



CLAUDE PEPPER LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

READING COMPREHENSION EXERCISE

INTRODUCTION

Claude Pepper was a man of strong conviction and opinions and he was a product of his time, the early 20th century. This reading guide was created to provide students with a broad understand of Pepper's background, his personal beliefs and the political challenges that he faced. Though he came from humble roots, he rose to become one of the most respected public servants of the 20th century.

He had a long and creative public life, and was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1938, where his run for the Senate was perceived as a test of Roosevelt's New Deal. *Time* featured him again in 1983, where his activism on behalf of the elderly earned him the nickname "Mr. Senior Citizen." Pepper was a liberal. He never wavered from his fervent conviction that government has a responsibility to help its citizens. He paid close attention to the needs of women, the elderly, the poor, the disenfranchised, the immigrant, the worker, and the physically challenged. Because of his liberal views, his opponents in the 1950s labeled him as a Communist and called him "Red Pepper", but most of what he fought for then is now the law of the land.

Instructions:

1. Read through each of the passages in the exercise
2. Complete the reading comprehension test at the end of the reading supplement.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: His Goals as a Politician

"I have always regarded politics as a kind of ministry. I am not a preacher by disposition or temperament, but if I can do a lot of people good, if I can lift up a lot of people to walk on higher ground by what I do in public life, I think I am rendering a kind of ministry to the people of my country or the constituency that I serve.

One of the most gratifying things that I think a man can do, a woman can do, in a career, is to have an honorable career in public service; be identified with meaningful legislation that helps people to live better and longer and healthier and happier, for example; provides better for assured peace among the nations and people of the world. In other words, makes life better on this planet that the lord has privileged us to live upon. I think that's a great privilege."

RURAL ROOTS AND VALUES

Claude Pepper was born on his family farm near Dudleyville, Alabama on September 8, 1900. Growing up in a rural setting had a significant impact on his life. Claude's parents, Joseph Wheeler and Lena Talbot were farmers by occupation and life on the family farm was a great deal of hard work. Though the Peppers never had much money, they wanted to do the best that they could for their family. In 1910, the Peppers moved from Dudleyville to the nearby town of Camp Hill where Claude spent most of his youth. Fortunately, Claude had a great principal at his local high school who instilled in him and the other young men and women the belief that they could rise above their circumstances and achieve great things in life. Pepper did just that. He went on to know some of the most famous people of his day. He worked with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, played golf with comedian Jackie Gleason, met with Soviet leader Stalin, became friends with actor Edward G. Robinson, and he corresponded with physicist Albert Einstein. Though he achieved greatness and political fame, he never forgot his roots. While growing up in Alabama, he witnessed the poverty around him and he empathized with others shared the same experiences for the rest of his life.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: Recalling the Experiences of his Youth

"I've never forgotten Camp Hill and Dudleyville and County Line Church, and all these humble places, and I feel that there are some people in high places in Washington now who don't come from this kind of an area, or else they've forgotten about it. I've never forgotten my raising.

And my family has had hard times, my family's been hungry... And fortunately, I've never forgotten it. And when they talk about not helping people who need help, they know I'm on the other side, because I still remember these days when my family lived among ordinary people. I had a vivid memory of the struggles and problems that my family had. And I guess that's perhaps made me a little more sensitive to the struggles and problems of other people."

PEPPER'S VALUE OF EDUCATION AND HARD WORK

At seventeen Claude left Dudleyville to find work in Birmingham. His dream was to attend the University of Alabama, which became a reality in 1918. At the time that he attended college, it was towards the end of World War I, and he enlisted in the Army Training Corps.

An independent spirit even then, Claude and several friends were briefly imprisoned for writing uncomplimentary remarks about the Army commander in the college newspaper. He sustained a minor injury during training, but one that was enough to qualify for government funds to continue his education at Harvard Law School.

Harvard's impact was enormous. He met significant public figures and made invaluable contacts. The experience made clear to him that most people need some type of help if they are to realize their dreams. Pepper began to feel that it was the

government's responsibility to make opportunities available to as many of its citizens as it could.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: His Experiences at Harvard Law School

"I was enormously impressed with the whole character of the Harvard Law School. Here I was a Southern boy, the grandson of two Confederate soldiers whom I knew very well as a young boy, I talked to often...

I was a provincial Southerner with a chip on each shoulder about the Civil War, the South.

Well, I took my chips off my shoulder and I never put them back...

It made out of a provincial Southerner an American. I got a view of the whole nation that I never had before. I was associated with young men from all over the nation. There were no girls in classes in those days. And I was associated with young men from all over the nation.

