



JOHN G.
NEIHARDT
STATE HISTORIC SITE

LESSON PLAN: Black Elk Speaks, by John G. Neihardt
Chapter 12 “Grandmother’s Land”
Includes: Summary, Study Questions, Writing Prompts

Developed by: Joe Green, Neihardt Board of Directors; retired high school English teacher from Minden, Nebraska; recipient Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association (NRCSA) 2014 Outstanding Secondary Teacher Award.

Copyright: John G. Neihardt Foundation.

Use: Copyright holder grants permission for educational use.

Summary:

To escape having to live in the agencies, Black Elk’s band travels north to Canada, where Sitting Bull and Gall have already gone. By the time the band reaches Clay Creek (probably the present-day Frenchman River in Montana and Saskatchewan), winter has arrived. Black Elk, 15, wonders when he will have to honor the obligations imposed on him by his great vision: to unite his people, restore the sacred tree, and find the good red road again. With the advent of spring, he participates in a successful buffalo hunt. However, as he and his uncle cross a stream, he again begins to feel “queer” in anticipation of some threat. On this occasion dozens of Crow appear and kill two Lakota hunters. Black Elk’s visionary powers are growing stronger.

During another hunt Black Elk kills and helps to butcher a bison cow. In the midst of thunder and rain, he hears a warning voice coming from the clouds. In the scene which follows, the Crow attack Black Elk’s band, which must flee. Black Elk tells how Brave Wolf sacrifices his

horse and his life to save a girl from certain death. Black Elk knows that the voice has told him the truth.

When one of his cousins is killed, Black Elk must assume responsibility for the man's surviving spouse. He silences her loud cries of sadness so that she will not attract the enemy, then participates in the night-long mourning for his cousin.

Black Elk turns 16, the winter temperatures fall, and life becomes almost unbearable for the starving Lakota. When he and his father arrive at Little River Creek, they find shelter and feast on four rabbits. A coyote howls, seeming to tell Black Elk of bison and humans nearby.

By now, Black Elk's father is convinced of his son's unusual power. With two other Lakota, father and son kill eight bison, though Black Elk's hands freeze temporarily from touching rifle metal. After a feast of their own, Black Elk and his companions then transport some of the meat and robes to the main camp, caching the remaining meat for others to find. Living in a foreign land, in harsh weather conditions, with little to eat, Black Elk and his people long for their own country farther south and for their former, happier, lives there. Their anguish is great.

Study questions:

1. Why do you think the Wasichus force the Lakota to live at *different* agencies?
2. When Black Elk's band arrives in Powder River country, their former homeland, they continue to move north to Canada. Why?
3. Name the two Lakota leaders already in Canada.
4. Before Black Elk can restore his nation's hoop and flowering tree, and find the red road again, what must happen?
5. Why doesn't Black Elk share his vision with others? (He offers two reasons.)
6. Black Elk says, ". . . and I was glad" shortly after an encounter with fifty Crow. Why is he glad?
7. Black Elk hears a voice in the thunderstorm telling him to hurry. Why must he hurry?
8. Briefly describe Brave Wolf's courageous deed.
9. When Hard-to-Hit is killed, Black Elk has to do something that he would rather not do. Identify something.
10. Black Elk believes that a coyote's howl is a warning that something will happen. Identify something.
11. Black Elk throws something away, and the result is painful. Identify something.
12. What happens to five horses kept in a draw?
13. At the end of this chapter something causes Black Elk to feel like crying? Identify something.

Prompts for student writing:

1. *Grandmother* refers to Queen Victoria. Locate some information about her life and summarize it in one paragraph. By the way, she will appear later in this book.
2. Discuss the power of Black Elk's vision. Support your topic sentence with at least two examples.
3. Consider this topic sentence: The Lakota face many dangers when they escape to Canada. Now support this topic sentence with at least four examples taken from this chapter. Paraphrase your examples. Do not quote.
4. Does escaping from your problems reveal that you are a coward? Or can escaping show something else about you? As you answer, think about Black Elk's escape to Canada.