Worksheet 5. Reading: Chief Seattle

Chief Seattle was an important Native American leader in the middle of the 19th century. He was considered very wise by everyone. As he was about to sign a land treaty with the United States government in 1854, it is said that he gave a heartfelt speech to the governor of the state of Washington. It was a memorable speech because of its recognition of the necessity to preserve the land, an important and timely topic today. A translation of the speech was published in the Seattle Sunday Star newspaper on October 28, 1857, and simpler versions appeared later. This passage is based on the thoughts in one of the simpler versions.

Read Chief Seattle’s speech. Then read the notes and answer the questions that follow.

1. The President in Washington tells us that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the land? We do not understand how you can buy or sell the land or the sky. The idea is strange to us. We do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, so how can you buy them?

2. Every part of the earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine tree, every sandy shore, every mist in the forest, every meadow, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people.

3. We know the sap which runs through the trees just like we know the blood that runs through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle -- these are our brothers.

4. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. You must give the rivers the kindness that you give your brother.

5. You must remember that the air is precious, that the air shares its spirit with all the life that it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also received his last sigh. The wind also gives our children the spirit of life. Will you teach your children what we have taught our children -- that the earth is our mother?

6. Your destiny is a mystery. Does anyone know what will happen? What will happen when the buffalo are all killed? When the wild horses are tamed? What will happen when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of too many people, and the view of the hills is spoiled by talking wires?

7. We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it, as we have cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children, and love it. The earth is precious.
freshness = the quality of being new, clean, and bright  
heartfelt = very strongly felt and sincere  
holy = sacred  
land treaty = a legal agreement about the ownership of land  
meadow = a field with wild grass and flowers  
mist = a light cloud low over the ground that makes it difficult for you to see very far  
precious = valuable and important, not be wasted or used without care  
quench = to stop yourself feeling thirsty, by drinking something  
sacred = extremely important and respected, often in a religious way  
sap = the watery substance that carries food through a plant  
sparkle = a bright shiny appearance, with small points of flashing light  
talking wires = the Native American phrase for telegraph wires  
version = a copy of a document that is a little different from other copies

Circle the letters of all the correct completions.

1. Chief Seattle was ______.  
   a. an important governor in Washington  
   b. an important Native American leader

2. This speech is about ______.  
   a. the relationship of people to land and nature  
   b. how much money he wants for the land

3. Chief Seattle says that ______.  
   a. the Native Americans don't want to sell the land  
   b. nobody really owns the land

4. Chief Seattle wants to know ______.  
   a. what will happen to the horses and the buffalo in the future  
   b. what will happen when too many people live on the land

5. The year of the speech is 1854. In line 23, talking wires refers to the wires for ______.  
   a. the telegraph  
   b. TV

6. In the speech, Chief Seattle mentions ______.  
   a. trees  
   b. the shores  
   c. the forest mist  
   d. the sky  
   e. insects  
   f. flowers  
   g. deer  
   h. cities