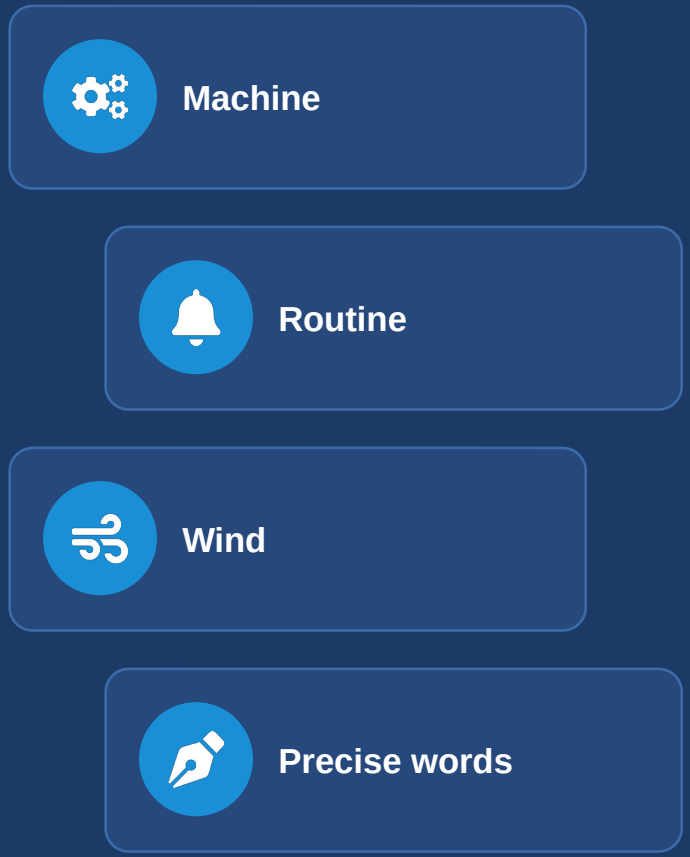
NBE3U Writing Back, Lesson 8

The Civilizing Machine

Metaphor and precise words in “Iron Routine”



Today's goals

We are learning…

- To analyse how metaphor and imagery carry an argument.
- To use precise, vivid words in our own analytical writing.

I can…

- Identify the machine metaphor and the nature images.
- Explain how the metaphor makes an argument.
- Add precise words from the text to my vocabulary.
- Revise sentences with strong verbs and exact words.

Today's plan

Time	What we're doing	You will…
0–6 min	**Hook**	Discuss
6–20 min	**Read**	Read
20–38 min	**Images**	Sort
38–50 min	**Vocabulary**	Bank
50–75 min	**Write**	Revise and write

Warm-up



Describe a routine in your life as if it were a machine. What does it make? Who runs it? What happens if someone breaks down?

Sentence starters

“My morning is a machine that…”

“The part that never stops is…”

“If someone breaks down…”

How it works

- Pairs: 2 minutes.

Big idea

Zitkála-Šá calls her school an “iron routine” and a “civilizing machine.” The metaphor does an argument's work: a machine has no heart, does not stop for a sick child, and turns out identical products. Analysing her word choices, and choosing our own words precisely, is how we show how style carries meaning.

Before we read



In this section, Zitkála-Šá describes the death of a classmate from illness. Many children died at boarding and residential schools.

You may step out or pass. Support: Hope for Wellness, 1-855-242-3310; Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868.

The bell

A loud-clamoring bell awakened us at half-past six in the cold winter mornings. From happy dreams of Western rolling lands and unlassoed freedom we tumbled out upon chilly bare floors back again into a paleface day. We had short time to jump into our shoes and clothes, and wet our eyes with icy water, before a small hand bell was vigorously rung for roll call.

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), “The School Days of an Indian Girl” (Atlantic Monthly, 1900), American Indian Stories (1921). Public domain.

Think about it

What wakes them?

Where were their dreams?

What does “paleface day” mean?

The civilizing machine

Relentlessly her pencil black-marked our daily records if we were not present to respond to our names, and no chum of ours had done it successfully for us. No matter if a dull headache or the painful cough of slow consumption had delayed the absentee, there was only time enough to mark the tardiness. It was next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day's buzzing; and as it was inbred in me to suffer in silence rather than to appeal to the ears of one whose open eyes could not see my pain, I have many times trudged in the day's harness heavy-footed, like a dumb sick brute.

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), "The School Days of an Indian Girl" (Atlantic Monthly, 1900), American Indian Stories (1921). Public domain.

Think about it

Which words belong to machines?

What doesn't the machine notice?

What is she compared to at the end?

Machine or nature?

On page 1, in pairs:

1. List every machine word or image.
2. List every nature word or image.
3. Which side does each belong to: the school or the child?
4. What does the metaphor argue?

The seashell

The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by. These sad memories rise above those of smoothly grinding school days. Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. But, however tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it.

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), “The School Days of an Indian Girl” (Atlantic Monthly, 1900), American Indian Stories (1921). Public domain.

Think about it

What is her “Indian nature” compared to?

Why a seashell?

Who can hear it?

Words worth keeping

Word	Meaning in the text
relentlessly	Without stopping or easing
consumption	Tuberculosis, a lung disease
censured	Blamed or criticized strongly
inculcating	Teaching by constant repetition
melancholy	Deep, lasting sadness

Weak verbs, strong verbs

Weak

- The author shows the school was bad.
- The metaphor is about the routine.
- This quote is interesting.

Precise

- Zitkála-Šá exposes a school that valued attendance over a sick child.
- The “civilizing machine” reduces children to parts on a line.
- The seashell image teaches readers how to listen.

Strong analytical verbs: exposes, indicts, reduces, mechanizes, contrasts, reclaims.

Sharpen the verbs

On page 2:

1. Revise each weak sentence.
2. Use a precise verb and a short quotation.
3. Read your best revision to a partner.
4. Then write the paragraph.

Model: a style paragraph

Task: How does the machine metaphor make an argument?

Zitkála-Šá never calls her school cruel; she calls it a “civilizing machine.” The metaphor indicts the school more sharply than any accusation could. A machine runs on schedule, does not pause for a “dull headache or the painful cough of slow consumption,” and turns out identical products. By describing herself “in the day's harness” like a “dumb sick brute,” she shows a system that reduced children to parts. The metaphor turns the word “civilizing” against itself.

Why it works

- Precise verbs: indicts, reduces.
- Short, embedded quotations.
- Ends with the irony.

Exit ticket

1. One machine image and what it argues.
2. One new word and its meaning.
3. Your strongest revised sentence.

Next class: Retrospection.

Teacher reveal

The civilizing machine: key points

Machine words: “iron routine,” “civilizing machine,” “buzzing,” “day's harness,” “smoothly grinding,” “pencils that moved automatically.”

Nature words: “Western rolling lands,” “the moaning wind,” “a curiously colored seashell.”

The argument: A machine does not notice a sick child; the school's routine mattered more than the children.

The classmate: Her death is met with a Bible and one teaspoon of medicine for everyone: care replaced by procedure.

The ending: Her grief speaks softly, like a seashell, “only for those ears that are bent with compassion.” She tells readers how to listen.

Precise verbs: Not “shows” but “indicts,” “exposes,” “mechanizes,” “reduces.”