Most of Julie's friends' parents drank coffee. Some of them liked tea, too; but not like her parents did. Jill's family, Billy's family, and Tanya's family each had just two or three boxes of tea on a shelf, but Julie's had a whole cabinet dedicated to tea. No bags in boxes either; her parents drank loose-leaf tea only. "The real stuff," her dad called it.

Packed tightly in rich red and gold tins, the Tang's collection included fragrant jasmine green tea; Longjing tea, a pan-fried green tea Julie preferred to call by its nickname, Dragon Well tea; roasted, curly-leaved oolong tea; lightly sweet white tea; and more.

Every New Year—the Chinese New Year that is—her parents would have a traditional tea ceremony. That's the time when she would roll her eyes and slink out of the room. Her mom said it was an important cultural tradition, but Julie just thought it was B-O-R-I-N-G. (Or at least she assumed it would be if she ever stuck around for it.)

However, now that she was 13 (an official teenager at last!), Julie felt different, more mature, and she was beginning to really enjoy history, thanks to her great social studies teacher. Julie decided it was time this New Year to take an interest in her own family and cultural history once she realized she actually knew very little. (She had only been to China once when she visited her grandparents as a five-year-old and her classes devoted equal time to studies of all the cultures of the world, not just that of the Chinese.)

"Why do we have to do this tea ceremony every year?" Julie asked her mother, who was taking the clay teapots out of the cabinet reserved for special teapots and fancy dishes.

"I'm not in the mood for complaints," her mother warned.

"No, but I really want to know! What is the tea ceremony really all about, and why do you always say that drinking tea is part of your DNA?"

Julie's mother gave her a sideways glance, her mouth turning from a suspicious smirk into a gleeful smile as she realized Julie genuinely wanted to learn about China's tea-steeped history.

"Well, the DNA thing is a figure of speech."

"I know that, Mom," Julie sighed. "How old do you think I am? Ten?"
"Okay then. Legend has it that Shennong, a Chinese emperor and herbalist—someone who grows and sells herbs and uses them to treat illness—discovered tea way back in 2737 B.C. He liked his water boiled so it would be germ-free when he drank it. One day, as a servant prepared the emperor's water, a dead leaf dropped into the water. The emperor drank it and actually found it to be quite tasty.

"Another story says that Shennong, whose name translates to 'Divine Farmer' and is known by many as the father of agriculture and herbal medicine, would test out many different herbs each day. Whenever he came across a poisonous one, he would use tea as an antidote.

"Chinese people continued to drink tea and use it as medicine throughout history, and by the early Middle Ages, drinking tea was common practice in China. It was considered one of the seven necessities to begin the day alongside firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, and vinegar."

Julie's mother walked across the room to the bookshelf, and pulled out a yellow and red book titled The Classic of Tea: Origins & Rituals, written by Lu Yu. "This book, which was written around 760 A.D. during the Tang Dynasty, is all about how tea is grown, how the leaves are processed, and things like that. I advise you read this instead of wasting your time with all that TV."

"I watch nothing but Tea TV," Julie joked.

"Right. Well, in case they didn't cover this on Tea TV, in the book, Yu describes the tea trees that grew in South China. Back in those days, they would compress tea leaves into little cakes—not like a birthday cake, just a little brick of leaves—which they would grind in a stone mortar. They'd add hot water to this tea powder to make the beverage we know as tea, and the Chinese call..."

"Cha," Julie responded to her mother's lifted eyebrows. Cha was one of a few Chinese words Julie had memorized.

"As tea became popular, so did tea shops. They continued to prosper during the Song Dynasty, and China's tea culture started to spread a little bit to other lands as monks and Zen masters brought tea seeds, drink ware, and knowledge to Japan.

"However, Chinese rulers imposed a strict ban on tea exports during the Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties. The ban made it difficult for tea to grow popular around the world. Then, soon after the Qing Dynasty was established in the 17th century, the ban was officially lifted and merchants travelled, first by land, to export tea. Many went as far as Russia, almost 4,000 miles, by horse, oxen, mules, and yaks. Just imagine!"

