



Chief Seattle's Speech

Study Guide by Course Hero



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👁 Book Basics

AUTHOR

Chief Seattle

YEAR PUBLISHED

1887

GENRE

History

AT A GLANCE

Chief Seattle (c. 1780–1866), known to his people as Chief Sealth, was born on what is now Bainbridge Island in Washington State. Seattle's father was a member of the Suquamish tribe, and his mother was a member of the Duwamish tribe. Seattle's native language was Lushootseed. Seattle was known for his abilities as an orator, as well as his even temperament and positive influence among both native tribes and white settlers of the area. Chief Seattle did not actually write the version of his speech that has survived until today. The first known recorded version of the speech was written by Dr. Henry A. Smith (1830–1915), a homesteader who had moved west from Ohio. Chief Seattle was said to have

delivered his speech probably in 1855 at a meeting among several native tribal leaders and Governor Isaac Ingalls Stevens (1818–62) of Washington, where Stevens planned to negotiate land treaties with the native tribes. Dr. Smith's version of Seattle's speech was first printed in 1887 in an article published in a Seattle newspaper. Since its initial publication, three additional versions of the speech have been published. The first revision was published in the 1960s and included modernizations of Smith's Victorian-era English. The second and third revisions appeared during the 1970s and included major changes to both the form and content of the original speech. Ongoing revisions and adaptations of this speech have made it a focal point for discussions about the treatment of Native Americans.

🕒 In Context

📍 Author Biography

📈 Plot Summary

The Origin of Chief Seattle's Speech

"Chief Seattle's Speech" is the historical record of a speech attributed to Seattle, the chief of the Suquamish and Duwamish Indian tribes of the Puget Sound region in what is now Washington State. The speech reportedly took place during one of the occasions when then-Governor Isaac Stevens (1818–62) visited the region to discuss land concession agreements with the local tribes.

The origin of the speech involves a fairly complicated history. In fact "Chief Seattle's Speech" is not the direct work of Chief Seattle. Chief Seattle (c. 1780–1866) was born sometime around 1786 at a place known as "Old Man House" in his tribe's winter village on what is now Bainbridge Island in Washington State. Seattle's father, Schweabe, was a member of the Suquamish tribe. His mother, Scholitz, was a member of the Duwamish tribe. Seattle's native language was Lushootseed. The name "Seattle" is Anglicized; in its native language, a more phonetically accurate spelling would be "Sealth."

The speech was first published in this Seattle newspaper in an article by Dr. Henry A. Smith. Smith claims to have been an eyewitness. This version is the first official written record of Chief Seattle's Speech. Subsequent versions appeared in the 1906s and 1970s with changes to the text and format. The speech was originally delivered in 1854 or 1855, and Dr. Smith's 1887 version is generally regarded as the most reliable and authentic record.

Chief Seattle's Early Life

Seattle was raised according to the traditions of the Suquamish and Duwamish tribes. His status as chief was inherited. Such status did not grant him extraordinary governing powers within his tribe. However, as chief he was responsible for ensuring that tribal wealth and resources were shared through annual celebrations such as potlatch. Potlatch is a ceremonial distribution of goods among tribal members according to social rank. Puget Sound Indian chiefs were traditionally expected to inherit certain qualities of physical stature and presence, including the power of Thunder, or the ability to command attention through the use of speech. Chief Seattle was known as a powerful orator whose booming voice could silence opposition and command respect.

As was expected of most young Puget Sound Indians, the young Seattle earned the respect of his tribe through victories in combat against other tribes. As Seattle grew older, white Europeans appeared more frequently in the region. Seattle first encountered white Europeans as a boy of about six when the HMS *Discovery*, a warship in the British Royal Navy originally launched in 1789, dropped its anchor at Bainbridge Island. His initial reaction was positive, and he gained a reputation early on as a friend rather than foe of white settlers.

