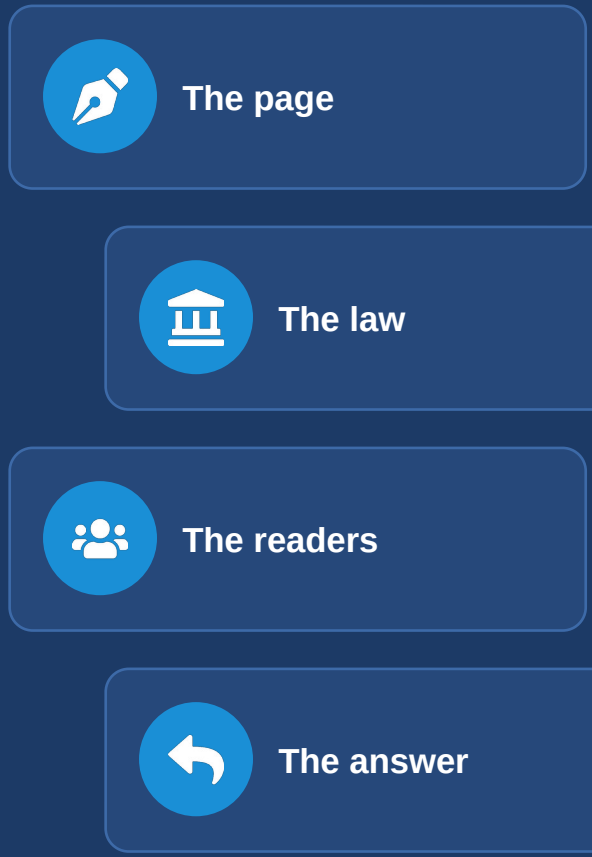
NBE3U Writing Back, Lesson 1

Writing Back

Who were these writers answering, and how?



Today's goals

We are learning…

- About the historical context in which early Indigenous writers published.
- To set purposes for reading and choose reading strategies for historical texts.

I can…

- Explain what “writing back” means.
- Place the unit's writers on a timeline of laws and events.
- Set a purpose for reading a historical text.
- Choose strategies for before, during and after reading.

Today's plan

Time	What we're doing	You will…
0–10 min	**Hook**	Discuss
10–30 min	**Context**	Build the timeline
30–45 min	**Three writers**	Note
45–65 min	**Reading plan**	Plan
65–75 min	**The unit**	Preview

Warm-up



A newspaper runs a story about your community. It is wrong, and it is read by people who make the rules. How would you answer? Where? To whom?

Sentence starters

“I would answer in… because…”

“The hardest part would be…”

“I'd want the readers to…”

How it works

- Pairs: 3 minutes.
- Share one idea.

Big idea

From the 1870s to the 1920s, Canada and the United States passed laws and built schools meant to end Indigenous nations as nations. A few Indigenous writers answered in English, in the magazines and halls settlers paid for, using the colonizer's own language and readers to tell the story he did not want told.

A timeline of power

When	What happened
1876	The Indian Act becomes law in Canada (April 12)
1884	The potlatch is banned (lifted in 1951)
1885	The North-West Resistance; troops sent west
1880s–1900s	Residential schools (Canada) and boarding schools (U.S.) expand
1900	Zitkála-Šá's school essays appear in the Atlantic Monthly
1920	Residential school attendance made compulsory (ages 7 to 15)

Words for this unit

writing back	Answering a dominant story in its own language and forms. *A Mohawk poet performing for Toronto's elite.*
audience	The readers or listeners a text is made for. *Magazine readers, lecture crowds, officials.*
counter-narrative	A story that challenges the accepted one. *A boarding school seen by the child, not the visitor.*
period terms	Words of the time, some now offensive. *We quote them only to analyse them.*

Three historical writers

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)

Mohawk, Six Nations of the Grand River, 1861–1913. Poet, story writer and touring performer.

Zitkála-Šá (Red Bird)

Yankton Dakota, 1876–1938. Writer, musician, teacher and activist.

Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa)

Santee Dakota, 1858–1939. Raised in exile in Manitoba; physician and writer.

Historical voices: our contemporary voices are First Nations, Métis and Inuit creators chosen with your teacher.

One border, many nations



Zitkála-Šá and Eastman wrote in the United States. Dakota homelands cross today's border, and Eastman grew up in Manitoba.

U.S. boarding schools and Canadian residential schools were separate systems with the same goal: to remove children from their languages and nations. We compare them carefully, without treating them as the same.

Who reached print?

Between 1885 and 1921, few Métis or Inuit voices reached print in their own words. Louis Riel's words mostly reached English readers through hostile reporters, and Inuit stories were written down mainly by explorers and missionaries.

Today Métis and Inuit writers tell these stories themselves: for example, Katherena Vermette's graphic novel Red River Resistance (A Girl Called Echo, 2019) and Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk's Sanaaq (Inuktitut 1984, English 2014).

A first taste

O! coward self I hesitate no more;
Go forth, and win the glories of the war.
Go forth, nor bend to greed of white men’s hands,
By right, by birth we Indians own these lands,
Though starved, crushed, plundered, lies our nation low...
Perhaps the white man’s God has willed it so.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), “A Cry from an Indian Wife” (1885), Flint and Feather (1912). Public domain.

Think about it

Who might this speaker be answering?

Which readers would be uncomfortable?

What does the final line do to the claim before it?

Reading strategies for old texts

Stage	Try this
Before	Note date, place and first audience; predict what the writer must push against
During	Mark long sentences into chunks; circle period terms; note shifts in tone
After	Summarize in two sentences; ask what the writer wanted readers to do

Set your purposes

On page 2:

1. Write a specific purpose for each row (context, argument, style, audience).
2. Choose two strategies for each reading stage.
3. Write one question you bring to the unit.
4. Share one purpose with a partner.

Your summatives



Comparative essay

Compare how two of our writers write back: their audience, strategies and effect.



Then and Now seminar

Connect a historical writer with a contemporary First Nations, Métis or Inuit text.

Exit ticket

1. What “writing back” means, in one sentence.

2. One law or event on the timeline that surprised you.

3. Your most specific purpose for reading.

Next class: Two Audiences.

Teacher reveal

Writing back: key points

Writing back: Answering a dominant story in its own language and forms, for its own readers.

Context: Indian Act (1876), potlatch ban (1884), 1885 on the prairies, residential schools in Canada and boarding schools in the U.S., compulsory attendance in Canada from 1920.

Johnson: Mohawk poet and performer, 1861–1913; poems and stories for Canadian, American and English audiences.

Zitkála-Šá: Yankton Dakota writer and activist, 1876–1938; boarding school essays in the Atlantic Monthly (1900).

Eastman: Santee Dakota physician and writer, 1858–1939; raised in exile in Manitoba; Indian Boyhood (1902).

Purposes: Read for context, for the writer's argument, for style, and for what the text asks of its readers.