Excerpt from President Ronald Reagan’s Speech at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana (1988)

When people tell me that I became President on January 20th, 1981, I feel I have to correct them. You don’t become President of the United States. You are given temporary custody of an institution called the Presidency, which belongs to our people. Having temporary custody of this office has been for me a sacred trust and an honor beyond words or measure. That trust began with many of you in this room many conventions ago. Many's the time that I've said a prayer of thanks to all Americans who placed this trust in my hands. And tonight, please accept again our heartfelt gratitude, Nancy's and mine, for this special time that you've given in our lives.

Just a moment ago, you multiplied the honor with a moving tribute, and being only human, there's a part of me that would like to take credit for what we've achieved. But tonight, before we do anything else, let us remember that tribute really belongs to the 245 million citizens who make up the greatest -- and the first -- three words in our Constitution: ``We the People.'' It is the American people who endured the great challenge of lifting us from the depths of national calamity, renewing our mighty economic strength, and leading the way to restoring our respect in the world. They are an extraordinary breed we call Americans. So, if there's any salute deserved tonight, it's to the heroes everywhere in this land who make up the doers, the dreamers, and the lifebuilders without which our glorious experiment in democracy would have failed.

[...]
This office is not mine to give; only you, the people, can do that. But I love America too much and care too much about where we will be in the next few years. I care that we give custody of this office to someone who will build on our changes, not retreat to the past, someone who will continue the change all of us fought for. To preserve what we have and not risk losing it all . . .

[. . .]

I know I've said this before, but I believe that God put this land between the two great oceans to be found by special people from every corner of the world who had that extra love for freedom that prompted them to leave their homeland and come to this land to make it a brilliant light beam of freedom to the world. It's our gift to have visions, and I want to share that of a young boy who wrote to me shortly after I took office. In his letter he said, "I love America because you can join Cub Scouts if you want to. You have a right to worship as you please. If you have the ability, you can try to be anything you want to be. And I also like America because we have about 200 flavors of ice cream." Well, truth through the eyes of a child: freedom of association, freedom of worship, freedom of hope and opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness -- in this case, choosing among 200 flavors of ice cream -- that's America, everyone with his or her vision of the American promise. That's why we're a magnet for the world: for those who dodged bullets and gave their lives coming over the Berlin Wall and others, only a few of whom avoided death, coming in tiny boats on turbulent oceans. This land, its people, the dreams that unfold here and the freedom to bring it all together -- well, those are what make America soar, up where you can see hope billowing in those freedom winds.

When our children turn the pages of our lives, I hope they'll see that we had a vision to pass forward a nation as nearly perfect as we could, where there's decency, tolerance, generosity, honesty, courage, common sense, fairness, and piety. This is my vision, and I'm grateful to God for blessing me with a good life and a long one. But when I pack up my bags in Washington, don't expect me to be happy to hear all this talk about the twilight of my life.

Twilight? Twilight? Not in America. Here, it's a sunrise every day -- fresh new opportunities, dreams to build. Twilight? That's not possible, because I confess there are times when I feel like I'm still little Dutch Reagan racing my brother down the hill to the swimming hole under the railroad bridge over the Rock River. You see, there's no sweeter day than each new one, because here in our country it means something wonderful can happen to you. And something wonderful happened to me.

1. According to Reagan, who does the institution of the Presidency belong to?

   A the current president  
   B all of the past presidents  
   C the people of America  
   D God

2. How does Reagan describe the American people?

   A common, unimaginative workers  
   B hardworking, extraordinary dreamers  
   C idealistic, unusual brothers  
   D brave, intelligent soldiers

3. Reagan believes that the American people deserve the credit for the nation’s success. What evidence from the passage best supports this conclusion?

   A “Let us remember that tribute really belongs to the 245 million citizens who make up the greatest--and the first--three words in our Constitution: ‘We the People.’”  
   B “Just a moment ago, you multiplied the honor with a moving tribute, and being only human, there’s a part of me that would like to take credit for what we’ve achieved.”  
   C “This office is not mine to give; only you, the people, can do that. But I love America too much and care too much about where we will be in the next few years.”  
   D “This land, its people, the dreams that unfold here and the freedom to bring it all together--well, those are what make America soar, up where you can see hope billowing in those freedom winds.”

4. Why does Reagan give this speech?

   A to give thanks for his time as president  
   B to remind people of the American dream  
   C to talk about a letter from a little boy  
   D to encourage Americans to seize every day

5. What is the main message of this speech?

   A The American people should take care to elect a progressive president.  
   B Ronald Reagan does not believe he is in the twilight of his life.  
   C The Presidency of the United States belongs to the people.  
   D Because of the people, America is a land of freedom and opportunity.
6. Read the following sentences: “I care that we give custody of this office to someone who will build on our changes, not retreat to the past, someone who will continue the change all of us fought for. To **preserve** what we have and not risk losing it all . . .”

As used in this sentence, what does the word “**preserve**” mean?

- A to give ownership to someone
- B to change the nature of something
- C to keep safe from harm or loss
- D to allow someone to get hurt

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Reagan was honored and moved by the tribute; ________, he believed the tribute rightfully belonged to the people of the United States, not him.

- A however
- B for instance
- C therefore
- D ultimately

8. What kind of person does Reagan want to become president after him?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
9. Why does Reagan mention the letter he received from a young boy in his speech?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

10. Based on the passage, how did Reagan likely feel about leaving the office of the Presidency? Support your answer using information from the passage.

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
1. According to Reagan, who does the institution of the Presidency belong to?

   A  the current president  
   B  all of the past presidents  
   C  the people of America  
   D  God  

2. How does Reagan describe the American people?

   A  common, unimaginative workers  
   B  hardworking, extraordinary dreamers  
   C  idealistic, unusual brothers  
   D  brave, intelligent soldiers  

3. Reagan believes that the American people deserve the credit for the nation’s success. What evidence from the passage best supports this conclusion?

   A  “Let us remember that tribute really belongs to the 245 million citizens who make up the greatest--and the first--three words in our Constitution: 'We the People.'”  
   B  “Just a moment ago, you multiplied the honor with a moving tribute, and being only human, there's a part of me that would like to take credit for what we've achieved.”  
   C  “This office is not mine to give; only you, the people, can do that. But I love America too much and care too much about where we will be in the next few years.”  
   D  “This land, its people, the dreams that unfold here and the freedom to bring it all together--well, those are what make America soar, up where you can see hope billowing in those freedom winds.”  

4. Why does Reagan give this speech?

   A  to give thanks for his time as president  
   B  to remind people of the American dream  
   C  to talk about a letter from a little boy  
   D  to encourage Americans to seize every day  

5. What is the main message of this speech?

   A  The American people should take care to elect a progressive president.  
   B  Ronald Reagan does not believe he is in the twilight of his life.  
   C  The Presidency of the United States belongs to the people.  
   D  Because of the people, America is a land of freedom and opportunity.
6. Read the following sentences: "I care that we give custody of this office to someone who will build on our changes, not retreat to the past, someone who will continue the change all of us fought for. To **preserve** what we have and not risk losing it all . . ."

As used in this sentence, what does the word “**preserve**” mean?

A  to give ownership to someone  
B  to change the nature of something  
C  to keep safe from harm or loss  
D  to allow someone to get hurt

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Reagan was honored and moved by the tribute; ________, he believed the tribute rightfully belonged to the people of the United States, not him.

A  however  
B  for instance  
C  therefore  
D  ultimately

8. What kind of person does Reagan want to become president after him?

**Suggested answer:** Reagan wants the next president to be "someone who will build on our changes, not retreat to the past."

9. Why does Reagan mention the letter he received from a young boy in his speech?

**Suggested answer:** Reagan mentions the letter from the young boy to demonstrate the benefits of America and the American promise, namely "freedom of association, freedom of worship, freedom of hope and opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness."

10. Based on the passage, how did Reagan likely feel about leaving the office of the Presidency? Support your answer using information from the passage.

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary and should be supported by the passage. Examples include:

- Reagan likely felt proud of the work accomplished during his time as president: “lifting us from the depths of national calamity, renewing our mighty economic strength, and leading the way to restoring our respect in the world.”
- He felt thankful for the opportunity to serve as president: “Please accept again our heartfelt gratitude, Nancy's and mine, for this special time that you've given in our lives.”
- He hoped that the next president will continue with the work that was started during his term: "I care that we give custody of this office to someone who will build on our changes, not retreat to the past."
- He looked forward to the future: “You see, there's no sweeter day than each new one, because here in our country it means something wonderful can happen to you.”