Black Elk Speaks Study Guide

Black Elk Speaks by John Neihardt

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Black Elk Speaks (1932) is the story of an Oglala Sioux medicine man who lived with his people on the Great Plains through most of the second half of the nineteenth century—an age that saw many bloody conflicts between American Indians and white soldiers and settlers. As a child, Black Elk experienced a vision that he thought would help lead his people through the hardships they were just beginning to endure. Unfortunately, Black Elk's story is ultimately one of broken dreams and unfulfilled visions. Like so many other tribes, the Oglala Sioux's traditional way of life ran counter to the American dream as envisioned by most white Americans in the nineteenth century.

Black Elk Speaks, by John G. Neihardt, is one of the most unusual memoirs ever put to paper. Black Elk, the Oglala Sioux medicine man whose life the book relates, did not speak English. John G. Neihardt, the poet and authority on Plains Indian culture who brought Black Elk's tale to the page, did not speak Sioux. However, the two men recognized each other as kindred spirits, and each played an important part in bringing the book to life.

Neihardt first traveled to meet Black Elk while researching the ghost dance movement of the 1890s for an epic poem he was writing. Hearing that Black Elk had been an instrumental participant in the Oglala ghost dance movement, Neihardt hoped to glean some firsthand information for his poem. After first meeting the aging medicine man, however, Neihardt felt that Black Elk's story was an important piece of American history in its own right that needed to be preserved:

As hunter, warrior, practicing holy man, and indubitable seer, he seemed even then to represent the consciousness of the Plains Indian more fully than any other I had ever known; and when I became well acquainted with his inner world, I knew this to be true.

The two men relied on their children to complete their task: Black Elk's son translated his father's words into English, while Neihardt's daughter recorded a stenographic transcript of the translation. Neihardt later pieced together the transcript, rewriting portions to capture the flavor and meaning of Black Elk's original spoken testimony and to maintain narrative flow. This has led to some criticism that the book is not an autobiography, because many of the specific phrases and sentences in the book originated not with Black Elk, but with his son and with Neihardt. Vine Deloria Jr. in his foreword to the book, argues that such criticism misses the point: "The very nature of great religious teachings is that they encompass everyone who understands them and personalities become indistinguishable from the transcendent truth that is expressed."

Although the book fell into relative obscurity for nearly three decades after it first appeared, a renewed interest in American Indian heritage among readers led to new editions of *Black Elk Speaks* to be published in 1961, 1972, and 1979. More recent editions contain supplemental materials and accounts that help place the creation of *Black Elk Speaks* in a richer historical and literary context. The book remains an essential text for anyone seeking to understand and appreciate the practices and beliefs

of the Lakota Sioux, as well as anyone hoping to gain a fuller understanding of the consequences of the westward expansion of the United States in the 1800s.

Author Biography

John G. Neihardt

John Gneisenau Neihardt was born on January 8, 1891, near Sharpsburg, Illinois. His family later moved to Kansas, where Neihardt became interested in Greek epic poems, before settling in Nebraska. While ill with a fever as a young boy, Neihardt claimed to have had a vision that convinced him his calling was to write poetry. He published his first book of poetry, *The Divine Enchantment*, when he was just nineteen.

Neihardt continued living and writing in Nebraska, making his home in a town on the edge of the Omaha Indian Reservation. In 1930, while researching the ghost dance movement for his epic poem series *A Cycle of the West*, Neihardt met with Oglala medicine man Nicholas Black Elk; the two became fast friends. Black Elk was sixty-seven years old when he met Neihardt and began telling the story of the first twenty-seven years of his remarkable life, which was published as *Black Elk Speaks* in 1932. He died on November 24, 1950, in Columbia, Missouri, before his story won the wide renown it enjoys today.

Neihardt died in Columbia, Missouri, on November 24, 1973. Neihardt's retelling of Black Elk's life on the Plains, *Black Elk Speaks*, is without a doubt the author's most enduring work.

Before he begins to tell of his life and his vision, Black Elk makes a pipe offering to the Spirit of the World. He also explains the origin and significance of the pipe. According to legend, two hunters were out looking for bison when they saw a woman. One of the hunters recognized the woman as sacred, but the other, being foolish, did not. The foolish hunter approached the woman, and was killed. The woman ordered the other hunter to tell his village she is coming, and to build a large tepee in the center of the nation for her. When the woman arrived, she gave the chief a pipe to help the nation become strong. As she walked away from the village, she transformed into a white bison. Black Elk remarks, "This they tell, and whether it happened so or not I do not know; but if you think about it, you can see that it is true."

After completing the pipe ceremony, Black Elk relates his family history and earliest childhood memories. He is a member of the Oglala Sioux tribe, born in 1863 as the son of a medicine man. When Black Elk is just three years old, Oglala warriors fight back against an encroaching tide of white—or "Wasichu"—soldiers in the area near Fort Phil Kearny, in what is now Wyoming. Later, Black Elk discovers the reason for the fight: The Wasichus had discovered gold in the area, and "they wanted to have a road up through our country to where the yellow metal was; but my people did not want the road." The fight, known as the Battle of the Hundred Slain, is remembered by Black Elk's older friend Fire Thunder, as is a bloody skirmish the following year known as the Attacking of the Wagons. When Black Elk is five years old, Oglala chief Red Cloud signs a treaty with the Wasichus; white soldiers are removed from the area entirely, and the Oglala

people are promised that "our country would be ours as long as grass should grow and water flow."

