

The Flight of Red Bird: The Life of Zitkala-Sa Study Guide

The Flight of Red Bird: The Life of Zitkala-Sa by Doreen Rappaport

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Plot Summary

The Flight of Red Bird: The Life of Zitkala-Sa by Doreen Rappaport focuses on Gertrude Bonnin, an Indian girl who grew up on a reservation. She attended white schools. She had an identity crisis, fitting in both the white and Indian worlds. She used her knowledge of both cultures to become an Indian rights crusader and writer.

Gertrude was an Indian girl born on the Yankton reservation to Tate. Tate was a mother with strongly-held Indian beliefs. Gertrude did not know her white father. Tate doted on Gertrude, showing her traditional Indian ways. Gertrude listened to the elders' stories, which taught her about morality. Upon hearing how beautiful a boarding school was, she pleaded with Tate to be sent there. Tate agreed, knowing it was all a white man's lie. Gertrude attended White's boarding school, which was run like a harsh military school. Gertrude lost her Indian identity and adopted white ways.

When she returned to the reservation as an adolescent, she went through an identity crisis. Fitting neither into the white world nor the Indian world, a lifelong identity crisis followed her. She went to a white college to Tate's displeasure, becoming an accomplished musician and orator. After her marriage to Raymond Bonnin, the couple worked on the Ute reservation, but Gertrude hated the grunt work of farm life. She missed books and music. Raymond and she fought the government for the Utes to receive their \$3 million land settlement, but to no avail. When they moved to Washington D.C., she was happy to be in a cultural place where she could enjoy music and literature again.

Gertrude began to write and submit stories to national publications signing her name as Zitkala-Sa, meaning Red Bird, which returned her to her Indian identity, known as Zitkala-Sa (not Gertrude). She served on the board of the Society of American Indians. Following her resignation, she and Raymond started their own organization called the National Council of American Indians (NCAI). She investigated the injustices of the Indian, but made no headway in changing laws since the government was still anti-Indian. Falling into despair toward the end of her life, Gertrude was poor and resented white government officials, who did not care about the plight of the American Indian. The Indians on the Yankton reservation were destitute. She felt she had nowhere to turn, feeling once again that struggle between the white and Indian world.

She died on January 26, 1938 doubting the importance of her life work, but others disagreed. Her work was of the utmost importance to Indian rights. She was a trailblazer in Indian rights and paved the way for others to follow her example.



The Yankton Reservation 1876 to 1884: Woniya Kin Tinta Kin Piyawanikiye; Wounspe Tokaheya

The Yankton Reservation 1876 to 1884: Woniya Kin Tinta Kin Piyawanikiye; Wounspe Tokaheya Summary and Analysis

The Flight of Red Bird: The Life of Zitkala-Sa by Doreen Rappaport centers on Gertrude Bonnin, a half-Indian girl who lived on a reservation with her Indian mother. Gertrude attended white schools and college, thus causing her an identity crisis. Gertrude reinvented herself as Zitkala-Sa and lived in both the white and Indian worlds.

In Woniya Kin Tinta Kin Piyawanikiye (The Breath That Brings Life to the Prairie), Tate Iyohiwin had a daughter on February 22, 1876. Tate's white husband gave the daughter the name Gertrude, but later in life, Gertrude would rename herself Zitkala-Sa, meaning Red Bird. Gertrude was one of Tate's nine children from three marriages with white men. Only five of Tate's nine children survived. Three older sons from the first marriage were grown and lived nearby. David, 12, was from Tate's second marriage. Gertrude was from her third marriage. The US government forced Tate to send David to boarding school. She signed the agreement, even though she didn't know how to read.

Tate dressed Gertrude in traditional Indian dress, such as moccasins and dresses with elaborate beadwork, and she taught Gertrude to do beadwork. They went to Greenwood, the Indian agency, where they received their government food rations. Greenwood was always loud with sawing and cutting. White men controlled everything. Tate's mother told her of the visit of famous explorers Lewis and Clark in 1804 and how her people, the Yanktons (part of the Sioux nation), welcomed Lewis and Clark. During their visit, an Indian baby was born; the explorers wrapped him in an American flag and predicted he would be a leader of his people. Fifty-four years later in 1858, the boy who was now a man, signed a treaty with the US government. He and other tribal leaders signed over 11 million acres of Indian land in exchange for 430,000 acres of land, which was reserved for the Indians. The government promised food, livestock and money, totaling \$1.6 million and then forced the Yanktons to march from their homes to the reservation from which they could not leave without a written pass. In contrast, the white hunters could do whatever they wanted, so they slaughtered all the buffalo.

In Wounspe Tokaheya (First Lessons), when Gertrude was 24, she wrote a scathing article in Atlantic Monthly. She discussed the humiliation of whites forcing Indians to adopt the white way of life. She wrote about a childhood memory of her mother. Tate and she were at the muddy stream. Tate started to cry and said to never talk about her tears, while Gertrude played freely. Tate told her the story of the paleface (white people).



Once the tribe was very happy, but the paleface stole their lands and forced them to leave. Gertrude's sister and uncle died on the walk. Tate left her third husband for beating David. Gertrude was given the last name of Tate's second husband: Simmons.

