

Craig Santos Perez

Chanting the Waters

for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and water protectors around the world

“water moves the deep shift of life
back to birth and before...”

—Linda Hogan, “The Turtle Watchers” (2008)

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Say: Water is ____ !”

because our bodies are 60 percent water—

because my wife labored for 24 hours

through contracting waves—

because water breaks forth

from shifting tectonic plates—

Say: Water is ____ !”

because amniotic fluid is 90 percent water—

because she breathed and breathed and breathed—

because our lungs are 80 percent water—

because our daughter crowned like a new island—

Say: Water is ____ !”

because we tell creation stories about water—

because our language flows from water—

because our words are islands writ on water—

because it takes more than three gallons of water

to make a single sheet of paper—

Say: Water is ____ !”

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*because water is the next oil—
because 180,000 miles of U.S. oil pipelines leak everyday—
because we wage war over gods and water and oil—
Say: Water is ____ !”
because our planet is 70 percent water—
because only 3 percent of global water is freshwater—
because it takes two gallons of water
to refine one gallon of gasoline—
because it takes 22 gallons of water
to make a pound of plastic—
because it takes 660 gallons of water
to make one hamburger—
because it takes 3,000 gallons to make one smart phone—
because the American water footprint is 2000 gallons a day—
Say: Water is ____ !”
because a billion people lack access to drinking water—
because women and children walk 4 miles every day
to gather clean water and deliver it home
Say: Water is ____ !”
because our bones are 30 percent water—
because if you lose 5 percent of your body’s water
you become feverish—
because if you lose 10 percent of your body’s water
you become immobile—
because our bodies won’t survive a week without water
Say: Water is ____ !”
because corporations privatize, dam, and bottle our waters—
because plantations divert our waters—because animal
slaughterhouses consume our waters—
because pesticides, chemicals, lead, and waste*

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poison our waters

Say: Water is ____ !"

because they bring their bulldozers and drills and drones—

*because we bring our feathers and lei and sage and shells
and canoes and hashtags and totems—*

because they call us savage and primitive and riot—

because we bring our treaties

and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples—

*because they bring their banks and politicians
and dogs and paychecks and pepper spray and bullets—*

*because we bring our songs and schools and prayers
and chants and ceremonies—*

because we say stop! keep the oil in the ground—

because they say shut up! and vanish—

because we are not moving—

because they bring their police and private militia—

because we bring all our relations

and all our generations and all our livestreams—

Say: Water is ____ !"

*because our drumming sounds like rain after drought
echoing against taut skin—*

because our skin is 60 percent water—

Say: Water is ____ !"

because every year millions of children die

from water-borne diseases—

because every day

thousands of children die

from water-borne diseases—

because, by the end of this poem,

five children will die from water-borne diseases—

Say: Water is ____ !"

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*because our daughter loves playing in the ocean—
because someday she'll ask, "where does the ocean end?"—
we'll point to the dilating horizon—
Say: Water is ____ !"
because our eyes are 95 percent water—
because we'll tell her ocean has no end—
because sky and clouds lift ocean—
because mountains embrace ocean into blessings of rain—
sky-rain fills aquifers and lakes—
because ocean-sky-rain-lake flows into the Missouri River—
because ocean-sky-rain-lake-river returns
to the Pacific and connects us
to our cousins at Standing Rock—
because our blood is 90 percent water—
Say: Water is ____ !"
because our hearts are 75 percent water—
because I'll teach our daughter my people's word for water:
"hanom, hanom, hanom"—
so the sound of water
will always carry her home—
Say: Water is ____ !"
Water is ____ !"
Water is ____ !"*

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