Around this time, Black Elk begins to hear voices and see visions. His most profound vision occurs when he is nine years old and very ill. In his vision, the six Powers of the World—North, South, East, West, Earth, and Sky—reveal that Black Elk's people shall undergo four generations of increasing difficulties, but Black Elk will have the power to help them survive the hardship and regain their strength.

Chapters 4-7

Black Elk recovers quickly after the vision, and he learns that he had been gravely ill for nearly two weeks. He decides not to share his vision because he fears that no one will believe him. Soon after, the tribe goes on a bison hunt. Black Elk is not yet old enough to hunt, but he rides along with the other boys, pretending to be a scout for the hunters.

When Black Elk is ten, a small group from his tribe travels to Fort Robinson, or "Soldiers' Town" as he calls it, to visit relatives who live in the area with Oglala chief Red Cloud. This is the first time Black Elk sees a Wasichu in person: "At first I thought they all looked sick, and I was afraid they might just begin to fight us any time, but I got used to them." The band stays at Soldiers' Town through the winter and then journeys into the Black Hills. There, Black Elk learns to spearfish from a man named Watanye; this same man tells Black Elk the tale of a Lakota called High Horse and the girl he loved.

According to the story, High Horse fell in love with a beautiful girl from his village. She seemed to like him in return, so High Horse went to the girl's father and offered him horses in exchange for his daughter's hand. The father dismissed High Horse's offer. High Horse's friend Red Deer then devised a plan for High Horse to steal the girl away in the middle of the night. Red Deer painted High Horse completely white with black circles around his eyes so people would be too scared to chase him during his escape. High Horse entered the family's tepee, but while trying to remain quiet and avoid rousing the girl's parents, he fell asleep. The next morning, the girl found him sleeping next to her and, thinking he was some strange animal, screamed. High Horse fled, and the villagers let him go, believing he might be some sacred creature that would bring bad luck if they killed it.

Crestfallen, High Horse decided he would not return to the village; instead, he and Red Deer went on the war-path. After a few days, they discovered a band from a rival tribe, the Crow. They killed the horse guard and stole all the band's horses—about a hundred in all. They drove the horses back to their own village and up to the entrance of the beautiful girl's tepee. High Horse offered all the horses to the girl's father; finally seeing that High Horse was a man who could provide for his daughter, the father accepted him.

The following year, when Black Elk is eleven, a medicine man named Chips has a vision of soldiers in the area where the Oglala group is camping. Black Elk later discovers that Lieutenant Colonel George Custer—known by the Oglalas as Pahuska, or "Long Hair"—has led his soldiers into the Black Hills and discovered gold there. "Our people

knew there was yellow metal in little chunks up there; but they did not bother with it, because it was not good for anything," explains Black Elk.

The small band of Oglalas travels back to Soldiers' Town. Red Cloud and his followers defend the actions of the soldiers, believing the soldiers were trying to remove white settlers from the Sioux territory. Many of the Oglala disagree and start referring to Red Cloud's followers by the derisive name "Hangs-Around-The-Fort." In September 1875, after even more soldiers enter the Black Hills, the Wasichus invite the different Sioux tribes to a council. They want the tribes to lease the Black Hills—which, by treaty, belongs to the Sioux—so the area can be mined for gold. According to Black Elk, "They talked and talked for days, but it was just like wind blowing in the end."

Black Elk and his people leave Soldiers' Town to camp near the Oglala chief Crazy Horse, whose father is cousin to Black Elk's father. Crazy Horse sees things differently than Red Cloud and is willing to fight to keep the Wasichus out of tribal territory. During the winter, messengers track down Black Elk's group and tell them that they must return to Soldiers' Town, or else "there would be bad trouble." The group makes it back to Soldiers' Town in February, while Crazy Horse decides to remain camped on the Powder River. The following month, Black Elk hears that Crazy Horse's camp has been attacked by Wasichu cavalry troops. To Black Elk and his people, the attack is both unprovoked and in violation of Red Cloud's treaty: "These people were in their own country and doing no harm. They only wanted to be let alone." It becomes clear to many of the Oglalas at Soldiers' Town, including Black Elk's family, that the only way to keep their land is to fight for it.

Chapters 8-9

Black Elk's family and several others leave Soldiers' Town in May 1876 to join Crazy Horse. Though he is only thirteen, Black Elk is well trained with both guns and bows, and he is ready to fight the Wasichus if necessary. On the way to meet Crazy Horse at Rosebud River, the group's scouts are fired upon by members of a Wasichu wagon train heading into the Black Hills. The group attacks the wagon train, and although he does not know if any Wasichus are killed, Black Elk is proud that he has participated in his first battle.

When the group reaches the Rosebud River, they find members of many other Sioux tribes have also congregated there. Cheyennes, Hunkpapas, Minneconjous, Black Feet, and others have united to defend their lands against the Wasichus. In June, the congregation holds a sun dance, a traditional festival intended "to purify the people and to give them power and endurance." The sun dance is led by Sitting Bull, considered by many to be the greatest living medicine man. After two days of dancing, scouts report that Wasichu troops are drawing near. Although Black Elk is eager to join in the fight alongside Crazy Horse, he is asked instead to look after the young children in the village. Black Elk's friend, a Hunkpapa named Iron Hawk, fights in the battle against General Crook—known to the Sioux as Three Stars—and his cavalrymen; the Wasichus are also aided by Crow warriors, who are traditional enemies of the Sioux. Although Iron

Hawk is at first convinced that his people have lost the battle, he later discovers that the Wasichus and their Crow mercenaries have been soundly defeated.