Analysis

Tate represented the strong, Indian woman. Even though the white man kept the Indian nation down, he did not keep Tate down. She fought against the white man by leaving her white husband after he beat David. Not many Indian women could have the strength to stand up to a white husband. Tate was also strong because she passed on her traditions to Gertrude. The beadwork was symbolic of traditions passed down and Tate made certain that her daughter had at least this tradition. Tate did not want Gertrude to see her cry and she said never to discuss her tears. This displayed Tate's strength, since she took the place of both a mother and father in Gertrude's life. She wanted to remain a strong figure to her daughter, so Gertrude could see what a strong, Indian woman was like.

Lewis and Clark's prediction foreshadowed the trials and tribulations of the Native American. Symbolically, the explorers wrapped the baby in an American flag. The baby grew up into a man who betrayed the Sioux nation and Native Americans as a whole. The American flag symbolized how the white influence "rubbed off" on the baby and caused him to betray his people. In other words, the American influence tainted the baby and left him poisoned with the white man's spirit for the rest of his life.



The Yankton Reservation 1876 to 1884: Tiyospaye; Winyan; Wasicun Kin Owewakankan Tawapi

The Yankton Reservation 1876 to 1884: Tiyospaye; Winyan; Wasicun Kin Owewakankan Tawapi Summary and Analysis

In Tiyospaye (Social Unit), Gertrude and Tate lived in a tiyospaye, or social unit. In Indian society, oral tradition served as winter education for children as elders told stories to teach morality. Gertrude loved the Iktomi stories the most. Iktomi was greedy, helpful and creative. An elder told the story of Prairie Flower and her ill husband, Cloud Elk. They had stayed behind when others left the reservation and had nothing to eat. Prairie Flower saw a hunter kill a buffalo and he promised to give her meat, saying he helped the sick and the poor, but he only gave her a scrap. The next day, the same thing happened. Prairie Flower talked to the hunter about his lies. She said Cloud Elk, a medicine man, would beat his drum and scare the buffalo away. The hunter did not return. Prairie Flower and Cloud Elk set out and found the Man of Empty Words. After he ran out of his tipi, they lived in it and ate his food. When they ran out of food, Prairie Flower went to the forest and found the Man hiding under a log. He said to open the bag in his tipi and a white pony would come out. Then a buffalo would come out. After that, she should close the bag. He told her Cloud Elk must ride the pony and hunt the buffalo. That way, they would always have food. She did this. They were happy and ate well. But then Iktomi visited. He opened the bag wide. All the buffalo came out and stampeded through the prairie. This was how the buffalo came to live on the plains.

In Winyan (Woman), Tate taught Gertrude how to do beadwork. Gertrude tried simple patterns, then more complex patterns. She spent summer days eating sweet root and playing with her friends. They impersonated their mothers. It was a happy time in Gertrude's life.

In Waiscun Kin Owewakankan Tawapi (White Men's Lies), Richard Henry Pratt, a captain in the US Army, wanted to remove Indian infants from their homes and transfer them to civilized (white) homes. He thought the Indians were savage. This idea started to become popular. Recruiters took children as young as four years-old. Federal agents withheld food rations, thereby forcing Indian parents to give up their children to boarding schools run by whites. Agents kidnapped children and/or dragged them from their homes. Gertrude said her Indian friend Judewin had told her the boarding school was beautiful. The palefaces told her so, but Tate said it was a white man's lie. An agent visited with an interpreter and told Gertrude that she could ride a train and the boarding school was in Red Apple Country. She could have as many apples as she wanted. Tate



said nothing. Gertrude wanted to go. A few days later, Gertrude left for boarding school, excited for Red Apple Country.

Analysis

The story of Prairie Flower and Cloud Elk symbolized the white man's greediness. The Man With Empty Words symbolized the white man. He made promises, especially to the sick and to the poor, but he never kept them. The Indian woman, Prairie Flower, called his bluff. She symbolized Gertrude in later life. This story foreshadowed Gertrude's time at the boarding school and in white society. Gertrude would eventually reinvent herself as Zitkala-Sa, an Indian who fought against the white man, such as Prairie Flower did with the Man of Empty Words.

The white man fed Gertrude and Judewin lies. Unfortunately, Tate had no power over them. She exerted power by leaving her husband, but she knew the white man would eventually take her daughter. Gertrude represented innocence because she thought the palefaces were truthful. In her innocent state, she went off to boarding school, excited for Red Apple Country. This foreshadowed a loss of innocence because she would discover what boarding school run by whites actually entailed. She would lose her innocence very quickly.



Red Apple Country 1884 to 1887: The Journey; The First Day at School

Red Apple Country 1884 to 1887: The Journey; The First Day at School Summary and Analysis

In *The Journey*, Gertrude realized what she had done after she got on the train and she nearly passed out. She cried once she realized she had left her mother. Whites stared at her and the other Indian children. She arrived at the White's Manual Labor Institute in Wabash, Indiana. A white woman tossed her around like a doll. Gertrude hated it and cried. She wanted her mother. She slept in a bed with an older girl, who soothed Gertrude to sleep.

In *The First Day at School*, the land of Red Apples was bitter cold. She lived in a harsh building and the children had to wear shoes, not moccasins. The girls had to wear stiff dresses. Their hair was cut. Judewin said the staff would cut long hair. Gertrude's mother said only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair cut off. Mourners wore short hair too. Gertrude would not submit and stole away to the dormitory to hide under a bed. The staff found her, tied her to a chair and cut off her long braids. Gertrude's spirit was lost. Her Indian identity was stripped. Loneliness consumed her and the other children. They stopped eating, wet their beds or had diarrhea. A few children sneaked out and posted letters, begging to come home. But going home was not allowed.

