In the sixth century B.C., Rome was a minor town in central Italy. Only a few centuries later, it was a bustling city at the center of one of the most powerful empires in history. In its prime, Rome commanded an empire that ringed the Mediterranean. The Roman Empire included England, much of Europe, most of Asia west of the Euphrates River, northern Africa, and all of the islands in between. Why did Rome emerge as one of the greatest powers of all times? There are several related reasons.

To forge an empire, a nation needs vast armies that can fight on numerous fronts. Unlike its neighbors, Rome made it a practice to grant citizenship to any non-Romans joining their cause. They also let all citizens share in the spoils of victory. Such an open-door policy created a steady flow of enlistees who had a stake in the outcome of battle. In addition, the Romans developed an open formation of small groups of soldiers, which had two great advantages. Troops could quickly be mobilized and deployed as needed. Substitutions of fresh soldiers could readily be made for dead or wounded ones.

Once a region came under Roman control, it could go about its business under the authority of a provincial governor. The Romans found it efficient to have their empire administered at the local level, rather than concentrating power in Rome. This was not the case with their legal system, however. The Romans unified a jumble of ancient laws and practices into a coherent whole. No longer was the law subject to a variety of interpretations depending upon who was judging and who was being judged. Rather, the law was predictable and was applied in the same way throughout the empire. The Roman system of governance created stability and produced, through heavy taxation, a steady stream of riches to Rome.

In order to maintain the empire’s infrastructure, the ancient Romans focused on building useful structures. They built bridges, huge warehouses, and aqueducts that carried water to the public. They also built apartment buildings, public baths, sewers, and paved roads on which goods or armies could be transported. The Romans’ creation of cement was important to their architecture. This substance proved to be far stronger than other building materials of the time.

If the ancient Greeks were brilliant creators and visionary idealists, the ancient Romans were expert technicians and tacticians. They were, in a word, practical.
Recollecting Facts
1. According to the passage, the genius of the ancient Romans was their
   □ a. idealism.
   □ b. practicality.
   □ c. lack of structure.

2. In the Roman legal system, laws were
   □ a. different in different regions.
   □ b. the same throughout the empire.
   □ c. created by the provincial governors.

3. The Romans preferred cement over other building materials because cement was
   □ a. stronger.
   □ b. more flexible.
   □ c. less expensive.

4. The most important reason that Rome was able to maintain huge armies was that it
   □ a. built roads to move troops.
   □ b. granted foreigners citizenship and a share in the spoils of war.
   □ c. used an open formation of small groups for quick deployment.

5. Controlling an empire made Rome wealthy because
   □ a. the empire ringed the Mediterranean.
   □ b. everyone shared in the spoils of war.
   □ c. the Romans taxed the provinces heavily.

Understanding Ideas
6. In contrast to its legal system, the government within the Roman Empire
   □ a. was stable.
   □ b. varied from locality to locality.
   □ c. was democratic.

7. The success of the Roman Empire was not a result of
   □ a. the growth of the city of Rome.
   □ b. Rome's military policies, which guaranteed huge armies.
   □ c. Rome's administrative policies, which kept the empire running smoothly.

8. Which of the following statements best describes the main idea of the passage?
   □ a. The ancient Romans created an empire that lasted for centuries.
   □ b. The ancient Greeks were brilliant inventors and visionary idealists.
   □ c. Rome emerged as one of the greatest imperial powers through its practical approach to society and government.

9. The Romans were exceptionally good at activities related to
   □ a. theater.
   □ b. philosophy.
   □ c. engineering.

10. One can conclude from the passage that the author admires
    □ a. both the ancient Romans and the ancient Greeks.
    □ b. the ancient Greeks more than the ancient Romans.
    □ c. the ancient Romans more than the ancient Greeks.