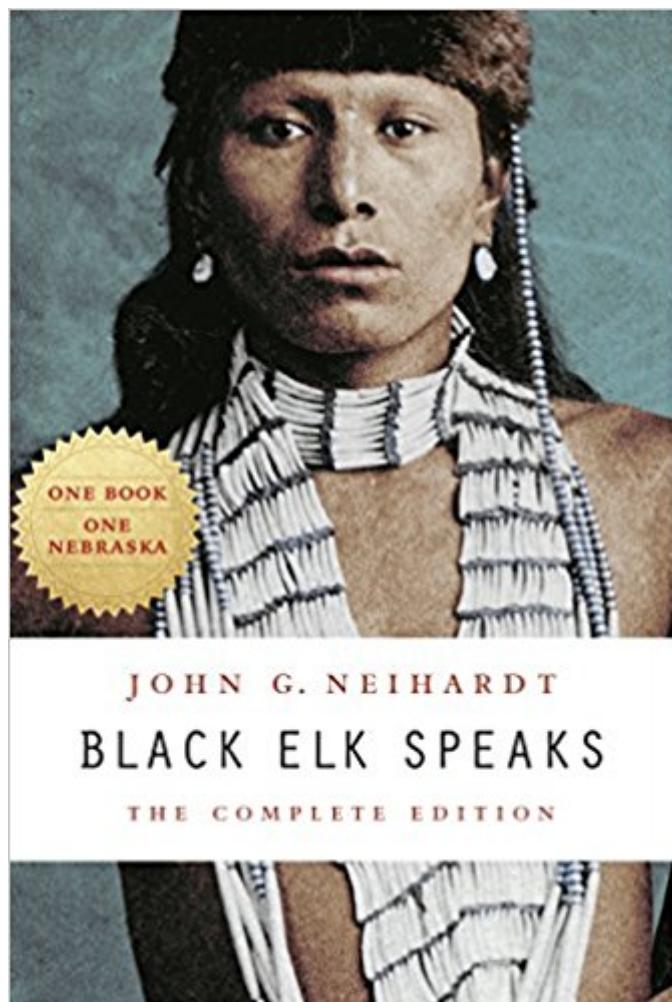


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# Black Elk Speaks: The Complete Edition



## Synopsis

Black Elk Speaks, the story of the Oglala Lakota visionary and healer Nicholas Black Elk (1863–1950) and his people during momentous twilight years of the nineteenth century, offers readers much more than a precious glimpse of a vanished time. Black Elk's searing visions of the unity of humanity and Earth, conveyed by John G. Neihardt, have made this book a classic that crosses multiple genres. Whether appreciated as the poignant tale of a Lakota life, as a history of a Native nation, or as an enduring spiritual testament, Black Elk Speaks is unforgettable. Black Elk met the distinguished poet, writer, and critic John G. Neihardt in 1930 on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and asked Neihardt to share his story with the world. Neihardt understood and conveyed Black Elk's experiences in this powerful and inspirational message for all humankind. This complete edition features a new introduction by historian Philip J. Deloria and annotations of Black Elk's story by renowned Lakota scholar Raymond J. DeMallie. Three essays by John G. Neihardt provide background on this landmark work along with pieces by Vine Deloria Jr., Raymond J. DeMallie, Alexis Petri, and Lori Utecht. Maps, original illustrations by Standing Bear, and a set of appendixes rounds out the edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Black Elk Speaks is an extraordinarily human document—and beyond that the record of a profoundly spiritual journey, the pilgrimage of a people toward their historical fulfillment

and culmination, toward the accomplishment of a worthy destiny. (N. Scott Momaday 2013-10-25)  
"An American classic." (Western Historical Quarterly 2013-10-25)  
"If any great religious classic has emerged in [the twentieth] century or on this continent, it must certainly be judged in the company of Black Elk Speaks." (from Vine Deloria Jr. 2013-10-25)

John G. Neihardt (1881-1973) is the author of several classics, including *A Cycle of the West* and *Eagle Voice Remembers*, both available in Bison Books editions. He was named Nebraska's first poet laureate and foremost poet of the nation by the National Poetry Center in 1936.

