

## DISCUSSION GUIDE for

# #NATIVE READS

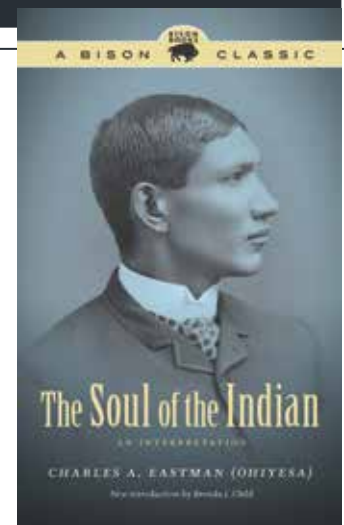
GREAT BOOKS from INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

## The Soul of the Indian

by CHARLES ALEXANDER EASTMAN (OHIYESA)

### Author Biography

Charles Alexander Eastman was born in 1858 in southern Minnesota, near what is now Redwood Falls. Eastman died on Jan. 8, 1939, in Detroit. He was the fifth and last child, and his mother died shortly after he was born. On her deathbed, she gave her youngest son to her mother-in-law to be reared. He was given the name Hakadah, meaning the pitiful last. At about age four, Charles received his name Ohiyesa based on a lacrosse game between two different bands. The medicine man announced that if the host team won, the four-year-old warrior would receive the name Ohiyesa, meaning winner. The Wahpetowan won and, as the medicine man declared, Charles was honored with the name Ohiyesa. He would carry this name for life.



After the Dakota War, those who had not been captured by the United States government fled in exile to Canada. Ohiyesa's father was one of the Dakota warriors who was imprisoned in Davenport, Iowa. When Ohiyesa was about 15, his father came to their camp in Canada, after it had been thought that he had been executed after the Dakota War in 1862 or killed by soldiers in the conflict. Ohiyesa and his family were shocked and filled with joy upon seeing his father alive, and this visit significantly changed Ohiyesa's life. His traditional life as Dakota ended. Ohiyesa's father observed while in prison that there was no defeating the whites and the only alternative was to learn their ways. This was the message he carried to his people in Canada. He then took Ohiyesa with him to learn the ways of whites. They left Canada and settled in Flandreau, South Dakota. This was the beginning of learning the ways of the Western society.

Eastman graduated from Dartmouth College in 1887 and received a medical degree from Boston University in 1889. He married Elaine Goodale in 1891. They had five daughters and one son. The couple separated in 1921. Ohiyesa is known for many accomplishments, which include starting 32 Indian groups of the YMCA and helping form the Boy Scouts of America and Campfire Girls. As a physician, he attended to the injured and dying at the Wounded Knee Massacre on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota on Dec. 29, 1890. He went to Washington, D.C., in 1897 as a legal representative and lobbyist for the Sioux Nation.

Ohiyesa authored many books and articles. Some of his works include *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, *Indian Boyhood*, *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains*, *Indian Child Life*, *Indian Scout Craft and Lore*, and *Living in Two Worlds: The American Indian Experience*.

# Book Summary

***The Soul of the Indian*** tells the story of Ohiyesa's reconciliation with his Dakota heritage. It is a narrative that validates the mores of the Oceti Sakowin. Ohiyesa was born in a time when the Oceti Sakowin traditional ways of life were still strong. His first language was Dakota. His boyhood education was in the traditional circle of learning from his grandmother, uncles and the elders of his *tiospaye* (community). It was also a time of conflict and uncertainty, as the land base of the Dakota was quickly being swallowed up by white settlers. The United States government was confining the Dakota to smaller and smaller tracts of land. They were not allowed to hunt for food. This confinement led to the Dakota War, which ended with 38 Dakota men hanged in Mankato, Minnesota, on Dec. 26, 1862. Many more Dakota were imprisoned.

Ohiyesa was four at the time when some of his family, along with others of his band, managed to escape to Canada. These were turbulent times of change for the young Ohiyesa. As an adolescent, Ohiyesa was introduced to white culture. He learned to navigate the ways of white society. ***The Soul of the Indian*** brings him full circle. In the 1911 book, he compares the traditional ways of his Dakota ancestry to the ways he learned in the white world. He comes to the conclusion that the Western society is full of contradiction and the traditional ways of the Oceti Sakowin are tried and true. A quote from Ohiyesa summarizes the message of ***The Soul of the Indian***:

This discussion guide was created by Oak Lake Writers' Society member Patty Bordeaux Nelson (*Sicangu Lakota*).

## Discussion Guide

PRESENTED BY



FIRST NATIONS  
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



- 1 Ohiyesa lived and wrote during a tumultuous time for the Oceti Sakowin Oyate (the People). He experienced two catastrophic events that deeply impacted the Oceti Sakowin, including the Dakota War of 1862 and the Wounded Knee Massacre. How did these two events impact Ohiyesa and the Oceti Sakowin? How did these events impact mainstream society's attitude toward the Oceti Sakowin at this time?
- 2 ***The Soul of the Indian*** defines the ways of the Oceti Sakowin Oyate. How does Ohiyesa use writing to preserve and perpetuate Dakota culture, customs and spirituality? What is gained and/or lost when transcribing and translating the oral tradition?
- 3 Chapter 1 describes Oceti Sakowin spirituality eloquently and in close detail as a daily natural way of life. What stood out to you in this chapter and why? What did you gain from his writing?
- 4 Chapter 2 speaks to the ways of the people, beginning with the education of children. Where does the child's education begin? Where is the traditional classroom of the Dakota child? What role do the elders have in educating and rearing the children? What is a child taught about generosity?
- 5 Why was honor an important virtue to the Oceti Sakowin? How is honor shown in Oceti Sakowin communities today? What was the importance of decorum within the traditional community? How can this be taught in today's society?
- 6 What does Ohiyesa say about white encroachment and colonization? In what ways does colonization still affect the Oceti Sakowin?
- 7 Ohiyesa writes about the hypocrisy of Christians. Discuss the contradictions he points out between Christianity and traditional Dakota spirituality.
- 8 Ohiyesa's life journey brings him full circle to his traditional ways. He has an urgency to record and preserve the traditional culture of the Oceti Sakowin. He has given the Oceti Sakowin the gift of preserving the Oceti Sakowin culture: "We are still here!" Discuss the legacy he left for today's generation. What does his legacy mean for the future of the Oceti Sakowin?