Big Red Apples: Zitkála-Šá and the promise of the East

NBE3U, Unit 3: Writing Back, Lesson 6. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

In “Impressions of an Indian Childhood” (1900), Zitkála-Šá remembers being eight years old and wanting red apples and a ride on the “iron horse.” The child believes the missionaries; the adult writer knows what came next. The gap between the two narrators is where the reader learns the truth.

What students do: Students meet Zitkála-Šá, read “The Big Red Apples” in pairs for fluency, make inferences about the mother's warning and the interpreter's promise, analyse the gap between the child narrator and the adult writer, and write a short scene in their own voice about a promise that turned out differently.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
C1.4	make and explain inferences of increasing subtlety about texts from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and, as appropriate, relevant texts from non-Indigenous sources, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, supporting their explanations with well-chosen stated and implied ideas from the texts
C3.1	demonstrate an automatic understanding of most words in a variety of reading contexts related to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures
D2.2	establish a distinctive voice in their writing, modifying language and tone skilfully and effectively to suit the form, audience, and purpose for writing

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 make inferences about a narrator who knows more than her younger self. • We are learning to write with a distinctive voice.	• I can read a historical passage fluently, understanding most words. • I can make inferences about the mother's warning. • I can explain the gap between the child and the adult narrator. • I can write a short scene in my own voice.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Big Red Apples deck.

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- **Handouts:** Two Narrators (page 1), A Promise (page 2).
- **Reader:** Zitkála-Šá, “The Big Red Apples.”

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	A promise in an ad.	Discuss.	
8–15	**Zitkála-Šá**	Who she was.	Note.	
15–35	**Read**	Partner reading.	Read aloud.	Fluency.
35–55	**Two narrators**	Inferences.	Analyse.	Inferences with evidence.
55–75	**Write**	A promise.	Write.	Distinctive voice.

Differentiation

- **Support:** Paragraphs numbered with one-line summaries.
- **ELL:** Echo reading with the teacher before partner reading.
- **Challenge:** Compare with Johnson's Esther (Lesson 5): two girls, two schools, two writers.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Two Narrators and the scene	Inferences (C1.4), fluency (C3.1) and voice (D2.2)

Big red apples: key points

- **The promise:** Red apples and a ride on the “iron horse”: what an eight-year-old wants.
- **The interpreter:** “I had never seen a train, and he knew it.” The adult writer exposes the trick.
- **The mother's warning:** “Their words are sweet, but, my child, their deeds are bitter.” She knows; the child doesn't.
- **The mother's decision:** She lets her go for an education, knowing her daughter “must suffer keenly in this experiment.”
- **Two narrators:** The child's wonder and the adult's knowledge sit side by side: dramatic irony.
- **Voice:** Short sentences at the turning points; the child's words in quotation marks; the adult's judgment in plain statements.

Teacher notes

- Zitkála-Šá (Red Bird), Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, Yankton Dakota (1876–1938), wrote about boarding school in the Atlantic Monthly in 1900 and collected her stories and essays in American Indian Stories (1921). She co-founded the National Council of American Indians (1926).

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- 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.
- She attended White's Manual Labor Institute, a Quaker missionary school in Wabash, Indiana, from about age eight, and later Earlham College (Britannica). Her three autobiographical essays appeared in the Atlantic Monthly from January to March 1900.
- “Paleface” is Zitkála-Šá's word for white people; “iron horse” is the train. Discuss why a writer in 1900 might use these words for Atlantic Monthly readers.
- For the writing task, students write from their own experience or invent a scene; they do not write as Indigenous characters or retell anyone's story. Do not ask Indigenous students to speak for their communities, to share personal or family histories, or to act as experts. Every student's participation in sharing is optional.
- Before reading, name the content (boarding and residential schools, separation from family, loss) and remind students they may step out, pass, or talk privately. This course discusses colonization, residential schools and their effects. Some students and families carry this history personally. Support: 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.

Coming up

Lesson 7, The Land of Red Apples.

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