I didn't read this edition; a little paperback version came to me. I read it long ago and read it again recently. This book had an incredible impact on me. Over the years people have come to criticize the author, John Neidhardt. The book ends somewhat abruptly not long after Wounded Knee and then there is an account of Black Elk's prayer on Harney Peak when he was an old man and he asked to make his people live again kind of tacked on the end. Many seem to feel Neidhardt was exploiting Black Elk to get a book out of him. I don't claim to be an expert on Black Elk and this subject, but from what I know I do not agree with the totally cynical assessment. Black Elk had been off the reservation in the Buffalo Bill Show and given his experiences he was hardly naive or ignorant. Black Elk's son Ben had been in the Carlyle school so he would have known if the book did not reflect his father's vision and words and life. The book was also not an instant bestseller. Neidhardt promoted this book and Black Elk's vision tirelessly until the end of his life and I truly believe it was because he saw the incredible spiritual nature of Black Elk, his life, and visions. And his "great vision" as a youngster can only be described as cataclysmic and psychedelic. When the spirits want you to see something you will see it and no drugs are necessary. Neidhardt left out the ensuing years on Pine Ridge Reservation and Black Elk's acceptance of Catholicism to frame a lost way of life, the sadness and injustice of it, and the greatness and seeming inevitability of Black Elk's vision. I believe any poetic license taken was in service of bringing forth a greater truth. The book was not meant to be a biography or history of the Lakota, but to preserve Black Elk's vision and so the purpose of the book was accomplished. Those who want to pick at the book miss the greater impact of Black Elk's life and vision. As this was not Neidhardt's culture he probably also didn't totally understand nor was he able to explain some things, but again, are we missing the greater

truth of the book by focusing on imperfections? Read this book with an open heart and you won't be disappointed. Some feel Black Elk became a Catholic as a way of continuing to teach the Lakota way along with the Christian faith to preserve the Lakota culture. I believe he was intelligent and had such a great spirit he saw he could blend both faiths and build a bridge for the future. Nor was he intimidated into the Christian faith. His daughter said his acceptance of the Catholic faith was true and not a sham to keep teaching the Lakota ways surreptitiously. After reading this book, if Black Elk interests you there are books available on the later half of his life. Black Elk lived until 1950. You may also be interested in *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (The Civilization of the American Indian Series). If you would like a somewhat different perspective or style of writing you might take a look at *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions* (Enriched Classics). Lame Deer felt Black Elk Speaks missed the mark in some ways so he enlisted the help of Richard Erdoes to write his own book as Lame Deer did not speak much English. I enjoyed reading Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions as there is humor and compassion toward all in his account of his life and that of his people.

Beautifully sad book, my boyfriend recommended this to me and I really fell in love with how the story was told and the way it was told. It really struck a heart cord because everything that was written about was true and I think that people easily look the other way or really lessen the impact that the settlers had on the Native Americans.

I love this book. It is inspiring and supportive while offering hope in the times which we are living. I purchased this book 21 years ago. I just got it on my tablet. Even if you are of another faith or no religion at all, this story of such a beautiful being will aid you in understanding the great, sacred thread of universality that runs through all hearts who seek truth and love for all vital life force. It will strengthen your heart and calm your spirit, leaving you with a deeper love and understanding of others while empowering you at the same time.

I read this for a class on religious dimensions in human experience. It was great to read the voice of an important tribal member, especially as he tells of the transition years between freedom and tribal destruction by the white man. It was also helpful hearing stories from multiple tribesman. There were none from women which was a disappointment. I also found the book a little too detailed which for me took away from the spirituality of it. I did get a very good sense of the connection between the Indians and their natural world and the beautiful spirituality that is embedded in their lives.

A very strong and beautiful book. The tale by 'Black Elk' is very poetic. You really feel the strength of a people living in total harmony with nature, with universe. The drawings by "Crazy horse" are great and tells its own story. So much to learn for us who live in a too material and rushed life.

This is the complete compilation of all the works, letters, etc. that documents the original work. This should be in every library!

Black Elk was born and lived when Natives were free, not on reservations. That is why his words were captured and printed back in the 1930s when he was an old man, his remembrances of liberty. I still do not know if he was naturally eloquent or if the translator is responsible for this tome. The two of them together made a fine team -- putting an era into words I can understand.

I have always been fascinated with the culture of the Native Americans, and this book has for me opened my eyes to not only their culture but their plight as a people. I always loved Native American culture and the art they produce. Even today, it continues to affect me in a profound way. Whether it is reading a book like Black Elk Speaks or beholding a painting by Woody Crumbo, I always get this sense of urgency from them, even today - a sense of urgency to preserve what is left of their culture, resuscitating it any way possible, in order to keep it living for future generations of Native Americans, and also to help non-Native Americans understand. This book goes through the history of the fall of their culture here in America, told through the eyes of the famous visionary, Black Elk. Reading it, you get a strong sense of their customs, traditions, developing a deeper understanding. Although most of us know the story of the Native Americans; however, even through the bitter ending of this book, I was still filled with a sense of hope, a hope that at least through art and other arenas of the soul, their culture would be preserved for future generations. Highly recommended!

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