



JOHN G.
NEIHARDT
STATE HISTORIC SITE

LESSON PLAN: Black Elk Speaks, by John G. Neihardt
Chapter 10: “Walking the Black Road”
Includes: Summary, Study Questions, Writing Prompts

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Summary:

Life for the Lakota and their allies becomes significantly more difficult after the Battle of the Little Bighorn—mainly because of an escalating military presence, inadequate food, insufficient grass for the horses, an approaching winter, and disagreements among the Indians themselves.

As conditions deteriorate, some Natives travel to the agencies. Others, including Crazy Horse, are defiant. Black Elk’s band travels east, at first, setting fire to the grass so that the soldiers’ horses will starve. Sitting Bull and Gall escape to Canada.

As the Indian resolve to fight weakens, Black Elk hears that the Black Hills and “all of the country” to the West has been sold. Violent incidents further threaten the Natives’ ability to survive.

Black Elk declares that each attack by the soldiers violates the treaty with Red Cloud made some eight years earlier. First is the Battle of Slim Buttes, followed by assaults on Dull Knife and the Cheyenne at Willow Creek and on Black Elk's own band near the Tongue River.

Hearing reports that Shoshone, Crow, and even some Lakota and Shyela, will join the Wasichus in subduing his people, Black Elk is confused. He wonders if his great vision is "only a queer dream." Compounding his confusion, and sorrow, Black Elk also learns that his people will join others at the agency in the spring and that even Crazy Horse will surrender.

A description of Crazy Horse's entry into Camp Robinson—the lines of soldiers and Lakota police—foretells an ominous fate for the great Lakota leader. Black Elk is now fourteen.

Study questions:

1. Black Elk's father gives two reasons for saying that "all the fighting has not done any good." Identify those reasons.
2. Describe the picture on the big rock bluff. What do some Native people believe is true about this picture?
3. Dull Knife and Sitting Bull escape to a certain place. Identify this place.
4. Write a one-page summary of Dull Knife's life.
5. Write a one-page summary of Sitting Bull's life.
6. Crook's soldiers attack a village at Slim Buttes. Which important Minneconjou leader do they kill there?
7. According to Black Elk what did the Red Cloud treaty promise?
8. A certain kind of tree is sometimes used to feed the ponies. Which kind?
9. Black Elk thinks that something may have been better than selling the Black Hills. Identify something.
10. During the attack by soldiers at Willow Creek, the Cheyenne men under Dull Knife only wear one thing—even though the weather is very cold. Identify this thing.
11. This person is often alone, and he says he has caves and holes to live in if necessary. Name this person.
12. The starving Lakota eat something that they normally would not eat. Identify something.
13. Black Elk's people do not have enough to eat until they finally arrive at this place. Name this place.

Prompts for student writing:

1. Why is this chapter called “Walking the Black Road”? Create a topic sentence; then support your answer with evidence from the chapter. (You may want to read about the Black Road again. See chapter four.)
2. Although some of the Lakota (and their allies) resist the soldiers, eventually they give up and enter the agencies. Why do they surrender? Develop your answer in a paragraph with details.
3. Assume that you were a member of the Lakota nation during the time when Black Elk lived. Would you have surrendered, tried to escape, or resisted regardless of the consequences? Think carefully about your answer. Support it with reasons and details.
4. Was the violent clash of these two cultures inevitable? Or could the killing have been avoided? Was a compromise possible? What sort of compromise? Consider these and related questions before you answer.
5. Research the agencies on the Plains, particularly the Red Cloud Agency. What were conditions there like? Write a one-page report.