After the battle against Three Stars, Crazy Horse and his followers move northwest to the area they call Greasy Grass, popularly known as Little Bighorn. Although they won the battle, they travel away from the soldiers, farther into their own territory because, "It was our country and we did not want to have trouble." Soon, however, soldiers led by Pahuska—General Custer—charge deep into Sioux territory to attack the camp. This time, Black Elk is closer to the fighting; he happens upon a wounded soldier on the battlefield and, at the prompting of another warrior, he shoots and scalps the soldier. Black Elk takes the scalp to show his mother, who sings out with pride for his bravery.

Elsewhere in the battle, Black Elk's friend Standing Bear finds himself in the midst of chaos: "There were so many of us that I think we did not need guns. Just the hoofs would have been enough." Iron Hawk, also present at the battle, tells how the warriors pinned down the troops near the river; the soldiers, in desperate need of water, send unarmed men with buckets down to the river. Iron Hawk sees these soldiers and moves in: "I guess they got enough to drink, for they are drinking yet. We killed them in the water."

Chapters 10-14

After the defeat of Custer, Crazy Horse and his followers move east across the Great Plains. Fearing the Wasichus will never stop chasing them, some of the Sioux leave for the safety of soldier-run agencies, while others including Sitting Bull flee toward Canada ("Grandmother's Land"). Many of the Sioux, however, refuse to leave their land: "It was ours already when the Wasichus made the treaty with Red Cloud…. That was only eight winters before, and they were chasing us now because we remembered and they forgot."

Just before winter, Black Elk and his people learn that the Wasichus have bought the Black Hills and all land to the west of the Hills by making agreements with tribe leaders who have stopped fighting and live near the soldiers. More troops battle the last remaining camps of Sioux, who are starving and freezing. In the spring, under Crazy Horse's direction, the last surviving Sioux rebels travel to Red Cloud's Agency, near Soldiers' Town, and vow to stop fighting.

The Wasichus suspect that Crazy Horse remains a threat, so they lure him to Soldiers' Town and place him under arrest. Black Elk and his father follow into Soldiers' Town. Though they do not see it happen, they later hear of Crazy Horse's fate: When the Sioux leader discovered that the soldiers were arresting him, he resisted and was stabbed to death. Black Elk explains, "They could not kill him in battle. They had to lie to him and kill him that way."

After the death of Crazy Horse, the Wasichus force many of the Sioux at Red Cloud's Agency to move east. During the journey, a small band that includes Black Elk's family decides to flee to the north. They eventually reach Grandmother's Land, where some of

their relatives already live in a camp led by Sitting Bull. They remain there through two winters. Although they are safe from Wasichu soldiers, the winters are brutal, and many of the Sioux feel homesick for their own lands. In 1879, a very small band that includes Black Elk's family heads south once again.

The group returns to camp near the Bighorn Mountains. Black Elk finds himself increasingly distracted by thoughts of his long-ago vision, and he hears voices all around him that convince him he must do something to help his people. He decides to share his vision with an old medicine man named Black Road. The medicine man tells Black Elk that he must share his vision with people, and the two prepare a horse dance to perform and convey Black Elk's vision.

The entire camp helps to prepare for the horse dance, which takes place around a sacred tepee painted with images from Black Elk's vision. After the horse dance, several people tell Black Elk that they feel healed by the ceremony, and medicine men respect him for his great vision.

Chapters 15-18

The group returns to the area near Soldiers' Town and finds that the Wasichus are building a new camp for the Oglalas to the east. Black Elk and the others journey to the camp, called the Pine Ridge Agency. In the spring, Black Elk experiences another vision; in this vision, two warriors hunt down two dogs and cut off their heads, only to find that the dogs have transformed into Wasichus. He shares his vision with several elders, who all agree that he must perform the vision in a heyoka ceremony, which features foolish characters to amuse and lift the spirits of the viewers. The ceremony is a success: "They were better able now to see the greenness of the world, the wideness of the sacred day, the colors of the earth, and to set these in their minds."

After the heyoka ceremony, the Wasichus move the Oglalas into square gray houses. According to Black Elk, "It is a bad way to live, for there can be no power in a square." Black Elk is approached by a man whose son is ill; using an herb he saw in both of his visions, Black Elk cures the boy. At the age of nineteen, Black Elk becomes renowned for his power to cure.

Black Elk insists that the power does not come from him: "It was the power from the outer world, and the visions and ceremonies had only made me like a hole through which the power could come to the two-leggeds." By sharing another part of his original vision, Black Elk persuades his people to perform two more ceremonies: one to celebrate the power of the bison, and one to celebrate the power of the elk. By performing the ceremonies, he hopes to use the power of his vision to help sustain his people.

Chapters 19-22

By 1883, when Black Elk is twenty years old, all the large herds of bison in Sioux territory have been killed. "The Wasichus did not kill them to eat; they killed them for the

metal that makes them crazy, and they took only the hides to sell." Without the bison, Black Elk and his people grow hungry; the situation is worsened when government provisions are frequently stolen by dishonest Wasichus before they reach the Pine Ridge Agency. Black Elk recalls, "There were many lies, but we could not eat them."

After a few more years as a medicine man, Black Elk decides to join a traveling show run by Buffalo Bill Cody. He and a hundred other Oglalas make the journey to New York City, where they perform in Madison Square Garden all winter. Buffalo Bill then moves the show across the Atlantic to London, where they perform for Grandmother England (Queen Victoria). The show travels on to Manchester, where Black Elk and three others are accidentally left behind. They eventually find their way back to London, where they join another traveling show run by a man named Mexican Joe.

