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**LESSON PLAN: Black Elk Speaks, by John G. Neihardt**  
**Chapter 25: “The End of the Dream”**  
**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.**

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*\*Historical note: After the Massacre at Wounded Knee, sporadic fighting occurred for several days. One skirmish took place at the Drexel Mission, only a few miles from Pine Ridge. A 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry company was rescued by African American soldiers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. On January 7, 1891, Red Cloud returned to the agency, and at about the same time Man Afraid of His Horses, another chief, convinced the Lakota from the Stronghold to capitulate. They surrendered on January 16. (See Raymond J. DeMallie, *The Sixth Grandfather*, 328-329.)*

**Summary:**

After the massacre Red Crow and Black Elk each carry a baby as they return to Pine Ridge, thinking that peace has finally come to the Lakota. Their people have gone elsewhere, though someone has left a pot of dried meat in a tepee. As Red Crow and Black Elk eat, they are forced to escape because soldiers are still shooting.

The trail leads to the Lakota camp where Black Elk is reunited with his mother. Without tepees, these Lakota must endure snow and extreme cold. On the day before Wounded Knee, Black Elk did not want to take the lives of the Wasichus, but now he longs to kill. Atop a ridge Black Elk witnesses the confrontation near Drexel (Holy Rosary) Mission. Carrying a rifle on this occasion, he enters the fray, remembering his vision as he fights. When he receives a serious wound to his abdomen, an old man named Protector binds the wound and tells him to leave the fighting. Black Elk learns that nuns and priests at the mission are caring for the wounded.

Later, at the Stronghold in the Badlands, a medicine man named Old Hollow Horn helps to heal Black Elk's wound.

A Lakota war party of about 60 warriors leaves the Stronghold to retaliate against approaching soldiers, and Black Elk charges ahead by himself to steal horses from them. The war party returns to the Badlands with its wounded only to find the people there hungry, cold, and uncertain about whether facing the soldiers again would be wise. Red Cloud convinces them to cease fighting to prevent further suffering, particularly among the women and children.

Two lines of soldiers meet the Lakota as they enter Pine Ridge, and Black Elk declares, "And so it was all over."

In *The Sixth Grandfather*, page 329, Raymond J. DeMallie points out that the last two paragraphs of this chapter are Neihardt's words. Nevertheless, the text seems true to the spirit of Black Elk's moving story. As warrior, healer, and visionary, Black Elk would have vividly recalled the bloody battlefield—the "children lying heaped and scattered." He would have felt the end of the "people's dream," a Lakota world without a center, and a sacred tree bereft of life.

### **Study questions:**

1. What do the Lakota leave behind when they hurriedly depart from Pine Ridge?
2. Identify *papa*.
3. A bullet causes something to get into the soup that Black Elk and Red Crow are eating. Identify something.
4. Someone sings a death song for Black Elk. Identify someone.
5. Earlier, Black Elk does not want to kill the Wasichus. He later changes his mind. Why?
6. Why does Black Elk rub his body with dirt?
7. Black Elk says that his power depends on these birds. Name the birds.
8. Something hits Black Elk like the back of an ax. Identify something.
9. Who says, "There may be a better day to die," to Black Elk?
10. At the mission a particular group of people help the wounded Lakota. Identify this group.

11. How serious is Black Elk's wound? Cite some evidence to support your answer.
12. How many horses does Black Elk steal? How many of these horses survive the theft?
13. Which chief says, ". . . we must make peace"?

**Prompts for student writing:**

1. Discuss Black Elk's courage in this chapter. Provide specific evidence.
2. How do the Lakota help one another in this chapter? Details, please.
3. Is *Black Elk Speaks* a tragedy? Before you answer, look up a useful definition of tragedy and include this definition early in your essay (or develop a definition of your own). Support your answer with details from anywhere in the book.
4. Is Black Elk a hero? Before you answer this question, look up a good definition of *hero* and include it early in your essay. Provide examples from anywhere in the book.