And then of course I had professors of renown and distinction at almost every case a professor that taught the course wrote the book from which we studied in that course. They all were men of great distinction, and I had moved up into a category of excellence and a national vision and scope that I had never known before. And it was immeasurably valuable influence in my life and I wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world. So the Lord was mighty good to me to allow me to achieve that opportunity."

CAMPAIGNING AND POLITICS

Claude Pepper ran successfully in eighteen races, and unsuccessfully in three. His schedule was grueling and his energy legendary. Pepper believed in what he was doing—he wanted to make a difference in people's lives. And in his fourteen years in the Senate and twenty-six years in the House, he did.

Pepper helped create the National Institutes of Health and enact the first minimum-wage law. He introduced one of the first equal rights amendments for women in 1943. He introduced the bill that stopped American isolationism and saved Britain during World War II.

Claude Pepper chaired the Committees on Crime; Aging; Long-term Care; and Rules. His voice was heard on the House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. He was not stuck in the past—Pepper held the first hearings on drugs in the schools and instituted metal detectors at airports. He helped create the Juvenile Justice Agency. Most significantly, he sponsored the Older Americans Act, created the Administration on Aging, and ended mandatory retirement.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: His Views About Politics

"Politics is not an easy life. It has frustrations. It has disappointments. It has cruelties that search the soul. But, on the other hand, it gives you the power to have an impact upon your

time. It gives you an opportunity to lift many other people... maybe, to walk on higher ground.

And I'm striving and I hope the Lord, who has been so good to me, will give me time to see the realization of that dream."

THE WAR YEARS

When Claude and Mildred Pepper visited Europe in 1938, they had the opportunity to see Nazi soldiers march through Berlin. They sat across the room from Hitler in a restaurant. When they returned to Washington, they warned Roosevelt of the approaching storm. After Germany took Poland and Czechoslovakia, and attacked Britain, Pepper urged our involvement in the war. His impassioned speech was uncommon for a freshman Senator. And his "Lend-Lease" plan was so controversial that he was hanged in effigy by isolationists and ridiculed in the press.

Yet the Senator persisted with his plan to provide assistance to the Allies without direct involvement in the war. Twice, the Senate voted his plan down. On the third try, after Pepper built public support by campaigning across the nation, it passed.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: His Recollections of Being Hung in Effigy for His Support of the Lend-Lease Initiative

"After I introduced the first Lend-Lease bill, a lot of folks in Florida, where I was the Senator -- for which I was a Senator, thought, 'Claude Pepper's trying to get us in the war.' And a group of women gathered out in the lobby of the Senate, and shouted dismal moans and grunts that I was trying to take the blood of their children in war

. And then one afternoon I got back to my office about six o'clock from the Senate and they said, 'The Superintendent of Police is calling you.' I got on the phone and I said, 'Yes?' He said, 'Senator, what do you want me to do with your effigy?' I said, 'What?' 'With your effigy.' He said, 'Didn't you know you were hanged in effigy in front of the Capitol this afternoon?

A bunch of women we have suspicions about what their background is, but they fixed up an effigy of you, a coconut thing with sort of human features and jeans and trousers and moccasins on the feet, and it was all well tied together and padded. Put a rope around its neck and put a sign across its chest 'Claude Benedict Arnold Pepper'".

I kept that effigy all through the years and it's a part of the exhibit that you will see over in the library."

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND THE NEW DEAL

Claude Pepper saw the need for direct government involvement with its citizens. So did Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In the years that Pepper was in the Senate, he worked with FDR to enact legislation of lasting national significance. Both men realized that contemporary problems were too big to be solved by individuals alone. Americans were out of work and starving during the Great Depression. They needed assistance. Pepper himself had benefited from government funding of his education at Harvard. With FDR's leadership, he worked to extend that hand to all those in need of it. Many years after the Depression and the war, Claude Pepper was still motivated by those same ideals.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: His Impression of President Roosevelt

“He showed, by his own example and leadership that the government of the United States belongs to the people of this land... and that whenever their troubles and their disasters and their needs impel its use on their behalf, it's available. It's the mightiest institution on the face of the earth, and it can be a hand that'll lift up the people, if they call upon it to do so.

And a second great legacy President Roosevelt left to us, and that is that compassion, genuine concern for one's fellow man should be in the heart of every man or woman who assumes the awesome responsibilities of public office. I rather believe that the President would not have objected to every person after taking the oath of public office re-reading Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan to be reminded that he was simply not to operate a cold machine. He was to help as far as would be proper and possible, people to live richer, healthier, and happier lives.

America, as Roosevelt left it, will be in center stage among the nations of the earth standing up for what is right, opposing what is wrong and trying to build the institutions that will preserve the peace and the happiness of mankind.”