As he grew older and became increasingly aware of the

growing strength and presence of white settlers, Seattle withdrew from his life of combat and assumed the role of diplomatic leader, both among competing tribes and the white settlers and representatives of the American government. After one of his sons died in battle, he and his children were baptized into the Catholic Church. He took the Christian name Noah, and the Oblate Sacramental Register shows his baptismal name as Noe Siattle.

Sometime around 1852 the American settlers established a small outpost near Alki Point and called it Seattle, in deference to Chief Seattle. In March 1853 the borders of modern-day Washington State were established from the Oregon Territory, and in October of 1853 Isaac Ingalls Stevens became the new governor of Washington in Olympia, the capital city. One of young Governor Stevens's main concerns was negotiating land concession agreements with the native tribes.

Who Wrote the Speech?

In early 1853 a man named Dr. Henry A. Smith (1830–1915) arrived as a homesteader from Ohio and settled into "Smith's Cove" near Seattle. Dr. Smith was reportedly fluent in the Duwamish language and served not only as the superintendent of the local schools but also in some capacity in the territorial legislature. Dr. Smith states that he was present when Chief Seattle gave his speech, wrote it down verbatim, and later published it in the 1887 newspaper article. However, several factors conflict with this version of events.

There is evidence that Dr. Smith did not report Chief Seattle's words verbatim. Clues within the text and elsewhere seem to indicate that Smith likely took notes from a translation of Chief Seattle's actual speech into Chinook, another Indian language used for trade among tribes and Europeans. His version of the speech is generally regarded as having been a collaboration of his notes from the time, his recollection of events over the intervening 32 years, and his own personal interpretations.

Regardless, historians generally agree based on forensic evidence that the speech Dr. Smith refers to in his 1887 article is the address given by Chief Seattle at Point Elliott in January 1855. Most people agree that Smith likely filled in some gaps and produced an English language version of what he understood to have been Chief Seattle's intent and meaning; however, there is also agreement that Smith captured the tone and substance of Seattle's views.

Understanding the Speech

The reader must consider not only the text of the speech itself, but also the circumstances under which it was originally published, its author's inspiration and motivations, and the degree to which it effectively captures the views of Chief Seattle. The native tribes of North America have a tradition of oral history that is significantly different from the written tradition of Europeans. Therefore, assessing the meaning of Seattle's speech and language requires readers to consider the substance of his speech, the cultural gaps his speech attempts to address, and how written language is used to achieve these goals.

The speech can be divided into two major components. In the first half of the speech, Seattle assesses the conditions under which the tribes have assembled to listen to the proposition of Governor Stevens. In the second half of the speech, Seattle discusses the seemingly unbridgeable cultural gaps that divide the Indians and Europeans. The second half of the speech may be further separated into three distinct parts: Seattle's argument in favor of brotherhood between Indians and Europeans, his argument for division, and his assertion that all mankind is united in a common destiny.

Assessment of the Treaty

Seattle begins by setting a positive tone, expressing hope that he can negotiate successfully with Governor Stevens. Chief Seattle opens his speech by expressing the fundamental difficulty of his position—that his people have inhabited the area since the very beginning of their existence, and that he is now confronted with an unprecedented change that no one ever expected nor knows precisely how to address. He states that the "sky ... has wept tears of compassion upon my people for centuries untold, and which to us appears changeless and eternal." However, all that "may change. Today is fair. Tomorrow it may be overcast with clouds."

Seattle quickly moves from the general to the specific, turning to questions of character. Continuing his analogy of the reliability of nature, he states that his "words are like the stars that never change" and that "the great chief at Washington can rely upon [me] with as much certainty as he can upon the return of the sun or the seasons." As proof, Seattle assesses his own position in the soberest of terms, stating that the "Big

Chief at Washington ... has little need of our friendship" and that "the Red Man no longer has rights that he need respect" because the European "people are many," but Seattle's "people are few."

Rather than launch into an angry attack, Seattle balances this grim assessment with a solemn determination to work with the American government in Washington. He regards the "White Chief's" offer to buy tribal land and to allow the tribes "enough to live comfortably" as "just, even generous ... and the offer may be wise ... as we are no longer in need of an extensive country."

