

From Ohyiesa Remembers

Charles A. Eastman, born with the Indian name Ohyiesa, lived the free and war-filled life of the Dakota Sioux until he was fifteen years old. Later, he attended both Dartmouth College and Boston University and became a physician, spokesman for the American Indians, and author of several books on Sioux life. He writes about changes that he has made in his life which he doesn't feel good about.



Consider something that has changed for you in that way and reflect on it as he did in his first paragraph.

What have you lost as you have grown older (a sense of wonder, innocence, trust, et al) that has changed your life?

Then Ohyiesa, Charles Eastman, focuses on another aspect of his earlier life—his Indian life. That aspect is Silence. The piece ends with words of wisdom he recalls from an old wise chief.

Think of some aspect of life you would like to write about that you think is important (integrity, compassion, curiosity, courteousness, dignity, courage, et al). Discuss this quality as Ohyiesa did Silence. As he did also, please end your piece with a saying from someone older whom you admire.

As you write, you may model on either of his paragraphs or (hopefully) include both.

Here is the excerpt to think about and from which to gain inspiration:

As a child I understood how to give; I have forgotten this grace since I became civilized. I lived the natural life, whereas I now live the artificial. Any pretty pebble was valuable to me then; every growing tree an object of reverence. Now I worship with the white man before a painted landscape whose value is estimated in dollars! Thus the Indian is reconstructed, as the natural rocks are ground to powder and made into artificial blocks which may be built into the walls of modern society.

Silence is the absolute poise or balance of body, mind, and spirit. The man who preserves his selfhood is ever calm and unshaken by the storms of existence—not a leaf, as it were, astir on the tree; not a ripple upon the surface of the shining pool—his, in the mind of the unlettered sage, is the ideal attitude and conduct of life. If you ask him: "What is silence?" he will answer: "It is the Great Mystery!" The holy silence is His voice!" If you ask: "What are the fruits of silence?" he will say: "They are self-control, true courage or endurance, patience, dignity, and reverence. Silence is the cornerstone of character."

"Guard your tongue in youth," said the old chief, Wabashaw, "and in age you may mature a thought that will be of service to your people!"