After a long run in London, Mexican Joe moves his show to Paris. There, Black Elk meets a Wasichu girl with whom he develops a close friendship; while having breakfast one morning with the girl and her parents, Black Elk falls unconscious and experiences a vision of his home. When he wakes, he discovers that he has been on the verge of death for three days. The Wasichu girl and her family contact Buffalo Bill, who has brought his show to Paris as well. Buffalo Bill is happy to see Black Elk again, and he arranges for him to return to the United States. When Black Elk finally arrives back at Pine Ridge, he finds everything just as he saw it in his vision. After almost three years, he is happy to be back with his people, and he returns to healing the sick.

Black Elk discovers that the situation at Pine Ridge is worse than when he left. The Wasichus have taken even more Sioux land and have not provided enough food for the people to eat. Black Elk also hears of a sacred man among the Paiute tribe out west; the man, Wovoka, claims to have spoken to the Great Spirit and has seen a vision in which the Wasichus will be swept from the land and the bison will return. That winter, Black Elk's father dies. By the spring of 1890, Wovoka's ghost dance move-ment—and the ceremony that accompanies it—has spread across the plains; seeing no better prospect for his people, Black Elk decides to participate.

Chapters 23-25

Black Elk spreads the word about the ghost dance to the Brules, a Sioux tribe not far from the Oglala agency. When he returns, the Wasichus decree that the Indians can only perform rituals like the ghost dance for three days each month. An official also secretly reveals to Black Elk that he and another ghost dance follower are going to be arrested. The two flee their camp and stay with the Brules, but they are eventually called back to Pine Ridge by one of their chiefs. After arriving back at Pine Ridge, Black Elk learns that Sitting Bull, who had come south from Grandmother's Land, was killed by Wasichus when he refused to be arrested. Soon after, an ailing Lakota chief, Big Foot, brings the last remaining members of his band, as well as the last of Sitting Bull's people, to Wounded Knee Creek and surrenders to Wasichu soldiers.

At Pine Ridge, Black Elk hears of Big Foot's surrender and sees hundreds of soldiers march off toward Wounded Knee. The next morning he hears cannon fire, and he rides

toward Wounded Knee to see what is happening. When he arrives, he sees Wasichu cavalrymen firing into a gulch filled with women and children. Though he has no weapon, Black Elk and some others decide to charge the cavalrymen to allow the surviving women and children to escape. The tactic works, and Black Elk survives unharmed. Other Sioux arrive and help to push the soldiers back; one of Black Elk's friends witnessed the whole incident and tells what had happened.

That morning, the soldiers had attempted to disarm all of Big Foot's camp. Nearly all the weapons were gathered peacefully, but one man named Yellow Bird refused to give up his gun. A soldier wrestled with Yellow Bird for his weapon but got shot during the scuffle. Almost immediately, soldiers began firing on the unarmed Sioux. The ailing Big Foot, lying infirm in his tepee, was shot right away. Not even the women and children were spared.

Black Elk returns to Pine Ridge with an infant he found still alive at Wounded Knee, but he discovers that his people have fled to avoid the Wasichus. He follows their trail and catches up with them at Clay Creek. The group organizes a war party, and the warriors ride out to meet the Wasichu soldiers. Black Elk is shot during this battle, but he recovers and retreats with some other warriors to a stronghold in the Badlands. The soldiers want to continue fighting, but Red Cloud convinces them to return. Remembering the sight of the massacre at Wounded Knee, Black Elk realizes: "And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream."

Plot Summary

Black Elk Speaks tells the story of Black Elk's early life, beginning with his first childhood memories and concluding in 1890, when he was twenty-seven years old. The text also contains detailed information about Oglala Sioux customs and traditions, as well as first-person accounts of important historical events as witnessed by other living Native Americans. Black Elk sees his tale as one that extends far beyond his own experiences:

It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit.

Themes

Spiritual Guidance

Visions of spirits and the spirit world are a recurring theme in *Black Elk Speaks*. Black Elk experiences several visions throughout his life, but the first—at the age of nine—is the most significant. He believes that this vision contains the key to helping save his people from the Wasichus. In that sense, his vision represents his desire to provide a better life and future for his fellow Sioux. Ultimately, Black Elk considers himself a failure for not being able to use his vision to help his people.

Other characters in *Black Elk Speaks* also experience visions. Black Elk tells of a vision passed down from his father and grandfather, originally seen by a holy man named Drinks Water. Long before white explorers had ever visited the Great Plains, Drinks Water saw a vision of a race that would entrap the Sioux and force them to live in "square gray houses," and that there they would starve. Black Elk later points out that his people were indeed moved into square gray houses, and that the government repeatedly failed to provide adequate amounts of food for the Sioux.

Another significant vision in *Black Elk Speaks* is that of Wovoka, the leader of the ghost dance movement. In Wovoka's hopeful vision of the future, the bison return to the earth, as do the deceased loved ones of the surviving Sioux. The Indian territory is wiped clean of all Wasichus, and things are returned to as they were before the coming of the Wasichus. Although Black Elk later supports the ghost dance movement, his first instinct about the popularity of Wovoka's vision is telling: "I thought maybe it was only the despair that made people believe, just as a man who is starving may dream of plenty of everything good to eat."

Each of these spiritual visions represents the idealized potential of the Sioux—or, more broadly, all American Indians—to control their own destiny. This potential is essential to Black Elk's dream of a better life for his people, and when he realizes that the potential is gone, he feels that "the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead."

