Art and Culture of Pacific Northwest Communities

Paragraph 1

The 1,600-kilometer stretch of the northwestern Pacific coast of North America (from southern Alaska to Washington State) provided an ideal environment for the growth of stable communities. Despite the northerly latitude, the climate is temperate. Natural resources were originally so rich that the inhabitants could subsist by fishing and hunting and gathering, without the need to domesticate stock or cultivate the land. Forests yielded an abundance of wood for buildings, for boats, and for sculpture. Beyond them the Rocky Mountains were an impenetrable barrier against raids. The area appears to have been settled around 500 A.D. by tribes of diverse origins speaking mutually unintelligible languages: from north to south they include the Tlingit, the Haida, the Tsimshian, the Bella Coola, the Kwakiutl, and the Nootka. The culture to which they contributed has, nevertheless, an underlying homogeneity and a distinct visual character.

1. According to paragraph 1, which of the following was NOT one of the factors that made the northwestern Pacific coast perfect for the development of stable communities?

* Temperate climate
* Natural protection from raids
* Abundant natural resources
* Easily cultivated land

2. When the author states that the tribes speak “mutually unintelligible” languages, this means that the tribes

* speak languages of similar difficulty
* cannot understand each other’s languages
* cannot understand the languages of tribes ~~in neighboring areas~~
* understand the languages of tribes of similar origin

Paragraph 2

The peoples of the Northwest engaged in trade as well as warfare with one another, and this may account for the diffusion of cultural traits and artistic motifs throughout the area. Much of their art was concerned with religious ritual objects. But the rest is secular and springs from a preoccupation with the hereditary basis of their complex social structures.

3. The word “diffusion” in the passage is closet in meaning to

* development
* variety
* similarity
* spread

Paragraph 3

The Tlingit and other nations or language groups were collections of autonomous village communities composed of one or more families, each with its own chief, who inherited his position through matrilineal descent. They had no centralized political or religious organization, but cohesion was given by extensive kinship networks established through marriage, and men and women were obliged to many outside the larger divisions of clans and moieties (tribal subdivisions) into which they were born and into which the social group was divided by matrilineal or patrilineal descent. Thus families built up riches by marriage without any one family acquiring a dominant position

4. According to paragraph 3, what held together the collections of village communities?

* The control of one dominant family
* The establishment of wide kinship networks through marriage
* The participation in common religious practices
* The establishment of a central administrative authority

5. The word “autonomous” in the passage is closet in meaning to

* small
* well organized
* independent
* wealthy

6. The word “obliged” in the passage is closet in meaning to

* required
* allowed
* forbidden
* advised

Paragraph 4

Totem poles (see figure below), the most distinctive artistic product of the Northwest, were conspicuous declarations of prestige and of the genealogy (family history) by which it had been attained. These magnificent sculptures that probably originated as funerary monuments were first described by travelers in the late eighteenth century. Each one was carved from a single trunk of cedar, and the increasing availability of metal tools both permitted and encouraged more complex compositions and greater height—up to 27.4 meters. Their superimposed figures—eagles, beavers, whales, and so on—were crests (symbols of identity) that a chief inherited from his lineage, his clan, and his moiety. They were not objects of worship, though the animals carved on them might represent guardian spirits. Poles were designed according to a governing principle of bilateral symmetry, with their various elements interlocked so that they seem to grow organically out of one another, creating a unity of symbolism, form, and surface.

7. According to paragraph 4, what was the significance of totem poles in the culture of the northwestern peoples?

* They showed a family’s status and history.
* They were thought to increase success in hunting.
* They were objects of worship.
* They were battle monuments.

8. According to paragraph 4, all of the following were true of totem poles EXCEPT:

* Each was made from a single tree.
* They sometimes featured images of animals thought to provide protection against harm.
* Larger numbers began to be made after metal tools became increasingly available.
* Their decorative designs became more complex over time.

Paragraph 5

Masks (see figure above) are the most varied of the carvings from the Northwest, where they were an essential part of communal life. In style they range from an almost abstract symbolism to combinations of human and animal features and to a lifelike naturalism sometimes bordering on caricature (a style that strongly exaggerates features or characteristics), taken to its extreme in Tlingit war helmets. Some differences must have been due to those among the cultures in which they were created, but their place of origin cannot always be ascertained as they seem to have passed from one contiguous nation to another in the course of trade or warfare. Although carvers worked according to established conventions, no two masks are identical and those with basic similarities reveal varying degrees of skill.

