Death Valley

I hadn’t heard about Badwater Basin or Death Valley until we got there. Badwater Basin, in California, is the lowest point in the United States. The water there is filled with all kinds of salts. It would pickle your tongue if you ever tasted it.

Uncle Mert got down and looked into the water with a scope. He said enthusiastically, “There are things living in that water!” He pointed to a thin plant and said, “That’s pickle weed.” That water could pickle just about anything!

Not much is alive there. But Uncle Mert, Aunt Carla, my cousin Rick, and I were alive. Rick said we were lucky to be there in February. It can be 130 degrees there in July! Rick turned to me and said, “The spot you’re standing on is transformed into a frying pan.”

I walked on the rough salt beds. Up close, they looked like razor-sharp mountains. Some of the crystals were almost a foot tall! A crow landed near me. It stepped along the salt as if it hurt to walk there. It quickly flew off and disappeared into the tops of the Funeral Mountains.

Everything in Death Valley has a strange name. Tonight we’re camping at Furnace Creek. Maybe I’ll try to find Dead Man’s Gulch. That would be great!

Aunt Carla took Rick and me to investigate a wash. That means a shallow canyon made by water. It’s hard to imagine where enough water would come from to carve the wash. Aunt Carla says the desert gets flash floods. The wonderful part was when we climbed out of the wash. The desert was covered with flowers!
Answer the questions. You may reread parts of the passage to help you.

1. Why did the family go to Badwater Basin?
   - to visit friends
   - to go to school
   - to explore
   - to work

2. What did Uncle Mert find interesting?
   - the flash flood
   - the salt beds
   - the water
   - the crow

3. If transformed means “changed,” what does transformation mean?
   - a change
   - to change
   - in the process of changing
   - something that changes something else

4. Which statement BEST states the theme of the story?
   - Vacations are fun.
   - Death Valley is dangerous.
   - Looking at nature is interesting.
   - February is the best time to visit Badwater Basin.

5. What did the narrator learn on the trip? Use details from the passage to support your answer. Write your response on another sheet of paper.