**Name: Date:**

**English 11: Aboriginal Perspectives**

**“A Purple World” by Richard Wagamese *from Inside Essays I***

**Waterton Lakes – When the sun sets behind these mountains you can almost see them begin to breath. It’s a trick of the light, really, something created by the encroaching purple darkness, distance and an indefinable desire for magic.**

**The Old Ones believed that this was a strong spirit time. The grandfathers and grandmothers whose spirits reside within these trees, rocks, rivers and mountains would come alive again and around those ancient tribal fires their songs would be sung and the drums would echo the heartbeat of the universe to welcome them.**

**My *mishomis,* Ojibway for grandfather, described this time and the mountains breathing as the universe giving a collective shrug. It was his way of saying that the earth is alive.**

**The earth is alive. It was ironic to be perched on a rock at the edge of a small, rushing river in the back country of southern Alberta’s most beautiful park, while Environment Week (June 3-9, 1991) rolled into gear across the country. Here, amid the rough and tangle of pristine creation, the thought of a special week designed to focus attention on the earth as a living, breathing entity was an elegant redundancy.**

**In the Indian way of seeing, the land, and all things that move upon it, is alive and therefore sacred. Humankind’s relationship to the earth and its life-forms has always been that of an equal. The honour of one is the honour of all. If you cared enough to consider the guardianship of yourself and your family, it followed that you care enough to consider the guardianship of the earth.**

**Here, in the gathering darkness, in the middle of what the whiteman so loosely terms *wilderness*, it was good to consider these things.**

**There was never a term for wilderness in native tongues. Wilderness is a European term that simply means something that can’t be controlled. For the Indians there was never any need or desire to control, to fear or to abuse something which you were a part of. There was only a need, and a responsibility, to preserve it. So the destruction of forests, the damming of rivers, the depletion of resources and the extinction of animals has always been mystifying to the aboriginal peoples.**

**It all comes down to the idea of one heartbeat. A spiritual connectedness to those things that surround us and a realization that the reverse of the honour of one philosophy, logically, is the dishonour of all. This is spiritual, this is truth, this is Indian.**

**But the establishment of a spiritual connection to the earth isn’t enough. It’s a good foundation for an individual or a society, but the aboriginal peoples believed that a feeling could only become a belief and a principle if it were acted upon. So it was necessary for every tribal member to practise the idea of guardianship for all things.**

**Young people were taught the principles of respect and waste management virtually from the moment they could understand. Life was sacred and since all things were seen to be alive, respect meant taking and using only that which was necessary. If a life-form needed to be used, nothing was wasted. There were no land fills in pre-settlement North America.**

**It was good for me, an urban-based aboriginal person, to remember these things. Life in the city and existence in a cosmopolitan society has a sly way of taking you away from the philosophies and traditions of centuries. It’s not long before the frantic sweep of modern living erases the recollections of the wisdom of the Old Ones.**

**So for me, sitting there watching the world become a purple place was a vital reconnection to the environmental foundations of my people’s view of the world.**

**Walking along the parched bed of a mountain stream made it easy to imagine this place as it must have been two or three hundred years ago – untrammelled and free. These same rocks that have sat untouched for generations have their stories and it’s becoming open enough to realize this and to listen for them that instigates the reconnection.**

**One week devoted to refocusing on environmental concerns isn’t enough for anyone. Seven days to be reminded of the fact that the earth is a living, breathing entity won’t half the continued rape and plunder of finite resources; nor will it guarantee a collective mindset geared towards environmental protectionism. But it’s a start.**

**What it takes is a walk upon the land. Learning to see these things that exist here with something other than your eyes. Leaving the material trappings behind awhile and allowing yourself to become a part of the sweep and grandeur of the planet; allowing your heartbeat to echo the universal heartbeat.**

**When you do that you learn to see the mountains, begin to breathe in the falling darkness. You learn to accept the responsibility that comes with being a part of creation and you begin to understand, as the Old Ones understand, as the Old Ones understand, that the honour of one thing is the honour of all.**

[***Connection: Read the short story, “He-y, Come on Out!”***](https://www.tommoody.us/archives/2015/03/17/he-y-come-on-ou-t-a-short-story-by-shinichi-hoshi-translated-by-stanleigh-jones/)

**Student Response /15**

1. **Of what significance is the fact that there is no term for wilderness in native languages?**
2. **Do you agree that “Life in the city and existence in a cosmopolitan society has a sly way of taking you away from the philosophies and traditions of centuries? Is this statement true for non-native Canadians?**
3. **Do you agree that celebrating Environment Week “isn’t enough?” Does celebrating Environment Week serve a purpose?**
4. **Select a single sentence from this essay that you think is well-phrased. Explain why you chose it?**
5. **Identify the author’s purpose for writing this essay.**

**6. Determine whether more factual information would strengthen the essay. Explain your answer.**

**7. Describe the kind of information the author presents to develop his point of view.**

1. **List actions people take that reveal a disrespect for the Earth. What things can you think of that might draw attention and encourage respect for the environment? Would different strategies work for different groups of people? (ex. elementary school children vs. senior citizens).**

**Go beyond (prep for synthesis essay)**

1. **Compare and contrast the story “He-y, Come On Out” world view to that of “A Purple World”**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
|  |  |