MILDRED PEPPER

Mildred Pepper was Claude Pepper's wife. She was born in 1903 and attended the Florida State College for Women which later became Florida State University. She met Claude in the early 1930s shortly after Claude served in the Florida House of Representatives. For over forty-two years she and Claude shared victory and defeat together. The two traveled the globe, meeting both the famous and the ordinary. From witnessing Hitler in Berlin, to dinner with actress Tallulah Bankhead; charity work with the National Parkinson's Foundation, to organizational work with the Women's Democratic Club, Mildred was an able partner and advocate for the issues she shared with her husband. In the 1940s, Mildred was frequently heard on national radio, promoting her beliefs. Portions of her speeches are featured here. Claude was particularly proud of her when she met with Soviet Minister Molotov to discuss world affairs. Newspaper accounts of that experience are also featured in this segment of the exhibit. Mildred Pepper clearly believed that women had a special role to play, and that all of us—men and women—had to participate if we were to develop a caring society.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: Memories of His Wife Mildred

“... And all of a sudden a girl, and I believe a couple of other people, the girl wearing a beautiful yellow dress, emerged from the Governor's office out into the corridor near where I happened to be standing. I was a bachelor then and about 31 years old. So I remembered the song "Did You Ever See A Dream Walking" because she was an angel, it seemed to me, and I said, 'My, that's the prettiest girl I ever saw.' She loved people. She liked to be with 'em. She loved to be a part of great events, exciting episodes and the like. So she was just the ideal wife. She was a much better politician than I am. She was a perfect wife and possessed all those noble virtues which have adorned great woman from time immemorial, Her beautiful life has left a glow which will illumine and inspire others for generations to come.”

MCCARTHYISM

After the Second World War, a wave of Communist hysteria swept America. We had defeated a totalitarian regime, but with the help of what many felt was another totalitarian regime. Though 'Red Scares' had happened before, this one was to leave an indelible mark on our country. Claude Pepper believed that the central government should be involved in social and economic issues. He was an easy target. Because he was a Southerner who supported the civil rights of African-Americans and even helped enact the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, he was particularly vulnerable. Pepper supported progressive labor unions and friendship with the Soviet Union. Add to that his meeting with Stalin and his fate was sealed. The 1950 Democratic primary race for Senate between Claude Pepper and George Smathers was ugly. Smathers accused Pepper of being 'un-American' because of his beliefs. Claude Pepper never wavered from his principles and lost overwhelmingly.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: His Recollections of the McCarthy Era

“The McCarthy era was a cancer in the American body politic. It permeated the whole system of our nation. And pilloried and brought into contemptuous regard and imprisoned in many ways and sometimes physically a lot of people in the country. It destroyed a lot of people.. it was a tragic era in American history and did much to damage the quality and the integrity of our American democracy.”

LIBERALISM

Claude Pepper was a life-long liberal. He kept that vision even when it was unpopular. For Pepper, a “liberal” was a person who felt that every citizen deserved respect from his or her government. That respect was shown through government programs that helped a person throughout their life. Whether it was health care, civil and women's rights, labor, education, or international relations, the impact on the 'little guy' was the most important. Costs of these programs needed to be contained, but as Pepper said: "Brightening human lives is not

wastrel government; it is government at its very best."

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: His Views on Liberalism

"And as long as the Lord lets me live on this earth I shall continue to be a liberal because to me a liberal in politics is simply a man or a woman who wants to use the public power and the public authority and the public money to do things that should be done which cannot be done by the people without the help of the government. So that's what I mean by a liberal. Liberal to do the thing and liberal to have vision. Vision as to the future that we ought to be experiencing, getting prepared for the future—the children prepared in education, and other people trying to be prepared in trading and the like. Seeing in the future the opportunities that lie ahead of us and building greater opportunities to be attained by the people."

HEALTH CARE

Despite Claude Pepper's many successes, he never accomplished one goal—the creation of a national universal health care system. In 1988 Pepper delivered his last, great speech. His topic was home health care and his challenge to us all was to find a way to help our neighbors. He never saw his dream come to fruition and America faces a looming health care crisis as the baby-boomer generation gets older. Universal health care is just one of several issues that political candidates are using today to get your attention to vote. One day, the health care issue will play a significant role in your life as well.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: His Views on Universal Health Care for All Americans

"I had a big meeting the other day with half a dozen of the biggest insurance companies in the United States, the head of the American Medical Association, American Hospital Association, many other people interested in the subject. I said, "I haven't anything to sell you except a dream. My dream is that there will be a day in America when every man, woman and child, by paying whatever he or she can, will be able to get the medical care that he or she should have." And I say, in the genius of America, we can do it because we've done so much."

THE PEPPER LEGACY: SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

When Claude Pepper died on May 30, 1989, a member of the House of Representatives said, "We have lost one of the greatest, most dedicated public servants this country or any country has ever known. He was the oldest man in Congress, but his ideals were progressive and young."

