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

1. Robinson believes government should support education by
   C. providing a climate that allows teacher discretion and encourages creativity.

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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.)