

Name _____
Date _____

Potlatch

A potlatch is a ceremony traditionally held by Native Americans of the Northwest Pacific Coast. This ceremony was practiced in different ways by different Native peoples, including the Haida and the Salish, and it continues to be practiced today by some of these groups. One common feature of the potlatch is that the host always gives a gift to every guest. This gift giving serves many functions in society. Historically, the potlatch was a social occasion, but it also determined a person's position in society and allowed the wealth of the community to be shared more equally.



In the past, a potlatch was a big party that lasted several days. Guests came for the speeches, the singing, the dancing, and the feast. A good host was expected to provide more food than the guests could possibly eat. The main event of the potlatch, however, was the gift giving. The host presented gifts to each guest based on social rank. This means that more important people generally received larger gifts.

People held potlatches for many different reasons. A potlatch could mark a birth, death, or marriage. Hosting a potlatch makes a statement to the community about the host's wealth and social position. Sometimes a person who had been publicly embarrassed held a potlatch to regain honor in the community. A potlatch could also be a way for rivals to compete to see who had more wealth.

Ultimately, the potlatch served two main functions: to confirm the social position of the host and to redistribute the wealth among people in a community. Since potlatches were usually hosted by wealthier people, they were a way for these people to share their wealth with those less fortunate. In this way, the potlatch was both a powerful economic and social tool—and of course, it was also a great party.

- 1) This passage is mostly about
 - A. who goes to potlatch
 - B. what a potlatch is
 - C. when people hold potlatch
 - D. the gifts at a potlatch

- 2) According to the passage, the main event of a potlatch is the
 - A. dancing
 - B. singing
 - C. feast
 - D. gift giving

3) Based on its use in paragraph 1, it can be understood that the word **feature** belongs to which of the following word groups?

- A. characteristic, part, quality
- B. appearance, face, look
- C. advantage, benefit, favor
- D. law, requirement, rule

4) Which sentence from the passage best supports the idea that a potlatch is a way to share the wealth of a community more equally?

- A. "This gift giving serves many functions in society."
- B. "Hosting a potlatch makes a statement to the community about the host's wealth and social position."
- C. "Ultimately, the potlatch served two main functions: to confirm the social position of the host and to redistribute the wealth among people in a community."
- D. "Since potlatches were usually hosted by wealthier people, they were a way for these people to share their wealth with those less fortunate."

5) According to the author, the host of a potlatch always

- A. prepares all the food him or herself
- B. has been publicly embarrassed
- C. gives a gift to every guest
- D. is the wealthiest person in the community

6) If a person attending a potlatch were to receive a small gift, this would mean that person is

- I. unimportant
 - II. poor
 - III. unintelligent
- A. I only
 - B. I and II only
 - C. II and III only
 - D. I, II, and III

- 7) Which piece of evidence from the passage supports the author's conclusion that the potlatch is a way "to confirm the social position of the host"?
- A. The guests must rank themselves from most wealthy to least wealthy.
 - B. The host shows the community how wealthy he or she is.
 - C. The guests use the potlatch as a way to choose leaders in society.
 - D. The host has to compete with another host to see who has more wealth.

- 8) Explain in your own words the practice of the potlatch. Where was it practiced? What was its function?

Answers and Explanations

1) B

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

To understand what a passage is mostly about, it is helpful to consider the topics of each paragraph. We can do this by reading the first sentence, or the topic sentence, or each paragraph. The topic sentence of paragraph 1 is: "A potlatch is a ceremony traditionally held by Native Americans of the Northwest Pacific Coast." This paragraph gives an overview of what a potlatch is. Paragraph 2 begins, "In the past, a potlatch was a big party that lasted several days." It describes what happens at a potlatch. In paragraph 3, the author writes, "People held potlatches for many different reasons." This paragraph explains why people might hold a potlatch. The final paragraph begins, "Ultimately, the potlatch served two main functions: to confirm the social position of the host and to redistribute the wealth among people in a community." This paragraph considers the social functions of the potlatch ceremony. Based on this information, we can understand that the passage is mostly about what a potlatch is. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The passage does not discuss who goes to a potlatch other than in paragraph 1. It also does not provide many details about who goes to a potlatch. This means **(A)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 3, the passage tells us when people hold a potlatch, but this is only one point of the passage, so it is not what the passage is mostly about. This makes **(C)** incorrect.

Paragraph 2 mentions the gifts at a potlatch, but this is only one detail of the passage. This means it is not what the passage is mostly about. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

2) D

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

To answer this detail question correctly, we need to find where the author describes what happens at a potlatch in the passage. A good way to do this is to scan the topic sentence of each paragraph, since this sentence will likely tell us what information can be found in the rest of that paragraph. The topic sentence of paragraph 2 reads: "In the past, a potlatch was a big party that lasted several days." This lets us know that the details we are looking for can likely be found in paragraph 2.

In paragraph 2, the author writes, "The main event of the potlatch, however, was the gift giving." This tells us that the gift giving is the main event. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Although we learn that dancing, singing, and a feast all occur at a potlatch, none of these are described as the main event. Therefore choices **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(C)** are incorrect.

3) A

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

feature (*noun*): a noticeable or important part or characteristic.