Having set a tone for productive and successful negotiations, Seattle takes advantage of the opportunity to memorialize the significance and tragedy of the changing times. Although the tribes were once a robust people, that "time long since passed away with the greatness of tribes that are now but a mournful memory." Yet again, Seattle shows his strength as a diplomat and negotiator and balances these losses with hope that cooperation and success are still possible. He says he will "not dwell on, nor mourn over, our untimely decay, nor reproach my paleface brothers with hastening it, as we too may have been somewhat to blame." He also states his "hope that the hostilities between us may never return."

Chief Seattle as Diplomat

At the time when Chief Seattle was said to have delivered his speech, the Puget Sound tribes—like most of the native tribes in North America—preferred an oral tradition of history and storytelling to the written tradition established in European culture. Because of this cultural divide, combined with the barrier between the Lushootseed and English languages, analyzing language use throughout this speech will help the reader understand the author's objectives.

In the first part of the speech, Seattle creates an impression of himself as a respectable tribal representative while also implying that he has an overall positive view of the white settlers. Early on, Seattle establishes himself as the voice of reason and diplomacy in a potentially volatile negotiation. He proposes a reasonable assessment of his position through his rational admission that he will not likely prevail in any effort to resist the progress of white settlers. In contrast to the many stereotypical depictions of Indians as naïve and childlike, Seattle expresses the sobering view that his people may, in

fact, not survive at all. This progressive view may also reflect Seattle's hidden allusion to native mythology. Seattle's tribe often used the story of "The Changer," a mythological being who would appear throughout history. The Changer would approach members of the tribe and ask them what they were doing. Depending on their responses, The Changer would determine the future course of their actions. Thus, Seattle's receptive and progressive tone may have resulted from his belief that Governor Stevens was regarded as the most recent incarnation of The Changer.

Throughout the remainder of his speech, Seattle builds on his foundation of trust by using an emotional appeal to convince the governor of the value and importance of his position and to win as many concessions as possible.

Appeal to Brotherhood

Having established himself as a trustworthy and reliable partner in negotiation, Seattle next addresses the daunting challenges that lie ahead for both sides if they are to succeed in living together. He is saddened by the cultural and environmental losses posed by the continuing westward push of European culture, and he aspires to a future in which both sides will work toward mutual understanding.

Seattle first makes the case for a united population of Indians and white settlers. He refers to the American president as "our good father in Washington," and states that "he is now our father as well as yours." He also expresses optimism about the president's promise that if the Indians "do as he desires, he will protect" them. Seattle paints a hopeful picture of "brave [American] warriors [who] will be to us a bristling wall of strength, [with] wonderful ships of war [that] will fill [the] harbors, so that our ancient enemies ... will cease to frighten our women, children, and old men." Seattle suggests that if this promise is kept, "then in reality he will be our father and we his children."

Here Seattle also establishes his intent to base his appeal on pathos, or an appeal to emotion. Rather than beginning his speech by making a list of demands, citing a list of legal infractions, or criticizing the ethics of a government that has greatly reduced tribal populations, Seattle appeals to the governor's emotional responses by appealing to his sense of brotherhood. He initially hints at a possible brotherhood between white men and Indians by using words and

descriptions that convey strong positive connotations and feelings of trust, hope, and admiration. For example, the governor's troops are the president's "brave warriors," rather than an enemy to be conquered. In addition, rather than complaining that the Americans' "ships of war ... will fill our harbors," he refers to them as "wonderful" and as the possible foundation of a new alliance.

Argument for Division

Next Seattle balances this hopeful and optimistic vision with skepticism, citing the many divisions between the two cultures that seem impossible to overcome. He cites their vastly different religious practices, telling the governor, "Your God is not our God! Your God loves your people and hates mine!" Although the European God has protected the white settlers, "He has forsaken His Red children, if they really are His." In addition, the Indian "God, the Great Spirit, seems also to have forsaken" the Indians. As white settlers increase in number and strength, the Indians "are ebbing away." As a result, Seattle concludes that "the white man's God cannot love our people, or He would protect them."

