Reading Comprehension: Non-Fiction Article

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Ancient Art of Hangi Cooking

For centuries, Māori have used an underground oven called a hangi to cook food. This traditional cooking method, which predates European contact, remains popular in New Zealand today, bringing whānau and communities together for special occasions.

The hangi process begins early in the morning. First, diggers create a pit in the ground, typically about one metre deep. Volcanic stones or river rocks are carefully selected and placed in the pit, then a fire is lit on top of them. The wood burns for several hours until the stones are extremely hot—sometimes reaching temperatures of over 400 degrees Celsius.

Once the stones are ready, the wood and ash are removed, leaving only the glowing hot rocks at the bottom of the pit. Wire baskets containing food are then lowered onto the stones. Traditional hangi kai includes kumara, pumpkin, potato, chicken, pork, and mutton. Some cooks also add stuffing wrapped in foil. Wet sacks or cloths are placed over the baskets to create steam, and then earth is shovelled back over the pit to seal in the heat.

The food cooks slowly underground for three to four hours. During this time, the steam and heat work together to create tender, smoky-flavoured meat and vegetables. When the hangi is finally uncovered, the distinctive earthy aroma fills the air, signalling that the meal is ready.

Modern hangi methods have evolved slightly, with some people using metal containers or above-ground steamers, but many still prefer the authentic underground technique. The hangi represents more than just a cooking method—it embodies Māori values of manaakitanga (hospitality) and kotahitanga (unity), as preparing and sharing a hangi brings people together in a meaningful way.

Answer the following questions in complete sentences:

1. What is a hangi and who traditionally uses this cooking method?

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2. Describe the first two steps in preparing a hangi.

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3. What types of food are typically cooked in a hangi?

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4. How long does the food cook underground, and what creates the cooking environment?

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5. According to the article, what does the hangi represent beyond just a cooking method?

6. Why do you think the article mentions that hangi "remains popular in New Zealand today"? What does this suggest about the importance of this tradition?