In 1820, an Englishman wrote: "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?" The Englishman was mocking America. He echoed a European sentiment that Americans were crude, uneducated people. Many Europeans believed Americans did not care for art or literature.

England's criticism was not entirely true. But Americans did not have a very strong national identity at the turn of the 19th century. In 1837, the American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson responded to the Englishman's claim. He gave a speech called "The American Scholar." He summoned all the artists and poets in America. He called for a national literature based on the American experience. But what was the American experience? Adventure. Nature. The West
All of these things were very American.

One American poet who helped immortalize American idealism in the 19th century was Walt Whitman. To him, the spirit of America was closely tied to nature. Whereas European countries were tamed and crowded with farms, America was wild and free. Read these two poems about nature and the West by Walt Whitman. How does he describe the West? Does he seem excited by nature?

"To the East and To the West" by Walt Whitman

To the East and to the West,
To the man of the Seaside State and of Pennsylvania,
To the Canadian of the north, to the Southerner I love,
These with perfect trust to depict you as myself, the germs are in all men,
I believe the main purport of these States is to found a superb friendship, exalte, previously unknown,
Because I perceive it waits, and has been always waiting, latent in all men.

"A Promise to California" by Walt Whitman

A promise to California,
Or inland to the great pastoral Plains, and on to Puget sound and Oregon;
Sojourning east a while longer, soon I travel toward you, to remain, to teach robust American love,
For I know very well that I and robust love belong among you, inland, and along the Western sea;
For these States tend inland and toward the Western sea, and I will also.
Name: ___________________________________ Date: _______________

1. According to this passage, Europeans in the 1800s thought Americans were
   A. funny and silly.
   B. smart and educated.
   C. friendly and happy.
   D. crude and uneducated.

2. A problem in this passage is that Americans did not have a strong national identity. What solution to this problem is described in the passage?
   A. An Englishman wrote criticism about American art and literature.
   B. Europeans would be sent on trips to the West to see the beauty.
   C. Emerson asked artists to write about the American experience.
   D. Painters would go to California to paint the landscapes there.

3. Which of these answers best explains why Walt Whitman would have thought the spirit of America was closely tied to nature?
   A. America's land was more wild and free than other countries.
   B. He had been to Europe and disliked the nature there.
   C. He thought that writers only get great ideas from wild animals.
   D. He thought that writers do their best work while outdoors.

4. Read the following sentences: "The Englishman was mocking America. He echoed a European sentiment that Americans were crude, uneducated people."
   The word **echoed** means
   A. questioned
   B. said something similar
   C. argued against
   D. wrote down on paper
5. The passage "The West" is mostly about

A. all the ways that English people mocked America.
B. how poets helped create an American style of literature.
C. the differences between European and American paintings.
D. the life of the first American poet, Walt Whitman.

6. What are the places that Walt Whitman names in his poem "A Promise to California"?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

7. How do the two poems by Whitman show the American ideals that were discussed in the passage?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wanted a national style of literature, ________ he wrote a speech to other writers.

A. but
B. so
C. while
D. because