He also says that the Indians consider their ancestors' ashes sacred, but white people "wander far from the graves of [their] ancestors and seemingly without regret." Furthermore, the European religion comes from an angry God "written upon tablets of stone," but Seattle's "religion is the traditions of [his] ancestors ... written in the hearts of [his] people." Finally, in the afterlife, the ancestors of Europeans "cease to love [them] and ... are soon forgotten and never return," whereas for the Indians the "dead never forget this beautiful world that gave them being ... and often return from the happy hunting ground to visit, guide, console, and comfort."

Thus, Seattle in this part of the speech has moved from a discussion of the possibility of brotherhood to an expression of his belief that such an alliance is unlikely. For Seattle's address to Governor Stevens to succeed, Governor Stevens must be swayed less by the concrete considerations of commerce and more by the abstract considerations by which Seattle's people measure the value of their land. Seattle's use of figurative language throughout this part of the speech helps him sustain this appeal to pathos, which he uses not only to convey his sense of loss but also to indicate the value he places on the land he is being asked to surrender.

As his appeal to brotherhood becomes more skeptical, he incorporates the vivid imagery of "verdant valleys ... murmuring rivers ... magnificent mountains, sequestered vales and verdant lined lakes and bays" to illustrate why his ancestors regarded the land with such "fond affection." By moving beyond a mere physical description of acreage and money, Seattle expresses the idea that his people value the land spiritually and emotionally as something priceless and irreplaceable.

Seattle then shifts his focus from the land to the relationships among the tribes and the settlers. After establishing a basis of mutual trust and admiration and the possibility of a hopeful outcome, he asks the rhetorical question, "How then can we be brothers? How can your God become our God and renew our prosperity and awaken in us dreams of returning greatness?" This use of erotema, or rhetorical questions, invites the settlers themselves to confirm his belief that brotherhood between them is impossible. This juxtaposition of positive and negative sentiments strengthens the emotional appeal of Seattle's argument by allowing him to capitalize on the tension of the meeting while also avoiding confrontation.

Common Fate of Mankind

In the final part of the speech, Seattle's tone becomes pessimistic, and he urges the governor to proceed with care. Seattle firmly dismisses the possibility of a united nation of white and Indian people, stating, "Day and night cannot dwell together." Yet, he maintains his position as a diplomat, telling the governor, "Your proposition seems fair and I think that my people will accept it and will retire to the reservation you offer them. Then we will dwell apart in peace."

Seattle predicts that in the future, a "grim fate seems to be on the Red Man's trail ... A few more moons, a few more winters, and not one of the descendants ... will remain to mourn over the graves of a people once more powerful and hopeful than" the Europeans. As a resolution, he suggests that an inescapable fate awaits the populations of both civilizations: "Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature, and regret is useless." Because neither population can "be exempt from the common destiny," Seattle suggests that "we may be brothers after all."

Having defined the dilemma with which he is confronted, Seattle takes advantage of the governor's attention to establish the conditions upon which any agreement must rest.

He states that he will only accept the governor's offer on the "condition that [the tribes] will not be denied the privilege ... of visiting at any time the tombs of our ancestors, friends, and children."

As he concludes his speech, Seattle's tone turns grim. He foretells the fate of his people by invoking a powerful simile, through which he compares the tribes to hunted deer in the forest: "[g]rim fate seems to be on the Red Man's trail, and wherever he will hear the approaching footsteps of his fell destroyer and prepare stolidly to meet his doom, as does the wounded doe that hears the approaching footsteps of the hunter." Yet, rather than seek pity, he tries to evoke the same sense of foreboding in Governor Stevens. Seattle reminds Stevens that "every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people ... and [that] when the last Red Man shall have perished ... these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe." In addition, the cities "will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land." With this admonition Seattle counsels the governor to be "just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless ... There is no death, only a change of worlds." Thus, despite their insurmountable differences, the fate of both Europeans and the native tribes is similar.

