



JOHN G.  
**NEIHARDT**  
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**LESSON PLAN: Black Elk Speaks, by John G. Neihardt**  
**Chapter 7: "Wasichus in the Hills"**  
**Includes: Summary, Study Questions, Writing Prompts**

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**Summary:**

Sacred to the Lakota, the Black Hills, says Black Elk, "were a good place to play," a place where his people were "always happy." The summer of 1874, when Black Elk turns 11, is also when Lt. Col. George Custer enters these sacred hills and later announces the discovery of gold. Though worthless to Black Elk's people, gold soon becomes the catalyst of an escalating influx of whites, and further confrontations with the invaders now seem inevitable.

This chapter mentions three important clashes between Indians and whites, and none occurred in 1874: Custer's death on June 25, 1876, during the Battle of the Little Bighorn; Col. Joshua Reynolds' March 17, 1876, attack on a village where he believed he would find Crazy Horse; and the killing of Crazy Horse on September 5, 1877, at Camp Robinson (later, in 1878, called Fort Robinson).

However, this chapter mainly discusses other events important to Black Elk's childhood. Black Elk merely pretends to join his companions in throwing stones at swallows, for to actually participate would violate his great vision. When some boys shoot at squirrels, Black Elk experiences a queer feeling and hears a voice that tells him to return home.

Told by Chips that they must flee because something bad is going to occur, the band moves from place to place, hoping to avoid the soldiers who have entered the Black Hills. As winter passes, Black Elk turns 12, and tensions build, with some Lakota believing that the soldiers will keep out the gold-diggers, and some wondering if they should resist the whites in order to preserve their sacred land.

When Black Elk's band arrives at the Powder River, the focus of the chapter shifts to Crazy Horse. We learn that his father is a cousin of Crazy Horse's father. More important, we learn about Crazy Horse's bravery, his powerful vision of the spirit world, the meaning of his name, how he was twice wounded, the legend of his sacred stone, and Black Elk's belief that "it was only his [Crazy Horse's] great vision that made him great." We also read of Black Elk's personal relationship with Crazy Horse and of Crazy Horse's concern for his people. Black Elk asserts that had Crazy Horse lived longer, the Black Hills may have never been lost.

The Reynolds' attack (mentioned above) ends the chapter, and, significantly, we are reminded of the whites' great destructive power. Black Elk's band eventually arrives at the Soldiers' Town.

**Study questions:**

1. Briefly describe two incidents early in this chapter that show Black Elk remaining true to his vision.
2. Where is Chips when he hears a voice telling him that the band must flee?
3. While at Horse Creek the band learns that something is happening in the Black Hills. Explain.
4. Identify Pahuska. What discovery is made during his expedition into the Black Hills?
5. How old is Black Elk when this chapter begins?
6. To which historic event is Black Elk referring when he says that Pahuska was "rubbed out"?
7. According to Black Elk's father, what will apparently happen if the Lakotas do not "lease" the Black Hills?
8. Black Elk and Fat bet on something. Identify something. What is the prize, and who wins it?

9. Black Elk and Steals Horses find the corpse of Root-of-the-Tail? What was the cause of Root-of-the-Tail's death?
10. How did Crazy Horse acquire his name? Was his horse really crazy? Explain.
11. What apparently was the effect of the stone Crazy Horse carried?
12. What does Black Elk believe actually makes Crazy Horse great?
13. What does Crow Nose do to a Crow who attempts to steal his horse? Is Crow Nose allowed to count coup? Explain.
14. Some of Red Cloud's band are called "loafers." Explain.

**Prompts for student writing:**

1. Describe the characteristics of Crazy Horse that impress Black Elk.
2. Discuss ways in which the whites represent a threat to Lakota life and culture.
3. Research the discovery of gold in the Black Hills. Consider Custer's involvement in this discovery. Also, consider some of the effects of this discovery on white culture and on the Lakota, who consider the Black Hills sacred. This topic may require an essay.
4. In which ways does Crazy Horse deserve the label "strange"? Respond in one or two paragraphs.
5. Discuss the ways Black Elk's great vision continues to influence his life in this chapter.
6. As Black Elk enters adolescence, he becomes increasingly aware of the adult world. In which ways does the reality of adulthood affect his life in this chapter?