Christie's Argument: Dialogue and power in “A Red Girl's Reasoning”

NBE3U, Unit 3: Writing Back, Lesson 4. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

In Johnson's 1893 story, a dinner-party remark about a marriage “performed by Indian rites” becomes a contest over whose law counts. Christie wins the argument and loses the marriage. Reading the dialogue closely shows who controls the conversation, and how a husband who “studied” her people for years never learned to respect them.

What students do: Students decode period vocabulary with context and word-part strategies, read the story with a key-ideas map, analyse who controls each exchange of dialogue, and examine Charlie's perspective as a self-taught expert on “Indianology.”

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
C1.3	identify the most important ideas and supporting details in texts from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and, as appropriate, in relevant texts from non-Indigenous sources, including increasingly complex or difficult texts
C3.2	use decoding strategies effectively to read and understand unfamiliar words, including words of increasing difficulty, in texts from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and, as appropriate, in relevant texts from non-Indigenous sources
C1.8	identify and analyse the perspectives and/or biases evident in texts dealing with themes, ideas, and issues related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, commenting with growing understanding on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power

From The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies (2019), English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Voices, Grade 11, University Preparation (NBE3U). A = First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Perspectives and Text Forms in Canada, B = Oral Communication, C = Reading and Literature Studies, D = Writing, E = Media Studies.

Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals	Success criteria
• We are learning to identify the key ideas and supporting details in a story. • We are learning to analyse perspective and power in dialogue.	• I can use context to work out unfamiliar or old-fashioned words. • I can map the story's key ideas and details. • I can analyse who holds power in a conversation. • I can explain the bias in Charlie's perspective.

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Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Christie's Argument deck.
- **Handouts:** Vocabulary Detective (page 1), Who Controls the Talk? (page 2).
- **Reader:** “A Red Girl's Reasoning.”

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	What makes a marriage real?	Discuss.	
8–18	**Decode**	Period vocabulary.	Practise.	Context clues used.
18–45	**Read**	The story, in sections.	Read and map.	
45–65	**The argument**	Who controls the talk?	Analyse.	Power shifts traced.
65–75	**Charlie's lens**	Expert or tourist?	Discuss.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Teacher read-aloud of the dinner and bedroom scenes; summaries of the rest.
- **ELL:** Pre-taught list: rites, ceremony, disgrace, ancestry, honour.
- **Challenge:** Research “marriage according to the custom of the country” in fur-trade history.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Vocabulary Detective and power analysis	Key ideas (C1.3), decoding (C3.2) and perspective and bias (C1.8)

Christie's argument: key points

- **Key idea:** A marriage “performed by Indian rites” is mocked by settler society; Christie refuses to accept that her parents were not married.
- **Detail:** Charlie had studied “Indianology” since boyhood, yet sees her people's law as no law.
- **Power shift 1:** At the dance, Mrs. Stuart and Captain Logan question; Christie answers plainly and they lose their footing.
- **Power shift 2:** At home, Charlie accuses (“disgraced”); Christie reverses his logic: if her parents are not married, neither are they.
- **Christie's reasoning:** Equal standing for two nations' rites: “Why should I recognize the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine?”
- **Charlie's bias:** He admires Indigenous culture as a collector, not as an equal; his “study” never became respect.

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Teacher notes

- “A Red Girl's Reasoning” first appeared in Dominion Illustrated in February 1893 and was collected in The Moccasin Maker (1913). The title uses a period term; Christie's last spoken word is a slur she uses to describe how Charlie's law would see her. The slide stops before it; explain it rather than read it aloud. 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.
- Fur-trade marriages “according to the custom of the country” joined Indigenous women and European traders by Indigenous practice; churches and courts sometimes refused to recognize them. Keep this brief and factual.
- ENG4U Unit 5 also uses this story. Here the focus is vocabulary, the key-ideas map and the power of dialogue.
- 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.

Coming up

Lesson 5, The Last Word.

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