White Men's Entitlement

In *Black Elk Speaks*, the Sioux try to share their homeland and make room for the Wasichus (white people), but the relationship is soured by repeated instances of broken promises. The history of life in the New World is one of white Europeans never questioning their right to take what they want or use underhanded means to get it. *Black Elk Speaks* is a rare look at the victims of that ugly corner of the American dream.

On several occasions Black Elk mentions Red Cloud's 1868 treaty with the Wasichus, which guarantees that the Sioux could keep their territory "as long as grass should grow and water flow." He quickly points out, "You can see that it is not the grass and water

that have forgotten." Their territory is slowly stripped away from them, section by section, until even their reservation is moved to a different location altogether.

After Chief Crazy Horse decides to no longer fight, he is asked to meet with a Wasichu leader at Fort Robinson. According to Black Elk, Crazy Horse is promised that he will not be arrested when he arrives at the fort. However, soldiers immediately move to arrest the Sioux leader, and when he resists, he is stabbed by a cavalryman. Black Elk believes the Wasichus' betrayal is deliberate: "They could not kill him in battle. They had to lie to him and kill him that way."

Later, when the Wasichus take more Sioux land and move the remaining tribes people to a new reservation, soldiers take their ponies from them and promise that the Great Father (the U.S. president) will pay them for the horses. Black Elk notes, "if he ever did I have not heard of it." When the Sioux are placed on reservation lands, unable to hunt for game as they used to, the Wasichus promise to provide adequate food provisions for the Indians. However, the promised provisions are less than enough to feed everyone. According to Black Elk, "There were many lies, but we could not eat them."

Hope for the Future

The dream of a better future is a basic part of the American dream for Americans from all backgrounds. For Black Elk and many of his fellow Sioux, their dearest dream of an ideal future would be a return to the past—a time before the arrival of the Wasichus, when the bison were plentiful and the Black Hills were a sacred place shared by all tribes. Black Elk recalls his early childhood with fondness; though the world of his people is not without troubles, they maintain faith that the Great Spirit will give them the strength to overcome whatever hardships they face.

When the Wasichus begin to enter Sioux territory along the Bozeman Trail, Red Cloud wages a successful campaign to close the road and restore his country to its previous state. He signs a treaty that guarantees a return to the old ways, keeping Wasichus out of Sioux territory. Soon, however, the Wasichus return, and even Red Cloud realizes that they cannot be stopped.

With few exceptions, the prevailing behavior of the Sioux people is not to fight the Wasichus, but to move away in an attempt to continue following the old Sioux ways of living. The Sioux are chased deep into their own territory, and some flee all the way to Canada; however, they find that because the world is changing so swiftly around them, they cannot return to their previous way of life.

The ghost dance movement by Wovoka appeals to Black Elk and others precisely because it promises followers a return to the old ways. Wovoka told of a new world coming in which "there was plenty of meat, just like old times; and in that world all the dead Indians were alive, and all the bison that had ever been killed were roaming around again." When Black Elk finally loses hope for a return to the old ways, he loses hope for the future of his people.

Historical Context

The Battle of the Little Bighorn

At the age of thirteen, Black Elk participated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, also known as the Battle of the Greasy Grass or Custer's Last Stand. In this battle, the Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne, pursued onto their own territorial lands by U.S. Army troops, were attacked at their camp near the Little Bighorn River in what is now Montana. The soldiers were soundly defeated, though the victory for the American Indians involved was temporary.

In 1876, a large village of primarily Sioux tribes had camped in the area they called Greasy Grass along the Little Bighorn River. Although they were camped deep in their own territorial lands as defined by treaty, some government officials believed that the Indians represented a threat to soldiers and settlers flooding into the nearby Black Hills area. Among the Sioux camped at Greasy Grass were the leaders Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, who were both considered hostile by the U.S. Army. Three separate detachments of soldiers were sent to engage the Indians where they camped; the most famous of these was the Seventh Cavalry, led by Lieutenant Colonel George Custer—known to the Sioux as Pahuska, or "Long Hair." One of the other detachments, led by General George Crook, was defeated at the Battle of the Rosebud earlier in the year and was not able to push on toward the Little Bighorn camp.

The remaining two detachments had planned to combine forces and attack the Indian camp. However, on June 25, 1876, Custer decided not to wait for reinforcements and plunged ahead with his assault. The army officers discovered too late that they were greatly outnumbered by the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors; this, coupled with a disorganized plan of attack, led to more than half of the Seventh Cavalry being killed, including Custer.

According to Dee Brown, author of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, "When the white men in the East heard of the Long Hair's defeat, they called it a massacre and went crazy with anger." Although the Sioux viewed their victory at Little Bighorn as an important statement of their resolve to retain their ancestral lands, they were never able to stop the flow of soldiers and settlers into Sioux territory. The following year, Crazy Horse surrendered to U.S. Army forces and was killed during a struggle when soldiers attempted to arrest him at Fort Robinson. Sitting Bull and his followers fled to Canada for several years, but eventually surrendered to U.S. forces in 1881. Like Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull was later killed during an attempt by U.S. troops to arrest him.

The Massacre at Wounded Knee

By 1890, the vast majority of Plains Indians were confined to reservations established by the U.S. government. The death of Sitting Bull, however, sent a small band of Sioux

—including many women and children—fleeing from the agency where the leader was killed. The group adopted a new leader named Big Foot, who led his people south from Standing Rock to try to evade pursuing soldiers and find sanctuary with Red Cloud's people at Pine Ridge. Progress was slow, however, and Big Foot became seriously ill with pneumonia during the journey. The group was eventually intercepted by members of the Seventh Cavalry, the same division that suffered devastating losses more than a decade earlier at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Big Foot's people, in the custody of the soldiers, camped near Wounded Knee Creek on December 28, 1890.