Seattle's arc of emotion has now gone from hope and optimism to tentative skepticism and grim pessimism. His appeal resolves to a philosophical detachment, which he expresses using hypophora (rhetorical question and answer) to ask and answer, "But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea." Additionally, by incorporating the powerful image of the sea, he reinforces his tone of solemnity to dampen the enthusiasm of the settlers before any treaties are signed. Seattle's effective use of pathos—an argument that appeals to emotions—throughout this section is also significant because it may have been part of his strategy to make the governor more receptive to the one condition upon which his acceptance of the treaty rested: "the privilege without molestation of visiting at any time the tombs of our ancestors, friends, and children."

Seattle finally closes the speech with a plea to the governor: "[B]e just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds." Seattle uses hypophora to foreshadow the possibility of a dismal future if Governor Stevens chooses not to honor his request. This completes his appeal using the same strategy

he employed at the beginning. He avoids the trap of making an ultimatum or stating his claim through an exhaustive list of legal proofs and instead uses a deeply emotional appeal to suggest that the pattern of deception that characterized the conduct of white people toward tribes at other treaty negotiations would not lead to a positive outcome.

Rhetorical and Literary Techniques in Chief Seattle's Speech

Erotema

"Erotema" is derived from the Greek word for "question." The literary technique of erotema is more commonly known as the "rhetorical question."

When a writer or speaker uses erotema, he or she asks a question without expecting an answer because the answer is obvious or clearly implied. The purpose of erotema is to allow the speaker to lead the audience to a conclusion he or she wants them to reach.

Chief Seattle asks Governor Stevens and the settlers, "How then can we be brothers? How can your God become our God and renew our prosperity and awaken in us dreams of returning greatness?" Here, Seattle is not expecting an answer; he is merely leading them to draw a conclusion based on the evidence he has already presented.

Hypophora

Hypophora is related to erotema. Like erotema, speakers or writers using hypophora ask their audience a rhetorical question, but unlike with erotema, speakers or writers who use hypophora also supply the audience with an answer. Chief Seattle employs hypophora when he asks and answers, "But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea."

Although hypophora is similar to erotema, it is used in different circumstances and for different reasons. The first part of a hypophoric construction—the question—can be used to evoke curiosity in the listener and capture their attention, to introduce a new topic of discussion, or to introduce questions the

listeners may already have anticipated. Once the audience has been made receptive through the technique of questioning, the speaker can use hypophora to provide the answer in a way that has a greater impact than if the speaker had simply stated a list of facts or observations.

In the example above, a mere rhetorical question would have been less effective because the audience may not have answered the question the same way Seattle did. By asking his audience, "But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people?" Chief Seattle likely caught his listeners' attention, but it is unlikely that they would have come up with the answer he provided: "Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea." Thus, Seattle may have been trying to make his audience receptive so his philosophical outlook would have a greater impact.

Pathos

Pathos is the third main type of argumentation. An argument based in pathos depends on the use of an emotional appeal to convince the audience to accept the speaker's point of view. The writer chooses words and details that elicit the response they want their audience to have.

For example, early in his speech, Seattle uses these positive terms to describe the white settlers: "brave [American] warriors [who] will be to us a bristling wall of strength, [with] wonderful ships of war [that] will fill [the] harbors, so that our ancient enemies ... will cease to frighten our women, children, and old men." Thus, Seattle uses pathos to appeal to Governor Stevens's own pride in the European colonists' strength and thus create a sense of brotherhood.

“” Quotes

"Yonder sky that has wept tears of compassion upon my people for centuries untold, and which to us appears changeless and eternal, may change."

— Chief Seattle

Change is a recurring theme throughout human history. Each individual culture develops its own traditions as a means of mitigating the fear of change and the associated losses; each individual within a given culture also adapts to change differently. Seattle sets the agenda by beginning his speech with an observation of change, requiring his listeners to consider this universal challenge.

