



# Chief Seattle's Speech

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Additional Notes

# Chief Seattle



- He was a leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish tribes in Western America.
- The Native Americans were the ones who originally lived in the land that is now known as America.
- Christopher Columbus mistakenly called them ‘Red Indians’ and the name was popular for a long time, now it is no longer used.

# Introduction

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- The Native Americans had a close relationship with nature. They respected all aspects of nature
- When the white settlers came to America, they took over the land that used to belong to tribes like Chief Seattle's
- The Native Americans were forced away from their lands and made to live in areas that were reserved for them
- Chief Seattle's speech is a powerful response to the American government's treaty to **buy the lands** that belonged to the Native Americans.
- The speech requests the Americans to respect nature and the land.

# Chief Seattle's Speech (1887)

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- The speech begins by asking how land or sky can be bought or sold. To Chief Seattle's people, nobody owns the land, so it cannot be sold.
- **“Every part of the Earth is sacred to my people”**
- The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the *red man*. (**red man = the Native Americans**) This line is Chief Seattle telling us that his people are part of nature.
- Our dead never forget this beautiful earth, for it is the mother of the red man. Unlike the white people who go to heaven when they die, the Native Americans return to the earth. They see the earth as a mother

# More family imagery

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- The perfumed flowers are our **sisters**
- the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our **brothers**.
- The rocky crests, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and man—**all belong to the same family**.
- So just like Nature is their mother, all the different parts of nature are also part of their family
- This is why it is difficult for Chief Seattle to sell his land to the Americans – to the Great Chief in Washington.
- Who is the Great Chief in Washington? The US President





# Why does Chief Seattle not want to sell his land?

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- The land is like a part of the family for the people of his tribe
- The land is **sacred** to them. It is holy.
- Seattle's people are part of nature. Since they have always lived in harmony with nature, their memories are part of the land
- The rivers are the brothers of the people. They quench thirst, they provide transportation, and they help to feed the future generations
- Chief Seattle reminds the US President to treat the rivers with kindness



# How is the white man different from the red man?

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- The white man does not understand the culture of the Native Americans
- Chief Seattle thinks that the white man does not understand the importance of the land
- They just take over whatever they want.
- He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold
- The white man's greed will destroy nature, according to Chief Seattle



# Why does the Chief not like cities?

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- The white man lives in big cities instead of being with nature
- Chief Seattle feels that there is no silence in the cities, they are full of noise
- You cannot hear any of the sounds that you hear when you are out of a city – the sounds of nature
- The chief says that maybe it is because he is not ‘civilised’ like the whites, he does not understand – by saying this, he is questioning whether it is civilised to destroy nature or to preserve it.





# Air

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- Chief Seattle now talks about how important the air is to his people
- He requests the white men to take care of the air, because it is something we all share
- all things share the same breath—the beast, the tree, the man,
- The white men do not seem to notice if the air is full of pollution but the red men do
- It is air that gives everyone life, and it must be preserved to be fresh and clean **for future generations**



# Animals

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- Chief Seattle now brings the topic of animals
- “The white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brothers.”
- White men often hunt for fun, and for sport, unlike the Native Americans who only hunt when they need to
- This is also something that is very saddening for Chief Seattle, because as he believes:

**whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.**



# What must the white man teach the children?

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- the land is **holy**
- the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of the grandfathers of the Native Americans.
- the earth is our mother.
- Whatever happens to the earth, happens to the inhabitants
- All things are connected, as is displayed by the next line:

**Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it**



# What does Chief Seattle say about God?

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- Chief Seattle compares the idea of god for the white man with the idea of god for his people
- Even if they both had different religions, they share the same destiny
- In sharing that destiny, the red man and the white man are like brothers. “Our god is the same god”
- God sees everyone equally, red man and white man
- God sees the earth as precious, so to harm the earth is to harm God.
- So if the white man does not respect the earth, they will have to face the result of their action

# Conclusion

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- At the end of the speech, Chief Seattle is wondering why the white man is able to take over the land and treat it so badly
- The wild buffalo have been slaughtered, wild horses are tamed, the empty forests are now populated with many people, telephone cables are covering the land that used to be clear
- **“The end of living and the beginning of survival.”**
- As a result of the actions of the white man, it is no longer living, but a struggle to stay alive.