The following morning, the soldiers ordered Big Foot's people to turn over all weapons before being taken to their new reservation. The disarmament went smoothly at first, until a single warrior refused to give up his gun. In *Black Elk Speaks*, Black Elk's friend Dog Chief identifies this man as Yellow Bird; however, Dee Brown, in his comprehensive work *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, contends that the lone holdout was a deaf Minneconjou named Black Coyote. In any case, a scuffle ensued, during which a shot was fired. This caused the gathered military forces, which had the camp virtually surrounded, to open fire on all the Indians in the camp, including women and children.

Although many of the soldiers involved were awarded medals for their efforts, the events at Wounded Knee were infamous among those who knew the facts surrounding them. Even General Nelson Miles, the commander in charge of the officers who took part in the Wounded Knee incident, considered the event an unjustified massacre. L. Frank Baum, working as the editor of a South Dakota paper called the *Saturday Pioneer*, called the incident "a disgrace to the war department." The incident at Wounded Knee is often considered the final battle of the Indian Wars.

The Ghost Dance Movement

In 1889, a Nevada Paiute Indian prophet named Wovoka—also known as Jack Wilson—claimed to have experienced a vision that could help uplift not only his fellow Paiutes, but all Native American people. In this vision, which reportedly occurred during a solar eclipse, Wovoka claimed that God showed him his ancestors existing in a land of plentiful resources. God assured Wovoka that if his people no longer made war with the whites, they would be able to live in this land of peace and plenty with their ancestors. The vision was recreated by Wovoka and his people as a ceremonial dance, and soon members of other tribes came to see the dance—later called the "Ghost Dance"—and hear of Wovoka's vision.

The dance became wildly popular among many tribes across the western United States, and as it grew, so did the interpretations of Wovoka's vision. For believers among the Sioux tribes of the Great Plains, the vision suggested that all white settlers and soldiers would be erased from their lands, the Sioux's dead ancestors would rise, and abundant herds of buffalo would be restored to the plains within two years. In addition, many warriors believed that if they wore sacred "ghost shirts" into battle, they could not be wounded by the bullets of white soldiers. By 1890, ghost dances were being performed on reservations across the Great Plains; as conditions worsened for the reservation-

bound Sioux facing starvation, the ceremonies became more prevalent. The U.S. Army, fearing the movement would lead to a violent uprising, placed a limit on the number of ceremonies that could be performed each month. Ultimately, after the death of Sitting Bull and subsequent massacre of hundreds of Sioux at Wounded Knee in 1890, many Sioux followers lost faith in the power of the Ghost Dance, and the movement faded away as quickly as it had begun.

Critical Overview

When *Black Elk Speaks* was originally published in 1932, there were few written accounts of the events of the Old West told from the point of view of an American Indian. For this reason, the book was welcomed as a valuable testament from an individual directly involved in many important historical events.

John Chamberlain, in a review for the *New York Times*, proclaims that "the story of Black Elk … is one of the saddest and noblest that has ever been told." He notes that Black Elk's description of events from his early life form an "excellent straightforward narrative," and that "years of attrition have sharpened the memory of the ancient Sioux; brooding has greatly magnified his evocative powers." Chamberlain's only criticism is that the account of Black Elk's visions was "amorphous and vague," and he claims, "It is only when this Indian holy man comes to describe his 'visions' that the white-skinned reader is at a loss." However, an unnamed reviewer for the *Boston Transcript* points to Black Elk's descriptions of his visions as one of the book's strengths: "His accounts of his visions, and of the great tribal dances he carried out according to instructions received in these visions—particularly the Horse Dance, a memory of the Great Vision, are uniquely thrilling."

Many reviewers were especially impressed with the authenticity of a narrative that was translated from Black Elk's native Oglala tongue, and therefore required great effort and care to recreate in English. W. R. Brooks, in a review for *Outlook*, asserts that Neihardt's close collaboration with Black Elk "is about as near as you can get to seeing life and death, war and religion, through an Indian's eyes." Paul Horgan, writing for the *Yale Review*, calls the book a "story of the simplest impressiveness," and applauds that both Neihardt and Black Elk "did their jobs with dignity and regard for the past which they both cherish." C. L. Skinner, in a review for *Books*, states, "No unprejudiced reader will doubt that John Neihardt has set down honestly what Black Elk told him, with occasional corroborative statements from Standing Bear, Fire Thunder and Iron Hawk." In a review for the *New Republic*, M. W. Childs expresses a similar sentiment: "Throughout, it is apparent that Mr. Neihardt has set his sensitive poet's mind the task of recording faithfully and without intrusion Black Elk's words. He has been a keen and scrupulous editor."

Later critics have not been quite so kind to Neihardt's methods. G. Thomas Couser in particular leveled numerous criticisms at the book; in his 1989 essay "Black Elk Speaks With Forked Tongue," he argues that Black Elk's testimony in the book is inauthentic because "we see Black Elk not face to face, but through the gloss of a white man—a translation whose surface obscures Black Elk by reflecting the culture of his collaborator." The Bison Books edition of *Black Elk Speaks*, perhaps in an attempt to respond to such criticisms, includes an appendix comparing a passage from Black Elk's original translated transcript to Neihardt's handwritten draft of the same passage. In any case, such criticisms only call into question the book's standing as a genuine memoir and do not diminish its status as an illuminating piece of literature.

