

A Warrior's Speech

by Chief Tecumseh



ABOUT THE READING In the early 1800s, Chief Tecumseh, a famous leader of the Shawnee, worked to defend American Indian land and culture. He was committed to unite the American Indian nations. The following excerpt is from a speech Tecumseh gave after some Indian nations had agreed to sell parts of their land.



As you read the speech below, pay attention to how Tecumseh presents his argument.

Houses are built for you to hold councils in; the Indians hold theirs in the open air. I am a Shawnee. My forefathers were warriors. Their son is a warrior. From them I only take my existence. From my tribe I take nothing. I have made myself what I am. And I would that I could make the red people as great as the conceptions of my own mind, when I think of the great Spirit that rules over us all. . . I would not then come to Governor Harrison to ask him to tear up the treaty.

But I would say to him, "Brother, you have the liberty to return to your own country." You wish to prevent the Indians from doing as we wish them, to unite and let them consider their lands as the common property of the whole. You take the tribes aside and advise them not to come into this measure . . . You want by your distinctions of Indian tribes, in **allotting** to each a particular, to make them war with each other. You never see an Indian **endeavor** to make the white people do this. You are continually driving the red people, when at last you will drive them into the great lake, where they can neither stand nor work.

Since my residence at Tippecanoe, we have endeavored to level distinctions, to destroy village

VOCABULARY

allotting giving a share
endeavor an earnest effort
mischiefs bad behavior

The Shawnee people originally resided in the Northeast and occupied lands along the Ohio, Cumberland, and Tennessee rivers.

The "Treaty of Fort Wayne" gave the United States parts of the Northwest Territory. The tribes that signed the treaty received a single payment in goods of \$7,000 and a small subsidy for three million acres of land.

To whom is Tecumseh directing this part of the speech?

chiefs, by whom all **mischiefs** were done. It is they who sell the land to the Americans, Brother, this land that was sold, and the goods that were given for it, was only done by a few. . . In the future we are prepared to punish those who propose to sell land to the Americans. If you continue to purchase them, it will make war among the different tribes, and at last I do not know what will be the consequences among the white people.

What warning does Tecumseh give in this part of his speech?

The way, the only way to stop this evil, is for the red men to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land, as it was at first, and should be now—for it was never divided, but belongs to us all.

No tribe has the right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers. . .

Sell a country! Why not sell the air, the great sea, as well as the earth? Did not the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children? . . .

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. Main Idea Why does Tecumseh want the Indian nations to unite?

2. Critical Thinking: Drawing Conclusions Why do you think Tecumseh equates selling Indian land to selling the air, the sea, and the earth?

3. Activity If you were living in the Northwestern Territory and heard Tecumseh's speech, how would you respond? Write a list of arguments for and against the selling of Indian land.