"Whatever Seattle says, the great chief at Washington can rely upon with as much certainty as he can upon the return of the sun or the seasons."

— Chief Seattle

Seattle expands on the theme of change by contrasting it with the constancy and certainty of his promises. Although massive changes are underway, Seattle has already quieted the panic and now offers his assurance that unlike the uncertainty of the treaty negotiations and the changing demographic landscape, he represents a source of stability.

"There was a time when our people covered the land as the waves of a wind-ruffled sea cover

its shell-paved floor."

— Chief Seattle

Seattle set a tone in the first paragraph of unflinching determination to meet the challenges of a changing world head-on. He now acknowledges that the significant changes he is addressing at the summit involve very deep and complex emotional ties that may require the consideration of more than mere strategy and persistence.

"I will not dwell on, nor mourn over, our untimely decay, nor reproach my paleface brothers with hastening it, as we too may have been somewhat to blame."

— Chief Seattle

Chief Seattle exhibits his strength as a diplomat. He asserts his unwillingness to prolong or increase his tribes' suffering by dwelling on the sadness of their losses. He also expresses his willingness to accept responsibility for having contributed to some of those losses through the abuses the tribes may have committed against the European settlers. The reconciliation of indigenous tribes to European settlers is often regarded as a modern phenomenon, but Seattle's statement places the emergence of a progressive approach by natives that depended neither on vilification nor victimization much earlier in the history of treaty negotiations.

"When our young men grow angry at some real or imaginary wrong, and disfigure their faces with black paint, it denotes that their hearts are black."

— Chief Seattle

Seattle displays deftness at diplomacy. He first acknowledges the justifiable anger of the young tribal men made impotent in the fight against the loss of their native lands. Yet rather than giving the white settlers ammunition to thwart them at the treaty negotiation, he takes responsibility for these acts of aggression, thereby defusing any potential lingering resentments on the part of Governor Stevens.

"Revenge by young men is considered gain ... but old men who stay at home in times of war, and mothers who have sons to lose, know better."

— Chief Seattle

As a young man, Seattle was a fierce warrior. Now as a leader among tribesmen and a trusted negotiator, he exhibits the wisdom he has gained through experience. Treaty negotiations among whites and natives are often portrayed as contentious, dishonest, and without any semblance of legitimacy. Here, Seattle helps defuse the concerns of the white settlers by stating that he does not intend to co-opt or abuse the negotiations to satisfy the natives' desire for vengeance.

"Your God makes your people wax stronger every day ... Our people are ebbing away like a rapidly receding tide that will never return."

— Chief Seattle

This statement allows Seattle to build credibility in the eyes of his own people, as well as those of Governor Stevens's people. Seattle demonstrates that he is well aware of his disadvantaged position. He also takes the opportunity to build trust by acknowledging the power of the white settlers and of their God, who has allowed them to prosper.

"The white man's God cannot love our people or He would protect them ... How then can we be brothers?"

— Chief Seattle

Seattle begins to address what he believes are the insurmountable differences between the Indians and the white men. Because he initiates the dialog by attributing the relative fortunes of the two cultures to the actions of their respective gods, he can now question whether any sense of brotherhood is possible without causing offense or resorting to a direct attack.

"We are two distinct races with separate origins and separate destinies. There is little in common between us."

— Chief Seattle

Chief Seattle makes a final assertion that white settlers and native tribes must always remain separate. However, his approach leading up to this statement provides important context. He has provided enough of a foundation of trust and mutual respect in the preceding paragraphs that the tone of this statement is one of solemn resignation rather than adversarial hostility.

"Your religion was written upon tablets of stone by the iron finger of your God ... Our religion is ... written in the hearts of our people."

— Chief Seattle

Seattle uses imagery effectively to address questions of religion with grace and tact. He uses metaphorical language to describe on the one hand a "religion ... written on a stone tablet with an iron finger" and on the other hand a "religion ... written in the hearts of ... people." Next, he presents these two metaphorical descriptions as an analogy. Both civilizations share the practice of religion, and by placing them side by side he illustrates both the degree and the nature of the cultural divide between white men and Indians.