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “One common feature of the potlatch is that the host always gives a gift to every guest.” To understand the context of this sentence, however, we need to understand the previous sentence, which is “This ceremony was practiced in different ways by different Native peoples.” This means that although the ceremony was practiced differently, there is one feature, or one part, that all potlatches have in common. This one part is the same for all potlatches, even though other parts of the ceremony may differ. This tells us that *feature* belongs to the word group *characteristic, part, quality*. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Although in a different context the word feature can refer to parts of a person’s *appearance, face, or look*, in this context that would not make sense. Here feature describes a part of a potlatch, not a part of a person. This means **(B)** is incorrect.

While some people may consider it an *advantage, benefit, or favor* to get a gift, here the author is discussing the one part of the ceremony that is always the same. He or she is not discussing whether this part is an advantage or not. This makes **(C)** incorrect.

In this paragraph, the author is discussing the one part of the ceremony that is always the same. He or she does not suggest, however, that there is a *law, requirement, or rule* that the host has to give a gift to every guest. Instead, the author only suggests that this is the custom, or what is always done. This means **(D)** is incorrect.

4) D

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “Historically, the potlatch was a social occasion, but it also determined a person’s position in society and allowed the wealth of the community to be shared more equally.” This tells us that a potlatch is a way to share the wealth of a community more equally. In the final paragraph, the author explains why this is true. He or she writes, “Since potlatches were usually hosted by wealthier people, they were a way for these people to share their wealth with those less fortunate.” This sentence provides the reason why a potlatch was a way to share wealth (the fact that wealthier people usually hosted them). Since it provides an explanation, we can understand that this detail best supports the idea that a potlatch is a way to share the wealth of a community more equally. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Although the gift giving was a way people shared their wealth, the sentence “This gift giving serves many functions in society” does not explain why a potlatch is a way to share the wealth of a community more equally. This means it does not provide as much support as a reason would. This makes **(A)** incorrect.

The sentence “Hosting a potlatch makes a statement to the community about the host’s wealth and social position” does not tell us anything about how the wealth was shared. This means **(B)** is incorrect.

The sentence “Ultimately, the potlatch served two main functions: to confirm the social position of the host and to redistribute the wealth among people in a community” restates the ideas that a potlatch is a way to share the wealth of a community more equally. However, it does not provide support for this idea. This means **(C)** is incorrect.

5) C

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

To answer this detail question correctly, we need to find where the author discusses the host of a potlatch in the passage. A good way to do this is to scan the topic sentence of each paragraph, since this sentence will likely tell us what information can be found in the rest of that paragraph. The topic sentence of paragraph 1 reads: "A potlatch is a ceremony traditionally held by Native Americans of the Northwest Pacific Coast." This tells us that paragraph 1 will likely discuss basic aspects of a potlatch, including what it is and the role of the host. This lets us know that the details we are looking for can likely be found in paragraph 1.

In paragraph 1, the author writes, "One common feature of the potlatch is that the host always gives a gift to every guest." This tells us that the host of a potlatch always gives a gift to every guest.

Therefore **(C)** is correct.

In paragraph 2, the author writes, "A good host was expected to provide more food than the guests could possibly eat." However, this does not mean that the host always prepares all of the food him or herself. This eliminates **(A)**.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, "Sometimes a person who had been publicly embarrassed held a potlatch to regain honor in the community." This means that sometimes the host of a potlatch has been publicly embarrassed, but not always. This makes **(B)** incorrect.

In the final paragraph, the author writes, "Potlatches were usually hosted by wealthier people." However, this does not mean that the host of a potlatch was always the wealthiest person in the community. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

6) A

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 2, the author explains how the gift giving at a potlatch works. The author writes, "The host presented gifts to each guest based on social rank. This means that more important people generally received larger gifts." Since guests received gifts based on social rank and more important people received larger gifts, we can infer that less important people received smaller gifts. This tells us that if a person attending a potlatch were to receive a small gift, this would mean that person is unimportant. This supports **option (I)**.

The author suggests that the size of the gift is based on whether a person is "more important" or less important. The author does not suggest that this importance is related to how much money a person

has or to how intelligent a person is. This tells us that if a person attending a potlatch were to receive a small gift, this would not necessarily mean that person is poor or unintelligent. This eliminates **option (II)** and **option (III)**.

Therefore **(A)** is correct.

7) B

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “Historically, the potlatch was a social occasion, but it also determined a person’s position in society.” In paragraph 2, the author gives more details about why the potlatch would be a way to determine a person’s position in society: “A good host was expected to provide more food than the guests could possibly eat. The main event of the potlatch, however, was the gift giving. The host presented gifts to each guest based on social rank.” These details suggest that the host had to be very wealthy to provide so much food and to give so many gifts. In the final paragraph, the author writes, “Since potlatches were usually hosted by wealthier people, they were a way for these people to share their wealth with those less fortunate.” This tells us that the host of a potlatch did indeed tend to be wealthy. From this we can understand that because the host shows the community how wealthy he or she is by hosting a potlatch, the ceremony is a way to determine a person’s position in society. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The passage does not provide information to support choices **(A)** and **(C)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

Although in paragraph 3, we learn that “a potlatch could also be a way for rivals to compete to see who had more wealth,” this does not mean that the host of a potlatch always has to compete with another host. This eliminates **(D)**.