Writing Back: Unit Overview

NBE3U, English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit Voices, Grade 11 (University), Unit 3. 14 classes of 75 minutes (about three weeks).

The big question

How did Indigenous writers of a century ago answer the readers who held power over their nations, and what has changed in who controls the story?

Students read three Indigenous writers from 1885 to 1921 as historical context for the contemporary voices of the course: E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), Mohawk, in “A Cry from an Indian Wife,” “The Cattle Thief,” “A Red Girl's Reasoning” and “As It Was in the Beginning”; Zitkála-Šá, Yankton Dakota, in her 1900 boarding school essays and “America's Indian Problem” (1921); and Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), Santee Dakota, raised in exile in Manitoba, in Indian Boyhood (1902). Each lesson takes a fresh angle: two audiences and word choice, a ballad turned inside out, power in dialogue, a story's frame, child and adult narrators, sensory imagery, an extended metaphor, glossing Dakota words, who studies whom, and persuasive nonfiction. Students research context facts, write and revise a comparative literary essay, and close with a Then and Now seminar pairing a historical writer with a teacher-chosen contemporary First Nations, Métis or Inuit text. Every text studied is included in full or in excerpt in the Writing Back Reader.

Lessons

#	Lesson	Classes	Question	Expectations	What's inside
1	**Writing Back**	1	Who were these writers answering?	A3.1, C1.1, C1.2	Context timeline 1876–1924; three writers; reading purposes and strategies
2	**Two Audiences**	1	Who is the poem really for?	C2.3, C1.6, C3.3	“A Cry from an Indian Wife”; Toronto, 1892; word-choice audit
3	**The Ballad Turned**	1	Whose ballad is it?	C2.2, C1.4, C1.7	“The Cattle Thief”; ballad features; two headlines; evaluating the ending
4	**Christie's Argument**	1	Whose law counts?	C1.3, C3.2, C1.8	“A Red Girl's Reasoning”; decoding period words; power in dialogue
5	**The Last Word**	1	Who controls the story?	C1.6, C2.3, A3.1	“As It Was in the Beginning”; the title; structure and frame
6	**Big Red Apples**	1	What does the child not yet know?	C1.4, C3.1, D2.2	Zitkála-Šá; partner reading; two narrators; writing in your voice

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#	Lesson	Classes	Question	Expectations	What's inside
7	**The Land of Red Apples**	1	Who is watching whom?	C1.5, C2.3, A2.3	Being stared at; sensory imagery; the hair; connections to residential schools
8	**The Civilizing Machine**	1	How does a metaphor argue?	C2.3, D2.3, C3.3	“Iron Routine”; machine and nature imagery; precise verbs
9	**Retrospection**	1	What did the visitors miss?	C1.6, A3.1, D2.2	Sample work; the tree metaphor; the risk of publishing; your retrospection
10	**Hakadah**	1	What did a grandmother teach?	C1.3, C1.5, C3.2	Eastman in Manitoba; key ideas; glossing Dakota words; two educations
11	**The Fire-Boat**	1	Who studies whom?	C1.4, C1.8, A1.6	The uncle's study of the “Big Knives”; Scott's gaze compared; leaving
12	**Speaking to Power**	1	Whose problem is it?	C1.7, D1.3, D1.5	“America's Indian Problem” (1921); Johnson's 1892 essay; research log
13	**Essay Workshop**	1	Is every word exact?	D2.6, D3.1, D3.2, D3.5	Structure, thesis, ARMS revision, editing, partner proofreading
14	**Then and Now**	1	What has changed?	C1.5, A3.1, B3.3	Seminar (summative); essay due; unit reflection

Assessment

Type	In this unit
Assessment for learning	Context timeline and reading plan, two audiences and word-choice audit, ballad chart and headlines, vocabulary detective and power analysis, structure map, two narrators, imagery chart and connection web, machine and nature chart, metaphor ladder, key ideas and glosses, who studies whom, persuasive moves
Assessment as learning	Research log and accuracy check, revision routine, proofreading log, self-checks, exit tickets, unit reflection
Assessment of learning	Comparative literary essay and the Then and Now seminar, with rubrics in the Summative Tasks file

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Texts

Included in the Start Here folder:

- **Writing Back Reader:** four works by E. Pauline Johnson (complete), boarding school essays and “America's Indian Problem” by Zitkála-Šá, two chapters of Charles A. Eastman's Indian Boyhood (excerpts), Louis Riel's words at his 1885 sentencing as a hostile book reported them, and Duncan Campbell Scott's “The Onondaga Madonna” for comparison (all public domain)
- **Contemporary texts:** for the seminar, one text by a contemporary First Nations, Métis or Inuit creator per group (across the groups, all three), chosen by the teacher from board-approved resources (titles only; not included). Titles only: these texts are under copyright and are not included. Choose from your board's approved resources, preview for content (several include residential schools, violence, sexual content or grief), add local creators where you can, and learn about each creator in their own words.

Johnson, Zitkála-Šá and Eastman are historical writers (they died in 1913, 1938 and 1939). We read them as historical context: Indigenous writers who answered settler audiences a century ago. The course's contemporary voices are First Nations, Métis and Inuit creators chosen by the teacher. Zitkála-Šá (Yankton Dakota) and Charles Eastman (Santee Dakota) wrote in the United States. Dakota homelands cross today's border, and Eastman spent his boyhood in exile in Manitoba after the U.S.–Dakota War of 1862. Their accounts of U.S. boarding schools are context for, not the same as, Canada's residential school system. The unit discusses boarding and residential schools, the death of a child, and a story that ends in a killing; lessons name these with care and include support resources (Hope for Wellness Help Line (for Indigenous people across Canada, 24/7, by phone or online chat at hopeforwellness.ca; English and French, with Cree, Ojibway and Inuktut on request at certain times), 1-855-242-3310; Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868; 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline (call or text 988); National Indian Residential School Crisis Line, 1-866-925-4419.) Historical texts use the words of their time, including terms now considered offensive (for example, “Red-skin,” “savage,” “squaw,” “half-breed,” “Eskimo”). We quote accurately when analysing, explain why these terms are harmful, and use today's terms (First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Indigenous, or the specific Nation) in our own words. Readers may say “[skip]” instead of reading a slur aloud. We strongly recommend reviewing this unit with your board's Indigenous education lead and, where possible, inviting a First Nations, Métis or Inuit Elder, Knowledge Keeper or guest speaker following your board's protocols (including offerings and honoraria). Local Nations' own sources come first. Do not ask Indigenous students to speak for their communities.

What's in each lesson

- Teacher lesson plan with expectations, timed sequence, differentiation, look-fors and answer guides
- Slides with speaker notes
- Student handouts and organizers
- Editable Word and PowerPoint files, plus PDFs

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