Analysis

The land of Red Apples represented the land of the white man. It promised many things to the Indians, but once the Indians got there, everything was taken away. This was represented in Gertrude's identity being stripped by the staff. Her long braids were cut. She lost her spirit and power. The cutting of her braids symbolized a submission to the white man. Gertrude was fully immersed in a white man's world. There was no way out. The school served as a microcosm for America. It symbolized the Indians' plight as the persecuted upon their own land.



Red Apple Country 1884 to 1887: No!; The Stories of the Bible

Red Apple Country 1884 to 1887: No!; The Stories of the Bible Summary and Analysis

In No!, Gertrude and her two playmates Judewin and Totowin, played in the snow drifts. The headmistress did not want them to do this. Judewin understood some English and told Gertrude and Totowin that they should not play in the snow, but they did it anyway. The headmistress called Totowin in and beat her. Gertrude was horrified because Indian parents taught by example, not by physical abuse. At White's boarding school, there were cruel and unusual punishments such as whippings and solitary confinement. When Gertrude was finally able to understand some English, she got her revenge. A matron ordered her to mash turnips. Gertrude mashed them so hard she broke the bottom of the jar. At dinner that night, no turnips were served. Gertrude won a small victory.

White's was like a military camp. The children went to school then worked until nine p.m. They had to learn the Bible. The feds did not give White's enough money or staff, so the older boys worked as farmers. The girls sewed, washed, and baked. After dinner, they had lectures against drinking and gambling. Sunday was the only day of rest and going home to see parents was forbidden. The children were sent to live with white families, where they were slaves. To receive money, White's made the students perform native dances.

In The Stories of the Bible, the portrayal of the devil terrified Gertrude. She had a horrible dream where the devil came to get her mother and an Indian guest in Tate's home. Gertrude ran around, but Tate and the guest did not understand what was happening. The next morning when Gertrude awoke, she scratched out the devil's eyes in a Bible.

Indians did not have immunity to European diseases. White's was unsanitary. Five children slept in one bed and there was no medicine. Many students were sent home due to chronic health problems, while several died. Their bodies were not sent home for burial.

Analysis

Physical abuse of the children represented the abuse of Indian society as a whole. Gertrude was horrified by the abuse, but she did not know how to defend herself. The only way to do so was to win a small victory, so she mashed the turnips and broke the glass. This action represented her defiance against the white man. It also represented the beginning of her Indian spirit of Zitkala-Sa. Gertrude began to see the injustices the

Indians endured as she formed a rebellion in her head. This foreshadowed Gertrude's later life as Zitkala-Sa, a warrior for Indian justice.

The devil symbolized the white man. Now that Gertrude had lived amongst the palefaces, she knew what they were like. In the dream, her mother and her guest did not fully comprehend the evil of the white man. But Gertrude comprehended. She began to lose her innocence as she saw the white man for what he was: the devil in disguise.



Between Two Worlds 1887 to 1902: The Returned Student; Two Contests; Becoming a Teacher

Between Two Worlds 1887 to 1902: The Returned Student; Two Contests; Becoming a Teacher Summary and Analysis

In *The Returned Student*, in 1887 after three years at White's, Gertrude, now 11 years-old, returned home to her mother. Nineteen months later, she went to another boarding school in Nebraska. In 1890, she returned home as an adolescent. She felt caught between the world of the Indian and the white man. Gertrude did not know who she should be. This identity crisis was common after Indian children attended boarding school and returned home.

On December 15, 1890, police murdered Sitting Bull, a great Indian chief. December 29th, over 300 Indians were massacred at Wounded Knee.

Gertrude loved to learn. She was a good singer and storyteller. She returned to teach at White's in 1891. She observed how the Quaker teachers lived and how important female equality was to them. In 1893, at 17 years-old, Gertrude was an agent who separated Indian children from their parents. In the 1895 graduation speech, she spoke about women's rights. A Quaker woman offered to pay for Gertrude's education at Earlham College in Indiana. Gertrude accepted.

In *Two Contests*, David's wife, Victoria, strongly disapproved of Gertrude going to college. Tate was upset too and begged her to return home, but Gertrude ignored her request. At Earlham College, Gertrude entered an oratorical contest in which she told the story of how the Indians shared with the white man, but cruelty occurred. In her speech, she said Indians deserved equal rights and she won first place. She made the same speech at a college-wide competition in which she was the only woman and Indian. Someone rudely held up a white flag with an Indian girl on it. She won a prize and the white flag dropped in defeat. Gertrude thought of Tate, who was still angry at her. Gertrude got malaria and recuperated with a family in a nearby town.

In *Becoming a Teacher*, Gertrude could not go home because Tate would say she lost her health and freedom due to the white man. Gertrude knew it was true. Upon recovery in 1897, she taught at the most famous Indian boarding school in the US in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Richard Henry Pratt walked in and said she was the little Indian who created excitement among college orators.

Analysis



Gertrude endured an identity crisis throughout her life. At school, she felt strongly for her Indian identity, but after three years, her identity became skewed. This loss represented how the white man succeeded in coercing the Indian identity out of children. The white man's motivations were to continue with this idea. However, for Gertrude, her motivations were confusing. Did she want to be Indian or white?