Despite positive reviews on its initial release, the book failed to make a significant impact with the public—then in the midst of the Great Depression. As Neihardt notes in his preface to the 1972 edition of the book, "In less than two years the publisher 'remaindered' the edition at forty-five cents a copy and the book was forgotten." However, subsequent editions have proven to be far more successful, much to Neihardt's satisfaction: "The old prophet's wish that I bring his message to the world is actually being fulfilled."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

In the following excerpt, Couser argues that, despite its reknown, Black Elk Speaks *is not a reliable picture of Lakota culture, but rather suffers as a result of the undue influence of the autobiography's white co-author*.

Christopher Sergel adapted *Black Elk Speaks* as a stage play in 1996. It is available from Dramatic Publishing.

An abridged audio recording of *Black Elk Speaks* was released by Audio Literature in 1998. It is available on cassette tape and narrated by Fred Contreras.

Alone among similar books, *Black Elk Speaks, Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*, as told through John G. Neihardt (1932), has enjoyed both popular and critical acclaim. Since the 1960s, it has been something of a cult classic, and until quite recently, scholars and critics extolled it as an authentic and authoritative Native American autobiography—indeed, perhaps the only one. Euramerican critics set it apart from the narratives gathered lily anthropologists on the basis of its literary merit. It was also cited respectfully by prominent Native Americans: William Least Heat Moon paid homage to it in his bestseller, *Blue Highways* (1982), and it was invoked in the mid-1980s by Sioux attempting to regain control of sacred lands from the federal government. Its status was such that Vine Deloria not only published an edition in 1979, but declined, in his introduction, to inquire into the problems of its genesis, authorship, and editing. It was virtually canonized, then, both as aboriginal autobiography and as Lakota prophesy.

The notion of the text as one that offers a valid, even invaluable, insight into Lakota culture rested for a long time on Neihardt's own account of the collaboration—first offered in his preface to the book and later supplemented in interviews with scholars—and on a reading of the text in isolation from the transcripts. Given the book's reputation as a paragon of Native American autobiography and of bicultural collaboration, its inability to stand up to recent scrutiny is particularly distressing. Despite Neihardt's talent, empathy, and good intentions, *Black Elk Speaks* has proven to be not nearly as reliable as it appears, or was made out to be. In it, we see Black Elk not face to face, but through the gloss of a white man—a translation whose surface obscures Black Elk by reflecting the culture of his collaborator.

The difficulty of rendering a Lakota narrative into English is complicated by the problem of transforming oral into printed materials. Dennis Tedlock has argued that the performative qualities of oral literature—gesture, tone, timing, and sound effects—can be suggested, in freshly recorded narratives, by means of typographical effects, and Dell Hymes has shown how oral literature can be recuperated from transcripts. Neither of these ingenious attempts to recreate oral forms in print helps much with *Black Elk Speaks*, however, because of its complicated ontogeny. Black Elk's Lakota was first translated into idiomatic "Indian English" by his son, Ben Black Elk. In turn, that translation was rendered into standard English by Neihardt, and recorded

stenographically by his daughter. Later, at a geographical (and cultural) distance, Neihardt revised and edited the transcripts. The final text is so many removes from its source that the original language and gestures are irrecoverable. Thus, a scholar interested in assessing the accuracy, or faithfulness, of Neihardt's "translation" soon reaches an impasse: one cannot compare Neihardt's prose to the original Lakota, which vanished upon utterance.

Neither could Neihardt. Since he spoke no Lakota, and Black Elk spoke no English, the language of *Black Elk Speaks* was produced without being checked either against the original or by its originator. Thanks to Raymond J. DeMallie, however, one can now compare Neihardt's text to the transcripts. A look at them reveals the extent to which Neihardt is responsible for the readability and the dignified and consistent tone of *Black Elk Speaks*—confirming Dell Hymes's argument that literal translations of oral materials are generally most valuable, since "literary" patterns are more often imposed on, than discovered in, native materials. The transcripts reveal that Neihardt was editing in terms of white preconceptions about what Lakota "longhairs" *ought* to be sound like. Even DeMallie, who claims that Neihardt's free translation is likely to be "more faithful to the intended meaning than a strictly verbatim recording," concedes: "In a sense, Neihardt was already 'writing' Black Elk's story by rephrasing his words into English." For this project, Neihardt's vaunted poetic talent may have been a liability rather than an asset.

In addition to the problems inherent in bicultural collaboration, there is the perplexing visionary dimension of *Black Elk Speaks*. Of course, this is one of the features that has caused it to be prized above other Native American autobiographies. It greatly complicates the book, however, making it ghostwritten in two profoundly different and competing senses. As a visionary narrative, it is ghostwritten in the sense that it originates with the ghosts of ancestors and the spirits of the earth, rather than with a living individual. (Black Elk's authorship is that of augmentation: he is essentially a custodian and transmitter of a tribal legacy.) But it is also ghostwritten in the sense that it is conveyed to the page by a surrogate, amanuensis, collaborator—call him what you will. The vision, therefore, if not the entire narrative, is twice mediated: first from his ancestors through Black Elk, and then from Black Elk through Neihardt. (Unlike the poet, the holy man admits that the vision is ineffable and that he is an imperfect vehicle.) In spite of Black Elk's efforts to locate the narrative's authority in a communal and transcendent source, the basis for that authority has slowly but inexorably shifted: from the supernatural to the secular, the tribal to the individual, the Lakota to the English, and the visionary and oral to the written and printed.

