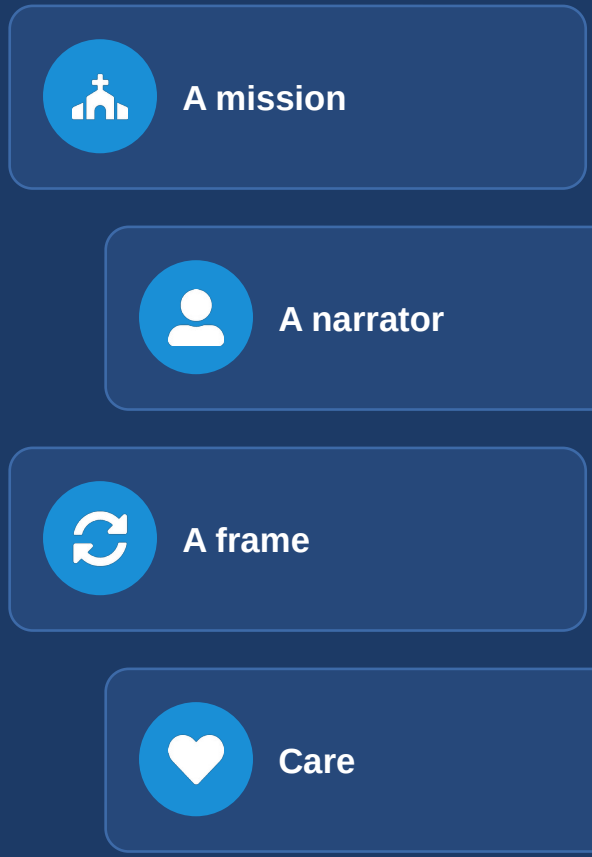
NBE3U Writing Back, Lesson 5

The Last Word

Structure and voice in “As It Was in the Beginning”



Today's goals

We are learning…

- To analyse how a story's structure develops its ideas.
- How a narrator takes control of her own story.

I can…

- Explain the title's source and irony.
- Map the story's structure.
- Compare the opening and closing lines.
- Explain how the frame gives Esther control of the narrative.

Today's plan

Time	What we're doing	You will…
0–8 min	**Care**	Listen
8–35 min	**Read**	Read
35–50 min	**Structure**	Map
50–62 min	**The frame**	Compare
62–75 min	**Paragraph**	Plan

Before we read

Content

A mission school, racism, and a killing at the end.

Your choice

You may step out, pass, or read a summary.

Support

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868. Hope for Wellness: 1-855-242-3310.

Our purpose

To understand why Johnson tells it this way, not to excuse the act.

Big idea

Johnson's 1899 story begins and ends with the same words, spoken about Esther and then by her. Between them, a mission school takes her language and her dress, and the missionary who raised her calls her "uncertain blood." The frame gives Esther the last word: the story is hers to tell, even about the terrible thing she does.

The first line

They account for it by the fact that I am a Redskin, but I am something else, too—I am a woman.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), “As It Was in the Beginning” (1899), The Moccasin Maker (1913). Public domain.

Think about it

Who is “they”?

What is “it”?

What does she insist on?

The first grief

The first grief of my life was when we reached the mission. They took my buckskin dress off, saying I was now a little Christian girl and must dress like all the white people at the mission. Oh, how I hated that stiff new calico dress and those leather shoes. But, little as I was, I said nothing, only thought of the time when I should be grown, and do as my mother did, and wear the buckskins and the blanket.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), “As It Was in the Beginning” (1899), The Moccasin Maker (1913). Public domain.

Think about it

What is taken first?

What does the calico dress stand for?

What does she promise herself?

Where the title comes from



“As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be” is a line from the Gloria Patri, a Christian prayer of praise that Esther would have said at the mission.

The mission promised Esther a new beginning. What was there from the beginning, and never changed?

What he really thinks

“Only this, my son: poor Esther comes of uncertain blood; would it do for you—the missionary’s nephew, and adopted son, you might say—to marry the daughter of a pagan Indian? Her mother is hopelessly uncivilized; her father has a dash of French somewhere—half-breed, you know, my boy, half-breed.” Then, with still lower tone and half-shut, crafty eyes, he added: […]

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), “As It Was in the Beginning” (1899), The Moccasin Maker (1913). Public domain.

Think about it

What does Father Paul call Esther?

What does “I am very fond of the girl” reveal?

How does this connect to the title?

Map the structure

On page 1, in pairs:

1. Summarize each part in one line.
2. Explain what each part adds to the meaning.
3. Find where the story turns.
4. Explain the title's irony.

Tools for structure

frame	An opening and closing that surround the story. *The same claim at both ends.*
retrospective narrator	Someone telling the story after it is over. *Esther speaks from her father's lodge.*
irony	A gap between what is expected and what is true. *A prayer about things never changing.*

Opening and closing

The opening

- They account for it by the fact that I am a Redskin, but I am something else, too—I am a woman.

The closing

- They account for it by the fact that I am a Redskin.
- They seem to have forgotten I am a woman.

What changed between the first line and the last two?

Talk it out



Esther does something terrible. Does Johnson want us to excuse her, understand her, or something else?

Sentence starters

“Johnson wants us to understand… without…”

“The frame makes us…”

“The real target of the story is…”

How it works

- Groups: 5 minutes.
- Respectful disagreement.

Plan your paragraph

On page 2:

1. Write a claim about the frame.
2. Choose evidence from the opening and closing.
3. Explain what changed between them.
4. Explain how the frame gives Esther control of her story.

Exit ticket

1. The title's irony, in one sentence.

2. What changes between the first line and the last.

3. Who controls this story, and how?

Next class: Big Red Apples.

Teacher reveal

The last word: key points

Title: From the Gloria Patri: “as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.” The prejudice never changes.

Structure: Childhood; the mission school; love; the overheard conversation; the act; the return home.

The frame: Opens: “They account for it by the fact that I am a Redskin, but I am something else, too—I am a woman.” Closes with the same idea split into two lines.

Voice: Esther narrates from after the events; she refuses the explanation others give for her.

Narrative control: Johnson lets the Cree girl the mission tried to remake tell the whole story, including what the mission did.

Not an excuse: The story makes the act understandable without making it right; readers must hold both.