Before she reconnected with her Indian identity, Gertrude connected with her female identity. She learned from the Quakers about women's rights. She made a speech about women's rights. This motivation for equality led to her motivation for Indian equality, since she made a speech about Indian rights two times. She could finally start to connect with her Indian identity, but through the world of white college. Gertrude's motivation was to fight for Indian rights in white society. Her other motivation was to resurrect her Indian identity by reconciling with her mother. But Gertrude must step out of the white world in order to do so. This foreshadowed Gertrude's possible homecoming to the reservation.



Between Two Worlds 1887 to 1902: A Second Visit Home; Realizations; Love

Between Two Worlds 1887 to 1902: A Second Visit Home; Realizations; Love Summary and Analysis

In *A Second Visit Home*, Gertrude returned to the Yankton Reservation to recruit students. She was 21 and had not been home in six years. Tate welcomed her. Gertrude learned David lost his job at the Indian Bureau to a white man. David's education was a waste. They did not have money for food. White robbers lived near the village. The government divided up tribal land and gave the infertile land to the Indians. Only Indians who accepted the white culture received land. The government forced the Indians to farm. David farmed and was lucky to have prosperous land. The tribe's unity was destroyed.

In *Realizations*, Gertrude returned to Carlisle to teach in fall 1897. She met Thomas Marshall, a Lakota, who was a sophomore at Dickinson College. They became engaged. Gertrude received recognition as a violinist. An award-winning photographer took photos of her dressed like a white woman. Gertrude understood she had given up her Indian identity and got upset. She resigned as a teacher and studied music at the Boston Conservatory. A Quaker woman supported her financially. Boston stimulated Gertrude. Thomas died of measles. Her Quaker sponsor no longer supported her. Gertrude used the pen as a weapon. She wrote a story in *Atlantic Monthly*. She signed it: Zitkala-Sa, meaning Red Bird, partially reclaiming her Indian identity.

In *Love*, in January 1901, it was her third year in Boston, where she studied music and wrote Indian stories. She met Carlos Montezuma, an Indian doctor who wanted to marry her. She needed "artificial things" such as books, music and city life. But she needed tribal life too. In this chapter, Zitkala-Sa's letters to Carlos are both loving and angry. She felt she would lose her identity again if she got married. Zitkala-Sa met Raymond Telephouse Bonnin, a fellow Yankton from her reservation. Zitkala-Sa was 26; Thomas was 22. She dumped Carlos via letter. On August 10, 1902, Zitkala-Sa and Raymond were married. They headed west to a Utah reservation.

Analysis

The motivations of the palefaces became clearer. They wanted the Indian adults to also identify with white culture, such as they had done with the Indian children. The motivation to move the Indians out of their land was apparent. As the photographer took photos of Zitkala-Sa dressed as a white woman, Zitkala-Sa realized her motivations had changed as well. She wanted to feel Indian again. She wanted to reclaim herself as an Indian. She chose the name Red Bird, which symbolized a departure from her white self. She was now a red-skinned Indian, free to fly wherever she wanted, like a bird.



Zitkala-Sa had a hard time identifying with Carlos. Her motivations wavered through her letters, which displayed both love and anger. Through these letters, she began to work out her identity issues. She had two men in love with her: Carlos, an Indian who did not like the reservation vs. Raymond, who was strongly attached to the reservation. She picked the latter, thus showing that her motivation had fully changed to identifying as an Indian. She was now Zitkala-Sa in both her personal life and writing career. She was no longer Gertrude.



The Uintah Reservation 1903 to 1916: Mrs. And Mrs. Raymond Bonnin

The Uintah Reservation 1903 to 1916: Mrs. And Mrs. Raymond Bonnin Summary and Analysis

In Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Bonnin, Zitkala-Sa and Raymond moved to the Uintah Reservation in Utah to teach. The Indian children were still treated badly. The government ignored requests for help. Malnutrition was a problem with the Utes, who once killed and grew their own fresh food. Now they relied on government rations of unhealthy food. Zitkala-Sa and Raymond had a three year-old son named Ohiya. Raymond fought for the Utes and questioned the white man. He wanted the government to give the Utes money for the land given to the government. The government had taken two million acres from the Indians. Zitkala-Sa chose the right man and was happy, but three years later, she was unhappy.

There was no justice for the Indians. The Utes won a settlement for \$3 million for their land, but did not receive any of it and probably never would. Zitkala-Sa hated the drudgery of farming. She missed books and music and they had no money. On the reservation, gambling and alcoholism were rampant, even among small children. She wrote to a Benedictine priest, who was caring and caused her to convert to Catholicism, to come and convert the Indians on the Ute reservation. He did not come. She wanted to leave.

Analysis

The plight of the Indian worsened. However, Zitkala-Sa separated herself from the Utes on the reservation. She felt she was different from her fellow Indians who had drinking and gambling problems. This symbolized that Zitkala-Sa still identified with the white man. She still wanted white things like books and music. The reservation did not satisfy her; she craved to move back to a cultural place or city. Though Zitkala-Sa reclaimed her Indian identity, the white part of her emerged in this society. Thus, wherever she was, the opposite identity emerged. For example, in White's boarding school, she held onto her Indian identity. Therefore, Zitkala-Sa was still caught in an identity crisis and did not know how to relate to her Indian people.