DeMallie's publication of the transcripts also makes very clear one of Neihardt's editorial practices—the consistent suppression of Black Elk's awareness of white culture and technology. When this extends to the substitution of descriptive phrases for the names of certain cities, the result is sometimes ironic, if not comic: Omaha becomes "a very big town" and Chicago "a much bigger town." Without knowing what Black Elk's locutions were, we should not make too much of this. But Neihardt's expunging of Biblical phrases such as "many were called but few were chosen" serves to conceal crucial facts about Black Elk (facts still not known to many readers of the book): he became a

Roman Catholic early in this century and, more startling perhaps, served as a catechist and missionary to other Sioux for a period of decades thereafter.

It is never easy to identify individual contributions to a collaboratively produced text, but given the politically sensitive nature of boundaries in the history of white-Indian relations, producers and consumers of bicultural texts need to demonstrate particular tact in this regard. In this case, the efforts of scholars to determine the respective contributions of John Neihardt and Black Elk have yielded especially interesting—and damaging—revelations. For example, in an interview with Sally McCluskey shortly before he died, Neihardt declared that the narrative's very first lines were his own creation: "My friend, I am going to tell you the story of my life, as you wish; and if it were only the story of my life, I think I would not tell it." Here "Black Elk" concedes more than he knows, since his story will be told not so much *in response to* the white man's request ("as you wish") as *in the way that* Neihardt desires (or, in effect, wills).

Thus, the opening uncannily betrays white encroachment on native grounds.

In effect, what we have here is not Black Elk speaking through the passive medium of John Neihardt; it is Neihardt, self-proclaimed author of the book, speaking through the mask of Black Elk (i.e., creating a literary character by means of invented speech). While the opening words appear to be Black Elk's explanation to his collaborator of the distinctively tribal nature of the story he is about to convey, they are in fact Neihardt's justification to his reader of a feature of the text—its tribal focus—that his own editing had already diminished. Moreover, the opening passage brings the text into conformity with mainstream models: Franklin, Thoreau, and Adams—to name a few canonical American autobiographers—all begin their narratives with gambits that deflect the charge of egotism. In the case of Black Elk, the gesture is made necessary only by the preconceptions of his editor about "autobiography."

Intended to correct the impression that he had merely recorded the narrative, Neihardt's interview with McCluskey made it evident that Black Elk's speech had not been translated, but transformed-and at times invented. (Ironically, as DeMallie points out, the text's most frequently quoted passages are ones for which Neihardt has claimed authority.) It also retroactively blurred the boundary Neihardt had originally drawn—by means of the shift from "frame" to "narrative" and by the deployment of first- and second-person pronouns-between his textual space and Black Elk's. Other problematic features of the narrative suggest that what is true in one sense of the opening paragraphs is true in another of the entire text: it is an act of bicultural ventriloquism.

The ending also reveals Neihardt's designs and preconception. In claiming credit for the narrative's organization, in his interview with McCluskey, he asserted that he concluded it with the Battle of Wounded Knee because he considered that to be its most dramatic event. He also acknowledged that he shaped the whole for a white audience: "The translation—or rather the *transformation*—of what was given to me was expressed so that it could be understood by the white world." It should be remembered here that when Neihardt first approached Black Elk, he was seeking material about the Ghost Dance religion for his poem cycle, which was to end with that battle as the climax of white

conquest of the West. Though a different book resulted from his visit, the ending was the same; in this sense, at least, it was a foregone conclusion.

The effect of Neihardt's editing is to stop the clock on Lakota life, in both its personal and communal dimensions, and thus to threaten its legacy. Indeed, ending the narrative so *conclusively* with the Battle of Wounded Knee is the literary equivalent of killing off the survivors—a kind of metaphorical genocide. The conclusion encourages white readers to indulge in uncomplicated pathos at the demise of a noble (savage) way of life rather than to compel them to contemplate its tenuous survival in assimilated forms. While Neihardt translates the vision in a compelling—because preternaturally clear—prose, he fails to devise a narrative form that can present it in any but a pathetic and nostalgic way. His book does not entirely transcend that romantic cliché—the song of the dying Indian.

Neihardt's narrative speaks with a forked tongue in several senses. (In the transcripts, though Black Elk complained about the Wasichus' lies, he never uses the phrase "forked tongue.") It speaks with a cloven tongue in the way that all collaborative autobiography does because it conflates two consciousnesses (and in this case languages and cultures) in one undifferentiated voice. It also misleads by not fully acknowledging the extent and the tendencies of its editing. Thus, the book's greatest deception is its most subtle one—its pretense that its own production escaped the cultural imperialism that it condemns. The preface claims that the collaboration was mutual and egalitarian—in effect, that it took place outside of the historical conditions it describes. But the editing is clearly implicated in—and thus encodes—cultural imperialism.

Thus, finally, the text *undoes* what it says: it reenacts the process it condemns. Black Elk repeatedly refers to his present predicament, and his vision points to a distant future, but the narrative produced is largely retrospective. Black Elk's "failure" to narrate events in temporal sequence is "corrected" by Neihardt's editing, and the narrative's truncation severs the tragic past from the present. Black Elk remains marooned in time, and confined to rectangles of print surrounded by white space. His speech is preserved here as Lakota culture is preserved on the reservation: in conditions neither wholly of its making nor freely of its choosing. Neihardt is also caught in a trap of his own creation. In treating the narrative as autobiography (rather than as sacred history), he made it less tribal, but in trying to make it more traditional (editing out evidence of Black Elk's assimilation), he made it less autobiographical (a less accurate expression of Black Elk's life and being), until *Native American autobiography* is revealed to be a misnomer, if not an oxymoron.

Source: G. Thomas Couser, "Black Elk Speaks With Forked Tongue," in *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography*, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp.189-209.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

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The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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