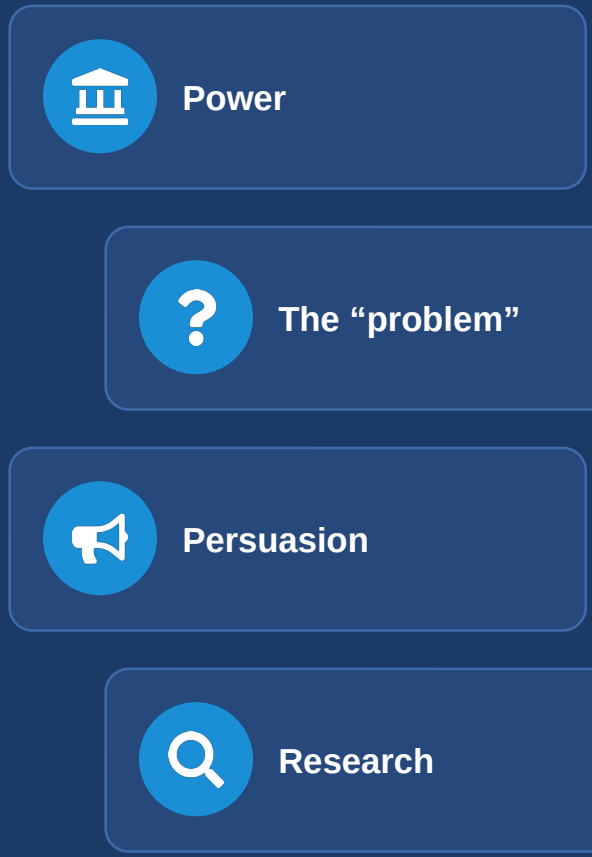
NBE3U Writing Back, Lesson 12

Speaking to Power

Zitkála-Šá's “America's Indian Problem” (1921)



Today's goals

We are learning…

- To evaluate persuasive nonfiction.
- To locate reliable information and check it for accuracy.

I can…

- Identify persuasive moves and their effects.
- Evaluate the essay's effectiveness with evidence.
- Find and cite reliable sources for a context fact.
- Check my information for accuracy and completeness.

Today's plan

Time	What we're doing	You will…
0–8 min	**Hook**	Discuss
8–25 min	**Read**	Read
25–40 min	**Persuasion**	Analyse
40–50 min	**Two essays**	Compare
50–75 min	**Research**	Research and check

Warm-up



When people in power call a group of people “a problem,” what does that phrase assume? Who should get to name the problem?

Sentence starters

“Calling people a problem assumes…”

“The real problem might be…”

“The people affected should…”

How it works

- Pairs: 3 minutes.

Big idea

Officials called it “the Indian problem.” In 1921, Zitkála-Šá turned the phrase around: the problem was a history of broken hospitality, stolen land and wardship without citizenship, and the solution was informed citizens who would act. Nonfiction can write back too, with irony, history and a call to action.

Snatched away

It was in this fashion that the old world snatched away the fee in the land of the new. It was in this fashion that America was divided between the powers of Europe and the aborigines were dispossessed of their country. The barbaric rule of might from which the paleface had fled hither for refuge caught up with him again, and in the melee the hospitable native suffered “legal disability.”

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), “America's Indian Problem,” American Indian Stories (1921). Public domain.

Think about it

What is “the fee in the land”?

Who suffered “legal disability”?

What is ironic about the refuge?

Wards, not citizens

History tells that it was from the English and the Spanish our government inherited its legal victims, the American Indians, whom to this day we hold as wards and not as citizens of their own freedom loving land. A long century of dishonor followed this inheritance of somebody's loot. […]

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), "America's Indian Problem," American Indian Stories (1921). Public domain.

Think about it

What is a "ward"?

What does "somebody's loot" mean?

Who will help the "American Indian"?

The demand

Wardship is no substitute for American citizenship, therefore we seek his enfranchisement. The many treaties made in good faith with the Indian by our government we would like to see equitably settled. By a constructive program we hope to do away with the "piecemeal legislation" affecting Indians here and there which has proven an exceedingly expensive and disappointing method.

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), "America's Indian Problem," American Indian Stories (1921). Public domain.

Think about it

What does she ask for?

What is "piecemeal legislation"?

How practical is her tone?

Name the moves

On page 1, in pairs:

1. Find an example of each persuasive move.
2. Explain its effect on 1921 readers.
3. Choose the most effective move.
4. Write your judgment of the whole essay.

Johnson, 1892

In the Toronto Sunday Globe, Johnson mocked the single “Indian girl” of settler fiction: always a chief's daughter with a “Winona”-sounding name and no surname, always in love with a white hero, and almost always doomed.

Both writers attack the stories settlers told themselves, in the newspapers and magazines settlers read.

Two essays that write back

Johnson, 1892

- Target: fiction's stereotypes.
- Tool: sharp humour.
- Asks writers to show real, particular women.

Zitkála-Šá, 1921

- Target: law and wardship.
- Tool: irony and history.
- Asks citizens to inform themselves and act.

Which approach would persuade you today?

Research like a historian

Reliable

Encyclopedias, archives, university and government sites.

Indigenous-led

Nations' own sites, the NCTR, Indigenous publishers and media.

Two sources

Every date and name, confirmed twice.

Cited

MLA: author, title, site, date, URL.

Find one fact

On page 2:

1. Choose one context fact your essay needs.
2. Find it in at least two reliable sources.
3. Note who made each source.
4. Complete the accuracy and completeness check.

Exit ticket

1. Her most effective move, and why.

2. One way her essay and Johnson's are alike.

3. Your fact, and your two sources.

Next class: Essay Workshop.

Teacher reveal

Speaking to power: key points

Irony: The settlers were saved by Indigenous “hospitality,” and repaid it with a cross “as a sign of English dominion.”

History as evidence: Spanish and English conquest, then “a long century of dishonor.”

Reframing: The “problem” is wardship without citizenship and unsettled treaties, not Indigenous people.

Audience: She addresses American women as partners: “cooperation of head, heart and hand.”

Call to action: “Let us be informed of facts and then we may formulate our opinions.”

Johnson, 1892: Also writing back in a newspaper, Johnson mocked fiction's single doomed “Indian girl”: both writers attack the stories settlers told themselves.