The Uintah Reservation 1903 to 1916: Awakenings

The Uintah Reservation 1903 to 1916: Awakenings Summary and Analysis

In *Awakenings*, in 1913, Zitkala-Sa and Raymond were in a white settlement called Vernal (25 miles from the Ute reservation). Mormon families came to see an opera, *The Sun Dance*, written by William Hanson, Vernal's white music teacher, and Zitkala-Sa. The plot was that an Indian man, Ohiya, must complete the sun dance to prove his worthiness to his beloved. Zitkala-Sa made sure the lyrics were Indian. Indians donated costumes and danced in the sun dance scene. The opera was a success.

Raymond had troubles with F. Baker, the greedy agent at the Indian Bureau. Rehearsals took away Zitkala-Sa from the family and Raymond accused her of having an affair. She stormed out. Baker made up a terrible lie, saying Raymond beat Zitkala-Sa, which was a crime in Utah. The rumor spread in the town. However, the marriage survived.

She put Ohiya in a Benedictine boarding school in Illinois. She returned to Boston and thought about Carlos. He started the Society of American Indians with only Indians on the board. Carlos was visionary. She wrote to him, begging for forgiveness of how she dumped him, and asked to be a part of the Society. Within a year, Zitkala-Sa served on the board and felt a hope amongst Indians. She wrote a poem, signing it Zitkala-Sa. She was elected secretary of the Society. They had to move to Washington D.C., which made both she and Raymond happy. She could have the cultural and Indian life she desired. He could study law.

Analysis

Zitkala-Sa's motivation was to re-immense into white culture. She chose to collaborate with a white man on an opera seen by white Mormons. This sense of white culture gave her the cultural joy she most craved. On the reservation, the Indians could not identify with this joy. But she needed the white man to feel fulfilled. However, her motivation also was to integrate the Indian with the white man, since she had Indians dance in the sun dance scene. This was an unprecedented collaboration as whites and Indians worked together. This symbolized Zitkala-Sa's success in bringing both of her identifying cultures together in peace and for the common good.



Washington D.C. 1917 to 1938: The Peyote Controversy; Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians; Tricksters

Washington D.C. 1917 to 1938: The Peyote Controversy; Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians; Tricksters Summary and Analysis

In *The Peyote Controversy*, on February 1, 1918, Zitkala-Sa testified before a senate sub-committee. Raymond volunteered for World War I and was stationed in a southern base. He and other Indians felt patriotic, even though they were not considered citizens. Richard Henry Pratt testified on Zitkala-Sa's behalf; he was a good ally, though they did not agree on everything. Peyote was a small cactus. Indians ate it for religious ceremonies for medicinal and visionary powers. It helped with tuberculosis when the Indians did not have medicine. Zitkala-Sa passionately protested the use of peyote. She was not a peyote expert, but she claimed it was addictive and swindlers used it to swindle money from the Utes. She wanted peyote outlawed. Mr. James Mooney was an ethnologist who studied peyote for years and said it was fine. The senators kept peyote legal. But by 1923, 14 states had anti-peyote laws. In 1919, the Society of American Indians elected a peyote majority leader as their president. Zitkala-Sa refused to continue as secretary and treasurer because she would not have any say.

In *Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians*, Osages were the richest people in the world. But in actuality, the Indians owned the land, while white guardians controlled the money. They stole the money, kept it to themselves, and forced the Indians to live in extreme poverty. Zitkala-Sa and others documented how the white guardians swindled the Osage Indians out of money in a document entitled *Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians*. For example, one Indian woman was entitled to \$15,000 a year, but her white guardian only gave her \$15 a week. The woman went to court, but her case was dismissed in a half hour. Zitkala-Sa's report shocked many, but the laws did not change. Three percent of Osage Indians were murdered and their land was given to white guardians, not the victims' family. Zitkala-Sa did not attend the final hearing out of fear of being murdered.

In *Tricksters*, the Utes had not received their \$3 million settlement. Other Indians were hopeful, but Zitkala-Sa knew they would not receive it. She had seen too much in Congress. She and Raymond formed their own organization called the National Council of American Indians (NCAI). She was always on guard with governmental officials. She remembered the Iktomi story where he tricked ducks into his blanket. He cooked them and then wolves tricked Iktomi and ate all of his food. In Washington, she learned how to play the game, dressing up as Indian when necessary. She said she was full-blooded Indian (her father was white) and Sitting Bull was her grandfather (he was not), but she



knew whites lumped all Indians together. She was a defender of the Sioux warrior tradition by her mighty pen.

Analysis

Peyote represented something that Zitkala-Sa could not control. She controlled her identity and she controlled bringing whites and Indians together in the opera. She also was in control of her dual careers in Indian rights and writing. But peyote was out of her control. Even though she was not an expert on it, she felt passionately enough to fight against it. Her actions represented her want for control over both the white man and the Indian. She desired to overpower the white man in government and the Indian in his traditions. She could not have it both ways. It was impossible to control both societies.

The Iktomi story symbolized Zitkala-Sa's roots. Though she fought for Indian rights in Congress, she remembered her morality through the Indian elders' stories. Her Indian ancestry remained within her and even taught her how to deal with the white man years later. These stories taught her how to stay motivated to play the white man's game. Her motivation was to do everything possible to make the white man listen to her, even if it meant lying. Therefore, Zitkala-Sa was untrustworthy as well, but she represented the good of society, not the evil. She fought her battles with sincerity and with the best intentions for her Indian brethren.