"Whoa," Julie thought about how hard it had been for her to run a mile today in gym class. Mule or no mule, 4,000 miles by anything but plane was impossible for her to imagine.

"Anyway, enough about trade for now. Back in the Song Dynasty, the Chinese would take that ground tea powder and whip it so it was frothy, almost like the top of a milkshake. They had special tea bowls to accommodate the whipping, many of which were black or blue, and looked beautiful against the light-green tea.

"During the Ming Dynasty, people started to transform green tea into black tea by heating the leaves. They realized they could preserve the leaves for a longer time by doing so. That's when oolong came into the picture. They also began steeping whole tea leaves instead of powder, which is the loose-leaf style you're used to."
"And what about the ceremonies?" Julie was interested, but knew that if she didn't wrap things up soon, her mom would talk straight 'til morning.

"Well, a Chinese tea ceremony is a way for families to connect, which is why it's a wedding tradition. It's also about cultivating peace, quiet, enjoyment, and strength. When you're performing a ceremony, there are six things to keep in mind: attitude, tea selection, water selection, tea ware selection, ambiance, and technique. Let's start with attitude."

Julie smiled.

"Perfect. Now let me show you the rest..."
1. How are Julie's parents different from her friends' parents?
   A. Julie's parents celebrate Halloween, and her friends' parents do not.
   B. Julie's parents like tea much more than her friends' parents do.
   C. Julie's parents have different jobs than her friends' parents do.
   D. Julie's parents prefer books, while her friends' parents prefer TV.

2. What does Julie's mom teach Julie about throughout the story?
   A. Julie's mom teaches her about how tea is used in different cultures around the world.
   B. Julie's mom teaches her how trade has changed in China.
   C. Julie's mom teaches her about the history of tea and tea ceremonies.
   D. Julie's mom teaches her about the different dynasties in Chinese history.

3. Tea is very significant to Chinese culture. What evidence from the text supports this conclusion?
   A. "'Back in the Song Dynasty, the Chinese would take that ground tea powder and whip it so it was frothy, almost like the top of a milkshake.'"
   B. "'However, Chinese rulers imposed a strict ban on tea exports during the Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties.'"
   C. "'[Shennong] liked his water boiled so it would be germ-free when he drank it. One day, as a servant prepared the emperor's water, a dead leaf dropped into the water. The emperor drank it and actually found it to be quite tasty.'"
   D. "'Well, a Chinese tea ceremony is a way for families to connect, which is why it's a wedding tradition. It's also about cultivating peace, quiet, enjoyment, and strength.'"

4. How does Julie's mother feel about Julie's sudden interest in tea ceremonies?
   A. She is indifferent.
   B. She is happy.
   C. She is frustrated.
   D. She is concerned.
The Tea Ceremony - Comprehension Questions

5. What is the main idea of this passage?
   A. Julie's parents are not like her friends' parents.
   B. Julie learns about the history tea and Chinese tea ceremonies from her mother.
   C. Julie's mother explains how the Ming Dynasty created oolong tea.
   D. Julie has found tea ceremonies to be very boring until now.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"Every New Year her parents would have a traditional tea ceremony. That's the time when she would roll her eyes and slink out of the room. Her mom said it was an important cultural tradition, but Julie just thought it was B-O-R-I-N-G."

Why did the author write the word boring as "B-O-R-I-N-G"?
   A. to emphasize how tired Julie gets during tea ceremonies
   B. to emphasize how much Julie disliked the idea of a tea ceremony
   C. to show how quiet Julie had to be while slinking out of the room
   D. to help readers understand how to spell boring

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Julie's mother told her a lot about the history of tea, _____________ how different kinds of tea were created.
   A. consequently
   B. otherwise
   C. instead
   D. including

8. What does Julie’s mother give her to help Julie learn more about tea?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
9. Julie's mother explains that tea ceremonies help families connect. What else are they for?

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10. Explain why Julie probably appreciates tea and tea ceremonies more after her conversation with her mother.

Support your answer with evidence from the text.

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