Reading Practise

Read the passage below and answer questions 1-10.

Four Early Important Films

The Birth of a Nation (America) 1915

The Birth of a Nation tells a story about two families who are friends but hold different beliefs and are torn apart during the American Civil War. This film was the most expensive ever made, costing one hundred thousand US dollars – a paltry sum in today's film industry but at the time an absolute fortune. Tickets were also incredibly expensive at two dollars, but audiences thought it was more than worth it, and the film more than made up the money spent on its production. This film included things never before seen in cinema – a coherent plot, excellent acting, and inventive camerawork. This was the first film to be seen as a feature film, and from this point on, movies, no longer an arcade novelty, became respectable. It also set a precedent for future blockbusters, films in which huge amounts of money are invested in the hopes of even larger returns at the box office.

Potemkin (Russia) 1925

Potemkin was directed by Sergei Eisenstein, who followed Lenin's belief that art could influence politics and that the cinema was their country's most important art form. The film, set in 1905, follows the story of sailors on the battleship Potemkin as they grow tired of conditions on the ship and start a rebellion which spreads from the ship to the town where the ship is anchored. Potemkin was unusual at the time in that it didn't look like a staged film. Eisenstein chose to use people who had never acted before to achieve a sense of reality in the film. In addition, he chose to shoot the film on location rather than on a created set in a studio.

The Passion of Joan of Arc (France) 1928

The film follows the trial and execution of Joan of Arc as based on historical records that had recently come to light. The aspect of this film that makes it different from those that came before was the camerawork - this is the first film that makes good use of close-ups. The audience, by looking closely at the faces of the characters, felt the emotions of the characters through their facial expressions and the film itself moved forward through the faces and emotions of the characters / actors rather than actions or events. The film is considered the last great silent film. In fact, the technology required to make films with sound had just recently arrived at the time of filming, but the director failed to get the funding needed to film with sound.

Citizen Kane (America) 1940

One of the most famous films of all time, Citizen Kane follows the life story of rich and enigmatic Charles Foster Kane, based largely on William Randolph Hearst, as a reported tries to discover the meaning behind Kane's dying word, 'rosebud'. Citizen Kane was directed by Orson Welles, who also played Kane. Hearst, knowing of the film and the fact that it was based on his life, tried by various means to suppress it. He mostly succeeded, and the film was largely unseen until it was revived in the late 1950s, and while the film was nominated for nine Academy Awards that year, the audience at the award ceremony refused to applaud when the film was announced. Because of all of this, Citizen Kane is considered by some to be the most controversial movies in the history of film. On the technical side, Citizen Kane makes full use of the sound and camerawork technology available at the time and employed both in new and creative ways.

*Answer the questions below with **A-D**.*

A – The Birth of a Nation
B – Potemkin
C – The Passion of Joan of Arc
D – Citizen Kane
E – Doesn't say

Which film(s):

1) Is/Are based on real people?
2) Is/Are silent films?
3) Changed film from being a curiosity to an art form?
4) Was/Were not praised at the time of release?
5) Was/Were designed and crafted to look like a film record of real events?
6) Was/Were the most expensive of all four?
7) Was/Were commercially successful?
8) Was meant to influence the audiences' political views
9) Focuses on thought and feelings rather than action
10) Stars the director in the main role?