Washington D.C. 1917 to 1938: Despair; Red Bird's Flight

Washington D.C. 1917 to 1938: Despair; Red Bird's Flight Summary and Analysis

In *Despair*, Zitkala-Sa and Raymond traveled for five months of the year from reservation to reservation documenting Indian injustices. They lived the rest of the year in Washington D.C. She was very ill with the flu. Raymond, Ohiya and his wife were sick too. Ohiya's children were undisciplined. Zitkala-Sa and Raymond took in Ohiya's two children, but they were too out of control. She was too tired and sick to be a mother again. She and Raymond were poor. Whites were not donating to the NCAI. Indians could not pay their \$1 membership fees. In government, whites were still anti-Indian. Zitkala-Sa wanted to leave D.C. and return to the reservation, where her best memories were. But Indians at the reservation were destitute. Zitkala-Sa felt lost.

In *Red Bird's Flight*, on January 26, 1938, Zitkala-Sa died in despair. She questioned her life's work, but attendants at her funeral praised her. She worked relentlessly to help the Native Americans. She made a lot of strides, including in 1950, the government finally awarded the Utes their \$3 million settlement. She continued to search for a place to land. She hated the greed and competition of the white world, but she loved books and music. Zitkala-Sa was a trailblazer for Indian rights, who paved the way for other Indian rights activists.

Analysis

The name Red Bird symbolized Zitkala-Sa's life and afterlife. In life, she did not know where to fit in. She wavered between the white and Indian worlds. Both worlds fulfilled her in some way. She could not just stay in one. She flew from one world to another, just like a bird who flies from place to place. In her afterlife, she perhaps still searched for the perfect, the middle ground. Zitkala-Sa flew like a bird, searching for this place, most likely as a spirit who wandered the reservation and the cultural streets of Washington D.C. or Boston. It was Zitkala-Sa's hope to find this perfection one day, and in the afterlife as her Indian spirit lived on, she might have a chance of contentment.



Characters

Zitkala-Sa or Gertrude Bonnin

Zitkala-Sa or Gertrude Bonnin was an Indian girl who grew up on the Yankton reservation. Gertrude was half Indian, since her father was white. She grew up surrounded by her mother's love and affection. She learned morality by listening to the elders' stories. Her best memories were of eating sweet root with her friends and playing in the fields. After attending boarding schools run by whites, Gertrude had an identity crisis. She was a confused adolescent who did not know whether to fit into the white world or Indian world. She respected her Indian upbringing, but she loved the white world of books and music. She was an accomplished musician and orator amongst whites. When she was in the white world, she yearned for her tribal Indian world. When she was in the Indian world, she yearned for the literature and music of the white world, which she referred to as her "artificial things." She was never fully at home in either world. She wrote stories for magazines and spoke about Indian rights. She signed her name Zitkala-Sa, meaning Red Bird. Gertrude returned to her Indian identity by reinventing herself as Zitkala-Sa.

In her marriage, she loved her husband Raymond and their son, Ohiya. She had a dual career as a writer and Indian activist. She loved the cultural world of Washington D.C. and hated the grunt work of farming life on the reservation. Zitkala-Sa was a strong woman who fought for Indian rights in Congress. She knew how to play the white man's game as she dressed in native costume for senate hearings. Her spirit saddened because she felt she had accomplished nothing. This despair led to Zitkala-Sa's death as she died in sorrow. But in reality, she greatly helped the Indian cause.

Tate

Tate was an Indian woman from the Yankton reservation. She was Gertrude's mother. She adored and loved Gertrude and taught her about traditional Indian ways. Keeping to Indian customs was important to Tate. She wanted to preserve the Indian way of life. She did not speak English or read in English and kept to the reservation her entire life. She did not understand the world of whites seeing them as mistrustful and greedy. The white man was a liar and the enemy. When the white man took away Gertrude for boarding school, it broke Tate's heart. But Tate was a strong woman who did not cry. Gertrude only saw Tate cry once and Tate told her to never speak of the tears. Tate wanted to set a strong, female example for Gertrude.

Tate did not understand why Gertrude chose to attend white college. She showed her great displeasure, but Gertrude did not come home. Despite Tate's mistrust of the white man, she married and had nine children with three white husbands. The last one she left because he beat her son. Tate showed strength as an Indian woman or woman of the time period by leaving an abusive man. Gertrude learned her strength from Tate.



Tate had a rebellious spirit and it was Gertrude who learned to act out on the rebellious spirit through writing and speaking about the plight of the Indian. Tate taught Gertrude how to be a proud Indian and to always mistrust the white man, two things Gertrude carried throughout her life.

Judewin

Judewin was Gertrude's friend on the Yankton reservation and at White's boarding school.

Totowin

Totowin was Gertrude's friend at White's boarding school. The headmistress beat her for playing in the snow.

David

David was Gertrude's half-brother. He was from Tate's second marriage. David went to boarding school, but he returned to the reservation.

Victoria

Victoria was David's wife. She disapproved of Gertrude attending a white college.

Richard Henry Pratt

Richard Henry Pratt was an army captain who believed in the idea of taking Indian infants away from their parents. The children would be sent to boarding schools run by whites, so they would have the savage taken out of them. Later on in life, Pratt and Gertrude would work together for Indian rights.

Thomas Marshall

Thomas Marshall was Gertrude's first fiancé. He died of the measles.

Carlos Montezuma

Carlos Montezuma was Gertrude's second boyfriend. He loved her and wanted to marry her. She wavered, eventually saying no.