"Day and night cannot dwell together."

— Chief Seattle

A metaphor is the use of one term to express another. Personification is the description of inanimate objects as if they were alive. An analogy compares two seemingly different things to show how they are also similar. Foreshadowing allows the writer to hint at what will come later in the passage. Seattle combines metaphor and personification to invoke a powerful analogy of the struggle between the two cultures. Thus, "day" is a metaphor for the European settlers and "night" is a metaphor for the tribes. Though "day" and "night" are inanimate, Seattle says they "cannot dwell together," as if they were people. By using figurative language effectively, Seattle does not have to recite a list of the many differences that characterize the two cultures and provide logical proof of why they must find another way to resolve their dispute. This analogy also foreshadows his subsequent predictions for the success of the outcome.

"The Indian's night promises to be dark. Not a single star of hope hovers above his horizon."

— Chief Seattle

Seattle states earlier that "day and night cannot dwell together." If Governor Stevens doubted which side represented day and which side represented night, Seattle removes all doubt here. Seattle's words disarm Governor

Stevens to some degree. By stating that he does not believe his people have a bright future, Seattle claims some of the power and social and political capital that is latent in the relationship.

"Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature, and regret is useless."

— Chief Seattle

Here Seattle changes the focus of the speech. He began with an observation that changes are difficult to confront; he then spoke to the specific challenges each side must be willing to accept; now he assumes a philosophical approach that provides perspective and distance. This shift lessens the sense that the changes facing the Indians are personal in nature. His comments also place the white settlers in the same position, despite their advantageous position in the treaty negotiation.

"Even the White Man ... cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We will see."

— Chief Seattle

Throughout the speech Seattle uses a tactic whereby he uncharacteristically accepts responsibility for his own people's decline and refuses to engage in bitter reprisals or retaliatory threats against whites by blaming them for their westward expansion. By using his political capital wisely, he now occupies a position of moral superiority in which he can counsel Governor Stevens about avoiding a similar fate for himself.

"Dead, did I say? There is no

death, only a change of worlds."

— Chief Seattle

Finally, Seattle provides a foundation for the ultimate resolution of the clash of civilizations he has addressed throughout the speech. He acknowledges the tragedy of the losses he expects to continue to suffer and the absence of any possibility that reconciliation between whites and Indians is possible. But rather than descend into despair, he provides a philosophical olive branch through which all participants have the opportunity to engage on equal footing.

Chief Seattle's Speech

Yonder sky that has wept tears of compassion upon my people for centuries untold, and which to us appears changeless and eternal, may change. Today is fair. Tomorrow it may be overcast with clouds. My words are like the stars that never change. Whatever Seattle says, the great chief at Washington can rely upon with as much certainty as he can upon the return of the sun or the seasons. The white chief says that Big Chief at Washington sends us greetings of friendship and goodwill. This is kind of him for we know he has little need of our friendship in return. His people are many. They are like the grass that covers vast prairies. My people are few. They resemble the scattering trees of a storm-swept plain. The great, and I presume—good, White Chief sends us word that he wishes to buy our land but is willing to allow us enough to live comfortably. This indeed appears just, even generous, for the Red Man no longer has rights that he need respect, and the offer may be wise, also, as we are no longer in need of an extensive country.

There was a time when our people covered the land as the waves of a wind-ruffled sea cover its shell-paved floor, but that time long since passed away with the greatness of tribes that are now but a mournful memory. I will not dwell on, nor mourn over, our untimely decay, nor reproach my paleface brothers with hastening it, as we too may have been somewhat to blame.

Youth is impulsive. When our young men grow angry at some real or imaginary wrong, and disfigure their faces with black

paint, it denotes that their hearts are black, and that they are often cruel and relentless, and our old men and old women are unable to restrain them. Thus it has ever been. Thus it was when the white man began to push our forefathers ever westward. But let us hope that the hostilities between us may never return. We would have everything to lose and nothing to gain. Revenge by young men is considered gain, even at the cost of their own lives, but old men who stay at home in times of war, and mothers who have sons to lose, know better.

