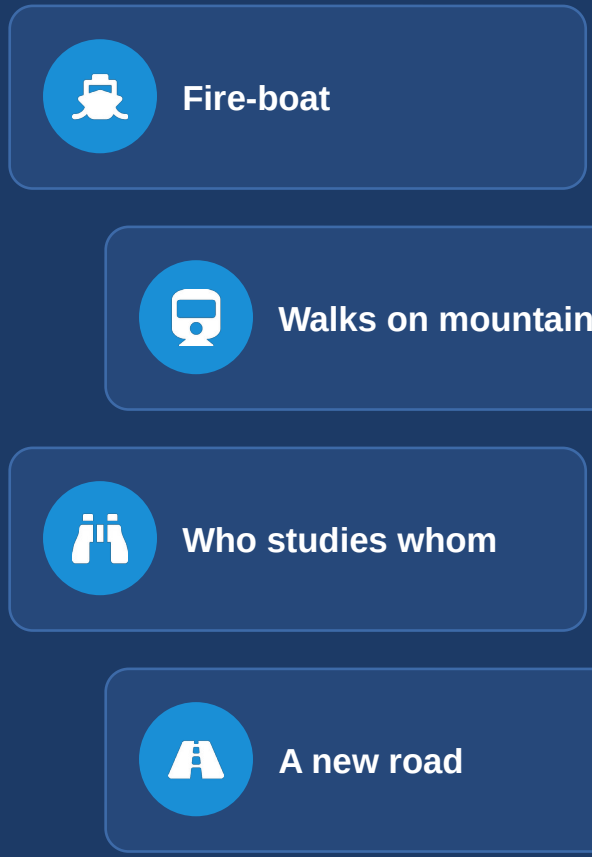
NBE3U Writing Back, Lesson 11

The Fire-Boat

Who studies whom in Eastman's “First Impressions of Civilization”



Today's goals

We are learning…

- To make inferences about a narrator's feelings and a writer's purpose.
- To compare perspectives from Indigenous and non-Indigenous sources.

I can…

- Infer the boy's feelings using details.
- Explain what the uncle's observations reveal about both peoples.
- Compare the uncle's perspective with Scott's.
- Infer the adult writer's purpose.

Today's plan

Time	What we're doing	You will…
0–8 min	**Hook**	Discuss
8–28 min	**Read**	Read
28–45 min	**The uncle**	Analyse
45–60 min	**Two gazes**	Compare
60–75 min	**The father**	Discuss and write

Warm-up



Describe something ordinary in our town (a mall, a drive-through, a tax bill) as a visitor would who had never seen one.

Sentence starters

“They have a building where…”

“Strangest of all, they…”

“A visitor might think we value…”

How it works

- Pairs: 3 minutes.

Big idea

Settler writers studied Indigenous peoples as curiosities. In the last chapter of Indian Boyhood, Eastman's uncle studies white Americans: people who measure everything and charge guests for dinner. Then the boy's father arrives in white men's clothes, and his life turns. Readers feel the strangeness from the other side.

Exile, and a return



After the U.S.–Dakota War of 1862, which Eastman calls “the terrible Minnesota massacre,” the boy was raised in Manitoba by his grandmother and uncle. His family believed his father had died.

The uncle trains him to avenge his father. This chapter is the day everything changes.

The fire-boat

On the other hand, I had heard marvelous things of this people. In some things we despised them; in others we regarded them as wakan (mysterious), a race whose power bordered upon the supernatural. I learned that they had made a “fireboat.” I could not understand how they could unite two elements which cannot exist together. I thought the water would put out the fire, and the fire would consume the boat if it had the shadow of a chance. This was to me a preposterous thing! But when I was told that the Big Knives had created a “fire-boat-walks-on-mountains” (a locomotive) it was too much to believe.

Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), Indian Boyhood (1902). Public domain.

Think about it

What is a “fire-boat”?

Why is it “preposterous” to him?

What is the “fire-boat-walks-on-mountains”?

The uncle's study

“The greatest object of their lives seems to be to acquire possessions—to be rich. They desire to possess the whole world. For thirty years they were trying to entice us to sell them our land. Finally the outbreak gave them all, and we have been driven away from our beautiful country.

Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), Indian Boyhood (1902). Public domain.

Think about it

What does the uncle conclude about white people?

What evidence does he give?

What does it reveal about Dakota values?

They measure everything

“They are a wonderful people. They have divided the day into hours, like the moons of the year. In fact, they measure everything. Not one of them would let so much as a turnip go from his field unless he received full value for it. […]

Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), Indian Boyhood (1902). Public domain.

Think about it

What surprises him?

What would a Dakota host do?

Is he wrong?

Who studies whom?

On page 1, in pairs:

1. List each of the uncle's observations.
2. What does it say about white Americans?
3. What does it reveal about Dakota values?
4. Infer the boy's feelings about trains and boats.

A different gaze

She stands full-throated and with careless pose,
This woman of a weird and waning race,
The tragic savage lurking in her face,
Where all her pagan passion burns and glows;
Her blood is mingled with her ancient foes,
And thrills with war and wildness in her veins;
Her rebel lips are dabbled with the stains
Of feuds and forays and her father's woes.

Duncan Campbell Scott, "The Onondaga Madonna," Labor and the Angel (1898). Public domain.

Think about it

Who is looking, and who is looked at?

Does she speak?

What future does "waning" imagine?

Two gazes

The uncle

- Studies a whole society.
- Gives reasons and examples.
- Speaks, argues, judges.

Scott's speaker

- Describes one silent woman.
- Uses images and labels.
- Imagines her people's “doom.”

On page 2: compare the two gazes in the chart.

Leaving

He had brought me some civilized clothing, At first, I disliked very much to wear garments made by the people I had hated so bitterly. But the thought that, after all, they had not killed my father and brothers, reconciled me, and I put on the clothes.

In a few days we started for the States. I felt as if I were dead and traveling to the Spirit Land; for now all my old ideas were to give place to new ones, and my life was to be entirely different from that of the past.

Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), Indian Boyhood (1902). Public domain.

Think about it

Why does he agree to wear the clothes?

What does “traveling to the Spirit Land” suggest?

How does the adult writer want us to feel?

Exit ticket

1. One observation of the uncle's and what it reveals.

2. One difference between the uncle's gaze and Scott's.

3. How Eastman wants readers to feel about leaving.

Next class: Speaking to Power.

Teacher reveal

The fire-boat: key points

The fire-boat: A steamboat; the “fire-boat-walks-on-mountains” is a train. The boy is relieved it “cannot chase us into any rough country.”

The uncle's study: White people want “to acquire possessions,” “measure everything,” and make guests pay for food.

What it reveals: Dakota values of sharing and hospitality, seen through what shocks the uncle.

Two gazes: Scott describes a silent woman as “weird and waning”; the uncle analyses a whole society with reasons and examples.

The father: He returns in white clothes, converted, and asks his son to learn “this new way.”

Writer's purpose: “I felt as if I were dead and traveling to the Spirit Land”: Eastman wants readers to feel the cost of the change he chose.