Broken Promises

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Sciences



Name: _____

History is often the story of the never-ending struggle for control over land. People have traveled great distances for land. They have endured pain and suffering for the chance to get land. They have fought in bloody battles and wars to claim their own little corner of Earth.

Stories of explorers claiming new lands for their countries have one stunning thing in common. In culture after culture, native peoples have been overlooked and abused. Indigenous people have often lived in a country for thousands of years before it was "discovered." In Africa, it was the native African tribes who were abused. In Australia it was the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. In the Americas, it was the Native Americans, who were called "Indians" by mistake.

The U.S. government signed many peace treaties with Native Americans when the nation was young. A peace treaty is a document in which both sides agree on the terms for peace. Unfortunately, these treaties were often unfair to Native Americans. Many natives did not understand English well. They did not understand the treaty. Some native leaders signed away their rights to land in order to get personal wealth. They neglected the needs of their people. The ultimate purpose of the treaties was to push Native Americans off their lands. These were the lands where their people had lived long before the arrival of European explorers.

During the l830s, the U.S. government forced the Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, Seminole and other tribes off their land on the east side of the Mississippi River. They were marched around 1,200 miles to eastern Oklahoma, then known as Indian Territory. Thousands died from disease and exposure on the way. This was such a devastating event to the Native Americans that it became known as the Trail of Tears.

Once that had been accomplished, settlers decided they should be able to have any land on the west side of the Mississippi River, too. Several hundred Cheyenne were killed in the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864. In 1890, Lakota people were killed by soldiers at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Sadly, they were killed even though they had already surrendered.

Many Americans are shocked and ashamed of the way native peoples were treated. We cannot change what has been. However, we can learn from our past and never treat people this way again.

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) What was the Trail of Tears?

_____

_____

_____

2) Name one reason that the Native Americans agreed to treaties that were unfair to them.

_____

_____

3) Members of which tribe were killed by soldiers at Wounded Knee?

_____

4) What is a peace treaty?

_____

_____

5) What is the main purpose of this reading passage?

_____

_____

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Name: Key

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

Actual wording of answers may vary.

1) What was the Trail of Tears?

The forcing of Native Americans off their land by the U.S. government and the march to Indian Territory in the 1830s.

2) Name one reason that the Native Americans agreed to treaties that were unfair to them.

Example of correct answer: They didn't understand English well.

3) Members of which tribe were killed by soldiers at Wounded Knee?

Lakota

4) What is a peace treaty?

It is a document where both sides agree on the terms for peace.

5) What is the main purpose of this reading passage?

Native peoples have been abused for centuries by people wanting their land.

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