Our good father in Washington—for I presume he is now our father as well as yours, since King George has moved his boundaries further north—our great and good father, I say, sends us word that if we do as he desires he will protect us. His brave warriors will be to us a bristling wall of strength, and his wonderful ships of war will fill our harbors, so that our ancient enemies far to the northward—the Haidas and Tsimshians—will cease to frighten our women, children, and old men. Then in reality he will be our father and we his children. But can that ever be? Your God is not our God! Your God loves your people and hates mine! He folds his strong protecting arms lovingly about the paleface and leads him by the hand as a father leads an infant son. But, He has forsaken His Red children, if they really are His. Our God, the Great Spirit, seems also to have forsaken us. Your God makes your people wax stronger every day. Soon they will fill all the land. Our people are ebbing away like a rapidly receding tide that will never return. The white man's God cannot love our people or He would protect them. They seem to be orphans who can look nowhere for help. How then can we be brothers? How can your God become our God and renew our prosperity and awaken in us dreams of returning greatness? If we have a common Heavenly Father He must be partial, for He came to His paleface children. We never saw Him. He gave you laws but had no word for His red children whose teeming multitudes once filled this vast continent as stars fill the firmament. No; we are two distinct races with separate origins and separate destinies. There is little in common between us.

To us the ashes of our ancestors are sacred and their resting place is hallowed ground. You wander far from the graves of your ancestors and seemingly without regret. Your religion was written upon tablets of stone by the iron finger of your God so that you could not forget. The Red Man could never comprehend or remember it. Our religion is the traditions of our ancestors—the dreams of our old men, given them in solemn hours of the night by the Great Spirit; and the visions of our sachems, and is written in the hearts of our people.

Your dead cease to love you and the land of their nativity as soon as they pass the portals of the tomb and wander away beyond the stars. They are soon forgotten and never return. Our dead never forget this beautiful world that gave them being. They still love its verdant valleys, its murmuring rivers, its magnificent mountains, sequestered vales and verdant lined lakes and bays, and ever yearn in tender fond affection over the lonely hearted living, and often return from the happy hunting ground to visit, guide, console, and comfort them.

Day and night cannot dwell together. The Red Man has ever fled the approach of the White Man, as the morning mist flees before the morning sun. However, your proposition seems fair and I think that my people will accept it and will retire to the reservation you offer them. Then we will dwell apart in peace, for the words of the Great White Chief seem to be the words of nature speaking to my people out of dense darkness.

It matters little where we pass the remnant of our days. They will not be many. The Indian's night promises to be dark. Not a single star of hope hovers above his horizon. Sad-voiced winds moan in the distance. Grim fate seems to be on the Red Man's trail, and wherever he will hear the approaching footsteps of his fell destroyer and prepare stolidly to meet his doom, as does the wounded doe that hears the approaching footsteps of the hunter.

A few more moons, a few more winters, and not one of the descendants of the mighty hosts that once moved over this broad land or lived in happy homes, protected by the Great Spirit, will remain to mourn over the graves of a people once more powerful and hopeful than yours. But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature, and regret is useless. Your time of decay may be distant, but it will surely come, for even the White Man whose God walked and talked with him as friend to friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We will see.

We will ponder your proposition and when we decide we will let you know. But should we accept it, I here and now make this condition that we will not be denied the privilege without molestation of visiting at any time the tombs of our ancestors, friends, and children. Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb

and dead as the swelter in the sun along the silent shore, thrill with memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people, and the very dust upon which you now stand responds more lovingly to their footsteps than yours, because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors, and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch. Our departed braves, fond mothers, glad, happy hearted maidens, and even the little children who lived here and rejoiced here for a brief season, will love these somber solitudes and at eventide they greet shadowy returning spirits. And when the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude. At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land. The White Man will never be alone.

Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds.