Primary Source: The Dawes Act of 1887

The Dawes Act
February 8, 1887

This is an excerpt from the act that provided for the allotment of lands to Indians on the various reservations, and extended the protection of the laws of the United States and the Territories over the Indians.

Be it enacted, That in all cases where any tribe or band of Indians has been, or shall hereafter be, located upon any reservation created for their use, either by treaty stipulation or by virtue of an act of Congress or executive order setting apart the same for their use, the President of the United States be, and he hereby is, authorized, whenever in his opinion any reservation or any part thereof of such Indians is advantageous for agricultural and grazing purposes to cause said reservation, or any part thereof, to be surveyed, or resurveyed if necessary, and to allot the lands in said reservations to any Indian located thereon in quantities as follows:

To each head of a family, one-quarter of a section;
To each single person over eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section;
To each orphan child under eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section; and,
To each other single person under eighteen years now living, or who may be born prior to the date of the order of the President directing an allotment of the lands embraced in any reservation, one-sixteenth of a section; . . .

SEC. 6. That upon the completion of said allotments and the patenting of the lands to said allottees, each and every member of the respective bands or tribes of Indians to whom allotments have been made shall have the benefit of and be subject to the laws, both civil and criminal, of the State or Territory in which they may reside. And every Indian born within the territorial limits of the United States to whom allotments shall have been made under the provisions of this act, and every Indian born within the territorial limits of the United States who has voluntarily taken up his residence separate and apart from any tribe of Indians therein, and has adopted the habits of civilized life, is hereby declared to be a citizen of the United States, and is entitled to all the rights, privileges, and immunities of such citizens....
After reading the excerpt, answer the following questions.

1. Name three ways this law states Native Americans came to be located on reservations. (3)

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2. Highlight the phrase in the first sentence were it states that the President has the power to designate certain Indian lands to be used for other advantageous purposes. (1)

3. Within this same sentence what two purposes are mentioned that would cause reservation lands to be surveyed and sold? (2)

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4. If land was surveyed and sold, Native Americans would still get an allotment of land, although smaller. Which group of Native Americans would get the largest piece of land? (1)

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5. Do some additional research to determine the number of acres for the answer from the previous question. (1)

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6. If a child is living on a reservation and doesn't have any living parents, is that child entitled to any portion of the land when the government takes it over? (1)

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7. Native Americans living on reservations could become U.S citizens when they received an allotment of land. Those living off the reservation could become U.S. citizens too, but what was the condition they had to meet before they could be declared a citizen? (1)

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