Read this essay that eulogizes Arthur Ashe, the tennis champion who died in 1993. Answer the questions that follow.

Arthur Ashe Remembered

By John McPhee (Originally Published in The New Yorker, March 1993) • MCAS Spring 1999 (Grade 8)

1  He once described his life as a “succession of fortunate circumstances.” He was in his twenties then. More than half of his life was behind him. His memory of his mother was confined to a single image: in a blue corduroy bathrobe she stood in a doorway looking out on the courts and playing fields surrounding their house, which stood in the center of a Richmond playground. Weakened by illness, she was taken to a hospital that day, and died at the age of twenty-seven. He was six.

2  It was to be his tragedy, as the world knows, that he would leave his own child when she was six, that his life would be trapped in a medical irony as a result of early heart disease, and death would come to him prematurely, as it had to his mother.

3  His mother was tall, with long soft hair and a face that was gentle and thin. She read a lot. She read a lot to him. His father said of her, “She was just like Arthur Junior. She never argued. She was quiet, easygoing, kindhearted.”

4  If by legacy her son never argued, he was also schooled, instructed, coached not to argue, and as he moved alone into alien country he fashioned not-arguing into an enigma and turned the enigma into a weapon. When things got tough (as I noted in these pages twenty-four years ago), he had control. Even in very tight moments, other players thought he was toying with them. They rarely knew what he was thinking. They could not tell if he was angry. It was maddening, sometimes, to play against him. Never less than candid, he said that what he liked best about himself on a tennis court was his demeanor: “What it is is controlled cool, in a way. Always have the situation under control, even if losing. Never betray an inward sense of defeat.”

5  And of course he never did—not in the height of his athletic power, not in the statesmanship of the years that followed, and not in the endgame of his existence. If you wished to choose a single image, you would see him standing there in his twenties, his lithe body a braid of cables, his energy without apparent limit, in a court situation indescribably bad, and all he does is put his index finger on the bridge of his glasses and push them back up the bridge of his nose. In the shadow of disaster, he hits out. Faced with a choice between a conservative, percentage return or a one-in-ten flat-out blast, he chooses the blast. In a signature manner, he extends his left arm to point upward at lobs as they fall toward him. His overheads, in fire bursts, put them away. His backhand is, if anything, stronger than his forehand, and his shots from either side for the most part are explosions. In motions graceful and decisive, though, and with reactions as fast as the imagination, he is a master of drop shots, of cat-and-mouse, of miscellaneous dinks and chips and (riskiest of all) the crosscourt half-volley. Other tennis players might be wondering who in his right mind would attempt something like that, but that is how Ashe plays the game: at the tensest moment, he goes for the all but impossible. He is predictably unpredictable. He is unreadable. His ballistic serves move in odd patterns and come off the court in unexpected ways. Behind his impassive face—behind the enigmatic glasses, the lifted chin, the first-mate-on-the-bridge look—there seems to be, even from this distance, a smile.
FAST-R Reading Check-Up
Skills tested: Finding evidence in text and making inferences
Grade 7 • Nonfiction passage 2 • “Arthur Ashe Remembered”

Mark your answer by filling in the circle for that answer choice on your answer sheet.

1. At the end of the passage, how does the author describe Arthur Ashe?
   A. quiet  
   B. cool  
   C. tragic  
   D. unpredictable

2. Why were other players frustrated while playing against Arthur Ashe?
   A. He would brag about beating them.  
   B. He never argued.  
   C. He was out of control when he played.  
   D. He always appeared cool and in control.

3. According to this passage, Arthur Ashe and his mother were similar in that
   A. they both argued a lot.  
   B. they both died when their children were six years old.  
   C. they both played volleyball very well.  
   D. they both had long, soft hair.

4. At approximately what age did Arthur Ashe die?
   A. six  
   B. twenty-seven  
   C. in his forties or fifties  
   D. in his sixties or seventies

5. In paragraph 2, the author says that “death would come to him prematurely, as it had to his mother.” What does prematurely mean?
   A. painfully  
   B. earlier than expected  
   C. suddenly and unexpectedly  
   D. peacefully
6. **In paragraph 4, Arthur Ashe said “what he liked best about himself on a tennis court was his demeanor.” What does demeanor mean?**
   A. bad attitude  
   B. drive to win  
   C. conduct  
   D. gracefulness

7. **The author uses paragraph 4 to describe**
   A. Ashe’s self-control.  
   B. how Ashe learned to play tennis.  
   C. the influence Ashe’s father had on him.  
   D. how Ashe felt about tennis.

8. **In paragraph 5, the phrase “a braid of cables” describes Arthur Ashe’s**
   A. very long legs.  
   B. muscular body.  
   C. tennis racquet.  
   D. high energy.

9. **In paragraph 5, the author focuses on Arthur Ashe’s**
   A. private life off the court.  
   B. physical appearance.  
   C. skills that made him a winning tennis player.  
   D. sad childhood that shaped the way he played.

10. **The author’s main purpose in writing this essay was to**
    A. warn the reader about the dangers of playing tennis.  
    B. persuade the reader to start playing tennis at an early age.  
    C. entertain the reader with an amusing story about a tennis player.  
    D. inform the reader about the qualities of a great tennis player.