What did Claude Pepper actually accomplish in over forty years of public life? He:

- Introduced the first equal pay for equal work to women legislation
- Was the author of the legislation that established a minimum wage and maximum hours
- Chaired the Senate Wartime and Health Subcommittee
- Wrote and introduced Lend-Lease Legislation that saved Great Britain in World War II.
- Sponsored the original G.I. Bill
- Chaired the House Aging Committee and the House Rules Committee
- Outlawed mandatory retirement
- Strengthened Medicare, Social Security and the Older Americans Act
- Created and Chaired the House Select Committee on Crime
- Created the National Institutes of Health
- Created the National Science Foundation
- Created the World Health Organization
- Worked to create the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the 'Model Cities' program
- Sponsored the Public Broadcasting Act and worked to support Educational Television
- Helped enact the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts
- Chaired and served as President of the U.S. Delegation to the Interparliamentary Union
- Chaired the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission

It is an impressive list for a ploughboy from the South.

Claude Pepper In His Own Words: The Rewards of Serving His Country

"I do foresee peace as a possibility for mankind through the genius of men and the leadership of wise men and women encouraging institutions that will assure that peace. I see raising the standard of living, the quality of employment, the kind of homes that people have. I think we will practically do away with the shelterless in the relatively near future. I hope we will. I hope we will abolish hunger in America. I hope we will come to curb disease to a great degree. There is a great world out there yet to be conquered, and I hope to play my own little part in that conquest."





READING COMPREHENSION TEST

Instructions: Circle the best choice based on your readings.

1. Claude Pepper was featured twice in what magazine?
 - a. *Newsweek*
 - b. *The Economist*
 - c. *Time*
 - d. *The New Yorker*

2. Pepper earned what distinguished nickname for his activism and work with the elderly?
 - a. "The Grey Panther"
 - b. "Mr. Social Security"
 - c. "Mr. Senior Citizen"
 - d. "Red Pepper"

3. In his own words, Pepper regarded politics as a type of _____ .
 - a. career choice
 - b. ministry
 - c. public service
 - d. none of the above

4. Claude Pepper was born in _____ .
 - a. Camp Hill, Alabama
 - b. Dudleyville, Alabama
 - c. Tallahassee, Florida
 - d. on the family farm

5. When Claude Pepper graduated from high school, he went on to attend:
 - a. The University of Florida
 - b. Florida State University
 - c. Harvard Law School
 - d. The University of Alabama

6. In his own words, Claude Pepper mentioned that he “was a provincial Southerner with a chip on each shoulder”. What did he mean by this expression?

- a. He had a negative attitude about everything and everybody.
- b. He had a narrow view about the causes of the social and economic conditions in the American South that distorted his views.
- c. He thought that the South should have won the Civil War.
- d. All of the above.

7. Claude Pepper was ridiculed in the press and hung in effigy by Isolationists because:

- a. He and his wife Mildred visited Germany in 1938.
- b. He was a Nazi sympathizer.
- c. He sponsored the Lend-Lease bill.
- d. He wanted to declare war on Germany.

8. The Lend Lease plan:

- a. Was a formal proclamation of war against Germany.
- b. Was a plan to provide assistance to the Allies without declaring war.
- c. Was a plan that was immediately adopted by the U.S. Congress.
- d. Was later embraced by the Isolationists as an ideal solution to ensure “peace in our time”

9. Claude Pepper and President Franklin D. Roosevelt perceived the government’s role as one that:

- a. Coordinated the needs and concerns of the American people.
- b. Allowed individual citizens to resolve their problems on their own accord.
- c. Lend a helping hand by providing direct assistance to the neediest of its citizens.
- d. Should provide federal assistance to everyone, regardless of need.

10. In 1950, Claude Pepper’s political opponent, George Smathers, accused Pepper of being what?

- a. A wicked thespian from New York City.
- b. A corrupt politician who accepted bribes in return for political favors.
- c. Un-American because of his political beliefs.
- d. A Totalitarian Fascist.

11. In Claude Pepper’s words, to him, a liberal is someone who:

- a. spends a lot of public money to help keep the economy strong
- b. uses public money to help people in dire need just get by on a daily

basis.

c. uses public money to create federal programs designed to help people now and for the future.

d. all of the above

12. What did Pepper **not** accomplish or help to accomplish during his 40 years of public life?

a. Establish a universal health care system.

b. Ending of mandatory retirement.

c. Enacting of Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act.

d. Establishment of federal minimum wage and maximum hours.



READING COMPREHENSION TEST

ANSWER KEY

1. c
2. c
3. b
4. b
5. d
6. b
7. c
8. b
9. c
10. c
11. c
12. a