Raymond Bonnin

Raymond Bonnin was Gertrude's husband. Raymond fought for Indian rights. He acted as a lawyer. He loved Gertrude through the ups and downs of marriage and fighting for the Indian.



Objects/Places

Tipi

A tipi was an Indian tent. Indians used it as a home.

Reservation

A reservation was the land the government reserved for the Indians. The rest of the land went to white people.

Moccasins

Moccasins were soft, leather shoes worn by Indians.

Greenwood

Greenwood was the Indian agency where the Indians of the Yankton reservation received their food rations.

Yanktons

Yanktons were Indians on the Yankton reservation.

Wigwam

A wigwam was a domed and rounded shelter used by Indians.

White's boarding school

White's boarding school was where Gertrude attended school for three years. It was run like a harsh military school, basically treating Indian children like slaves and stripping them of their Indian identity.

Earlham College

Earlham College was a white college that Gertrude attended. She entered oratorical competitions there and won.



Uintah reservation

Uintah reservation was where Gertrude and Raymond lived after marriage. It was a destitute community of Indians. Drinking and gambling were rampant. The Utes won a \$3 million land settlement against the government, but did not receive the money until many years later.

Peyote

Peyote was a small cactus. Indians ate peyote for their religious ceremonies and medicinal purposes. According to some people, including Gertrude, peyote was an addictive drug. To others, it was harmless.

Themes

Identity

One of the major themes of this book was identity. Gertrude struggled with identity when she entered White's boarding school. Up until then, she had a solid identity as an Indian child on the Yankton reservation. She loved Indian dress, traditions and stories. When she attended White's, she first lost her identity when her braids were cut. Indians with short hair were prisoners or mourners in the Indian culture. Therefore, Gertrude felt a great shame in cutting her hair. It was the first step in losing her Indian identity. At school she learned the white way of doing things. She loved books and music, what she referred to as "artificial things." When she returned home, Gertrude did not know her identity. She was not fully Indian anymore, but she was not white. Gertrude was in the midst of an identity crisis.

Gertrude began to miss her Indian life and went back to the reservation for a visit. She missed her mother and nature. She reinvented herself as Zitkala-Sa, the Indian warrior who used her pen as a weapon. She started a life of Indian activism and writing about the Indian plight. Yet, she still loved books and music, or the things of the white world. When she was on the reservation, she yearned for a cultural city. When she was in the city, she yearned for the natural surroundings of the reservation. Zitkala-Sa never felt fully at home in one place. She struggled with finding an identity, but she never found it. Her identity was both in the white world and in the Indian world.

Injustice

One of the major themes of this book was injustice. The American Indian faced many injustices against their people and culture. When Gertrude was a little girl, the government forced Indian parents to send their children to boarding schools run by white people. Once in school, the children were slaves, forced to study and work under white supervision until nine p.m. The school staff punished the children with whipping, paddling and solitary confinement in the basement. The Indian children had no voice and no rights to fight against this injustice. They endured their time in boarding school. When the children graduated and moved back to the reservation, they saw more injustices. Whites stripped the American Indian of land, nature and pride. Indians could no longer feed their own families with fresh buffalo meat and vegetables. The government forced them to subsist on fatty government rations. They took away the Indians' land, reserving only thousands of acres for the Indians, when they originally had millions.

Throughout the book, Zitkala-Sa fought for Indian rights, but she was in despair most of the time because the white government would not change their laws. She said, "There was no justice for Indians" (Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Bonnin, p. 113). The Ute reservation won a land settlement against the government for \$3 million, but the government did not



pay the money. White guardians stole the money of the Osage Indians and left them in poverty. In Congress, whites did not listen to Zitkala-Sa's pleas. Zitkala-Sa died in despair as the injustice of her people consumed her.

Power Struggle

One of the major themes of this book was power struggle. At White's boarding school, Gertrude was involved in a power struggle against the white staff. She found out they would cut her braids. She ran and hid under a bed, until the staff found her. She began to lose her freedom and power. This made Gertrude angry. She yearned for her power back. One day, she mashed turnips so hard, she broke the jar. The mistress got angry, but the turnips were not served at dinner that night. Gertrude had won a small battle. She had taken a bit of the power of the white staff by controlling dinner plans. It was a small victory for Gertrude in this power struggle, but it felt important to her.

When Gertrude entered college, she was the only Indian student. She entered oratorical contests. These orations gave Gertrude her voice. The power in her voice was undeniable because she won both competitions. She was a natural storyteller, who used her speaking power over whites. As she grew into an Indian activist, she used this voice against the white government in Congress. This was the ultimate power struggle for Gertrude. She sought justice for the Indian, but whites were in power in every facet of government. She had to use her voice to gain power back. Unfortunately, she did not have much success in doing so. She won small victories. More importantly, Zitkala-Sa's power emanated after her death, since she paved the way for other Indian activists, who fought in the power struggle against whites and won.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of the book was both first person and third person. The perspective of first person was the re-creation of Zitkala-Sa's voice. Doreen Rappaport, the author, envisioned Zitkala-Sa's life and wrote as if she was Zitkala-Sa in a first person voice. This gave the book a fiction-like narrative. The other narrative in the book showed Zitkala-Sa's original writing, which included her original letters, speeches, stories and memories. Her original writing appeared in the first person perspective. Therefore, the reader received a view of Rappaport's re-creation of Zitkala-Sa's voice, which was one first person perspective. The second perspective was Zitkala-Sa's original first person voice in her writings. Both voices were marked clearly by different fonts. These two first person perspectives gave the reader a wide scope of Zitkala-Sa's life. The reader received a glimpse into the details and descriptions of the two worlds of Zitkala-Sa: the greedy white world vs. the suffering Indian world. Without these details, the reader would not have had the entire perspective of the injustices and victories Zitkala-Sa had.