9. The author mentions “Tlingit war helmets” in the passage to

* explain why masks were an essential part of communal life
* provide an example of masks representing a stylistic extreme
* identify one of the uses of masks
* provide an example of masks characterized by abstract symbolism

Paragraph 5

Masks (see figure above) are the most varied of the carvings from the Northwest, where they were an essential part of communal life. In style they range from an almost abstract symbolism to combinations of human and animal features and to a lifelike naturalism sometimes bordering on caricature (a style that strongly exaggerates features or characteristics), taken to its extreme in Tlingit war helmets. Some differences must have been due to those among the cultures in which they were created, but their place of origin cannot always be ascertained as they seem to have passed from one contiguous nation to another in the course of trade or warfare. Although carvers worked according to established conventions, no two masks are identical and those with basic similarities reveal varying degrees of skill.

10. Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in the passage? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

* Some characteristics of masks must be due to cultural and national factors, such as whether they were made during a period of warfare or of peace and trade.
* As one contiguous nation exchanged masks with another during trade or warfare, it became more difficult to determine he place of origin of masks.
* Some differences among masks were probably due to their different origins, but because they passed from one nation to another, their origin cannot always be determined.
* As masks of different cultural origins passed from one nation to anther during trade or warfare, they acquired certain differences depending on how they were used.

Paragraph 6

The major differences between masks were determined by their purpose. Some were representations of chiefs and their ancestors and made to be displayed and treasured as heirlooms. Although they appear to record the styles of facial tattooing （customary in different groups）, it is difficult to say how far they were intended to be portraits rather than generalized images. Many masks, sometimes quite large, were carved to be worn in dance-dramas that re-enacted and kept alive the cohesive myths of a culture. Often, Tlingit masks were made for religious leaders and incorporated the animals that were believed to be their spirit helpers. Conjuring up forces of nature from the ocean, the forests, or the sky, they mediated between life on Earth and the inscrutable powers around and above.

11. What can be inferred from paragraph 6 about **masks （representing chiefs and their ancestors）?**

* They were made to be exhibited and appreciated rather than used.
* They include scenes depicting the heroic achievements of chiefs and their ancestors.
* They were made from different materials than were other types of masks.
* They were sometimes worn by non-family members during religious rituals.

12. Paragraph 6 mentions all of the following as purposes of masks EXCEPT:

* They were made to be worn in dance-dramas.
* They were used as models for tattoo artists to copy.
* They were made for religious leaders and showed their animal spirit helpers.
* They were valued family possessions representing chiefs and their ancestors.

Paragraph 5

■ Masks (see figure above) are the most varied of the carvings from the Northwest, where they were an essential part of communal life. ■ In style they range from an almost abstract symbolism to combinations of human and animal features and to a lifelike naturalism sometimes bordering on caricature (a style that strongly exaggerates features or characteristics), taken to its extreme in Tlingit war helmets. Some differences must have been due to those among the cultures in which they were created, but their place of origin cannot always be ascertained as they seem to have passed from one contiguous nation to another in the course of trade or warfare. ■ Although carvers worked according to established conventions, no two masks are identical and those with basic similarities reveal varying degrees of skill. ■

13. Look at the four squares [■] that indicate where the following sentence can be added to the passage.

If we consider 100 raven masks made by different carvers, for example, some will have been well executed, others less so, and one may have been made by an exceptional carver.

Where would the sentence best fit? Click on a square [■] to add the sentence to the passage.

14. Directions: An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some answer choices do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. This question is worth 2 points.

Drag your choices to the spaces where they belong. To review the passage, click on View Text.

The peoples who lived along the northwestern coast of North America had stable communities and a distinctive artistic style.

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Answer Choices

A. The people lived on food from the sea, animals, and wild plants, and used wood from the forests for building construction, boat making, and sculpture.

B. In the absence of a central political or religious organization, wide kinship networks established through interclan marriage helped to maintain social cohesion.

C. Totem poles had a chief’s symbols of identity imposed on them, and were thus used as objects of worship, whereas masks were used for secular purposes.

D. Although the peoples of the northwestern communities came from various language groups, their languages were closely related and they could generally understand one another.

E. The most remarkable artistic products of the northwestern peoples were totem poles and masks, which often represented families and their spirit guides.

F. Carvers made masks using a principle of bilateral symmetry that resulted in the creation of a unity of symbolism, form, and surface.