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960?

Most frequent answer: Sewanee University

Correct answer: The Highlander Folk School

Comments: Last year I attended a teacher career fair and spoke to several student teachers about where they were going to take jobs (most of them were planning to leave Tennessee in search of higher salaries). One of the people with whom I spoke was a college senior majoring in education from a public university in Middle Tennessee. He told me he was probably moving to Georgia.

I asked this young man (who was from Grundy County) whether he had ever heard of the Highlander Folk School (a Grundy County institution that trained, among others, Rosa Parks). He said he hadn't.

So let's see ... We're now graduating teachers who know nothing about their home counties and very little about the history of their state. Is it any wonder that some of them don't have much loyalty to Tennessee?

How to test your knowledge

Teachers and students are already using the “Tennessee History for Kids” interactive quizzes to learn about the Volunteer State. So can you.

There are more than 300 questions in the system, and the computer randomly picks them each time you take the test. In other words, if you take a test 10 times, you should get different questions each time.

Keep in mind that there are questions for grade levels two, four, five, seven, eight, 11 and 12. The questions are cumulative ... so if you type in grade 12, you will be getting a cross section from beginner (second grade) to advanced (12th grade).

Just go to the “Tennessee History for Kids” Web site (www.tnhistoryforkids.org) and follow the directions.

10. Why was Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis on April 4, 1968, when he was shot and killed?

Most frequent answer: He was attending a Million Man March.

Correct answer: To show support for striking garbage workers.

Comments: It's hard for me to comment on why students get this one wrong without getting on my soap box (and it's a big one) about No Child Left Behind, political correctness, revisionism and the inadequacies of textbooks. So I

won't. But it's a shame that students recognize the phrase “Million Man March” more than they actually know about the civil rights movement. After all, here's a point about the striking garbage workers who were on strike in March and April 1968: Most, but not all, of them were black. Some were white.

Bonus question: Who is the current governor of Tennessee?

Most frequent answer: Don't know

Correct answer: Phil Bredesen

Comments: From my school appearances, I've concluded that less than 5 percent of students in grades four and five know the name of the governor of Tennessee. (I spoke recently to 57 fourth-graders at one school and asked them to write down the governor's name; zero out of 57 knew his name.) This isn't a reflection of Bredesen's popularity or effectiveness; it's a reflection of what's happened to the teaching of Tennessee and the things about it. ☹