The final perspective was an omniscient, third person perspective. When the author wanted to relay facts of Zitkala-Sa's life, she used the third person perspective. This perspective was very fact-oriented and traditional to the nonfiction voice. It differed from the first person perspectives, which read similar to fiction and gave personal details and descriptions of her life. The third person perspective was necessary to display an authoritative voice to relay facts and the sequence of events in Zitkala-Sa's life.

Tone

The tone of the book tended to be formal. The sentences were constructed in a manner that was common to formal writing in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Although formal, the reader could easily read the narrative. The author wrote in a grammatically perfect way, adhering to the complex rules of grammar. The tone, in fact, added depth to the book because it allowed a reader a glimpse into Zitkala-Sa's two worlds: the world of the greedy man vs. the world of the suffering Indian. The tone differed depending on perspective. For example, Zitkala-Sa's re-created first person sounded personal. In Zitkala-Sa's original first person writing, the first person sounded deeply personal, since the reader spied on her most personal memories and letters. In her love letters to Carlos, for example, the reader observed a tone of love, but also of anger.

The tone of the book was personal, but when the author needed to relay the facts, the tone shifted to impersonal. The author relayed dates, events and explained situations in Zitkala-Sa's life or that were important to the Indian plight. This was when the tone was most impersonal and formal. For example, the author explained the events of the Ute land settlement and Osage Indian document in detail. The tone of the book overall was



one of despair. The plight of the Indian only worsened. As the author conveyed Zitkala-Sa's feelings of despair before her death, the reader felt this disparaging tone as well.

Structure

The book was comprised of five parts. Within those five parts were two to six chapters. Overall, there were 22 chapters, each approximately 10 pages long. Each part had a name that reflected a time period in Zitkala-Sa's life. Each chapter had a name that referred to some action or event within the book that foreshadowed what the reader was about to read. The chapters tended to be short and descriptive in which large amounts of time could pass between paragraphs. When the perspective shifted from Rappaport's re-created first person to Zitkala-Sa's first person to omniscient third person, the font changed and extra lines were added for each shift. This made it easy for the reader to shift perspectives. Interspersed throughout the book were historical photos of Zitkala-Sa, the boarding school children, and other characters.

The plot of the book was simple. Gertrude Bonnin was born a half-Indian girl on the Yankton reservation. She went to boarding school run by whites, causing an identity crisis. Gertrude reinvented herself as Zitkala-Sa and became an Indian rights activist.

The book's pace was moderate. It became a bit slow at times when shifting perspectives. However, the book was an easy read and the plot engrossed the reader into the Indian world of the late 1800s to early 1900s. The story line was linear with Zitkala-Sa's memories interspersed and some back story. The book entertained as a whole.

Quotes

"You must never talk about my tears." Wounspe Tokaheya, p. 10

"Gertrude's mother prepared her to be a traditional Yankton woman." Winyan, p. 21

"Gertrude had no idea what life would be like at boarding school, or that the school was over 700 miles from home." Wasicun Kin Owewakankan Tawapi, p. 28

"Then I lost my spirit." The First Day of School, p. 37

"'Killing the Indian' in Gertrude had begun." The First Day of School, p. 37

"Nearing fifteen, she was in emotional turmoil, surrounded between two cultures." The Returned Student, p. 52

"My daughter, beware of the paleface." A Second Visit Home, p. 76

"Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and the Great Spirit." Realizations, p. 82

"Where I am to go or when and what I am to do, no one knows." Love, p. 99

"There was no justice for Indians." Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Bonnin, p. 113

"She signed the poem Zitkala-Sa, again claiming her public Indian identity and her individuality." Awakenings, p. 124

"Red Bird's flight was never completed." Red Bird's Flight, p. 167



Topics for Discussion

How is morality portrayed in the Yankton tribe? What lessons did Zitkala-Sa learn about morality? Who was the most moral person in this book and why? Was Zitkala-Sa moral even though she lied about her family history?

Was Zitkala-Sa able to reclaim her identity? How did she define her own identity? How did she define the identity of the Indian vs. the white man?

What Indian traditions did Tate pass down to Zitkala-Sa? Did they define Zitkala-Sa? How did these traditions shape and influence her? Why was she most attracted to the tradition of the beadwork?

How was injustice portrayed in this book? How did it change your view of the plight of the Native American? Were there any injustices against the white man? If so, what were they?

Describe Zitkala-Sa's loss of innocence. When and how did she lose her innocence? Did she ever get it back? Why was innocence such an important trait to an Indian child? Was it the same loss with white children?

How did Zitkala-Sa relieve her anger and frustration? How did writing help her emotions? Did her writing serve a purpose or was it detrimental? How did her writing change your view of the Indian plight?

Doreen Rappaport, the author, recreated Zitkala-Sa's history through first person narrative. Did you find this effective or distracting as a reader? Were the shifts in perspective too jarring or did they make the reading experience enjoyable? Did Rappaport do a believable job of recreating the life of Zitkala-Sa? Explain your answer.