

Reading Comprehension Worksheet: Ken Robinson's Talk "Education's Death Valley"

This reading comprehension worksheet examines Ken Robinson's TED talk on education's "death valley."
http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_how_to_escape_education_s_death_valley.html .

It's recommended for intermediate or advanced ESL students. Like other TED talks, it has the advantage of both video and text (as well as transcripts in several other languages as back-up for those who need it.) Answers are at the bottom.

1. Robinson believes government should support education by

- A. adjusting the curriculum and scheduling tests to ensure that students study the right information.
- B. making sure all teachers follow a standard format for their classes.
- C. providing a climate that allows teacher discretion and encourages creativity.
- D. reinforcing student understanding of the value of education.

2. What is Robinson's conclusion about 'fidgeting?'

- A. it's natural when children are expected to sit for hours. Movement is an inherent need of young children.
- B. Only reluctant or bored students fidget. Make lectures more interesting so they will sit quietly through them.
- C. If students are fidgeting they should be moved to special classrooms with modified, simpler lessons.
- D. He doesn't draw any conclusions about fidgeting.

3. Which three items did Robinson say are the principles for providing conditions for people to 'flourish'? (Choose three.)

- A. reading
- B. social interaction
- C. curiosity
- D. experimentation
- E. creativity
- F. kindness
- G. diversity
- H. higher-level thinking

4. Robinson recommends that the U.S. follow the example of high-performing countries in other parts of the world that

- A. encourage all students to conform to community standards.
- B. standardize curriculum so all students learn the same content.
- C. support teachers and encourage individualized instruction.
- D. spend more money on education.

5. What does Robinson mean by “going into a mode of command and control”?

- A. Legislators and other leaders often feel they know best and should decide how schools should work.
- B. The government wants complete control of education.
- C. Like the military, schools need to be directed from the top down.
- D. Teachers command; students must submit to their control.

6. Robinson says effective education is happening in the U.S., but that it’s like “sailing into a headwind all the time.” What does he believe is the root cause of that difficulty?

- A. Social forces are like strong winds that blow educational planning around.
- B. There is insufficient funding, which the government uses to justify low teacher salaries.
- C. Education is too impersonal and rigidly conformist.
- D. Leaders use a mechanistic paradigm that sees education as an industrial, assembly-line process.

7. **Why** does Robinson compare the educational system to Death Valley?

- A. Education in the U.S. is dry and barren as a desert.
- B. When it rains in Death Valley, dormant seeds come to life.
- C. Schools, like deserts, will produce great results if the right conditions occur.
- D. Organic systems produce life.

Answers

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C. providing a climate that allows teacher discretion and encourages creativity.
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D. Leaders use a mechanistic paradigm that sees education as an industrial, assembly-line process.
7. **Why** does Robinson compare the educational system to Death Valley?
C. Schools, like deserts, will produce great results if the right conditions occur. (**Note** that the other answers are not false, but they do not answer **why** Robinson used that comparison.)