

# OHIYESA: The Soul of an Indian

## VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



Top: Director John Whitehead and Photographer Jon Springer on location in the Badlands, South Dakota.

Above: Kate Beane preparing to interview David Martinez.

Photos by Stephanie Mosher

Right: Charles "Ohiyesa" Eastman



## Program Synopsis

*Ohiyesa: The Soul of an Indian* is a deeply personal family film that follows Kate Beane, an urban, Dakota scholar, and her family as they trace the remarkable life of their celebrated relative, Ohiyesa (Charles Eastman), an important author, activist, lecturer and one of the first Native American doctors. Along the way, Beane uncovers uncanny parallels between their lives, though they were born more than 100 years apart.

For the first time, Beane and other relatives reunite to share Ohiyesa's story through an indigenous perspective, considering questions their grandfather posed more than a century ago, such as how can indigenous people retain their cultural traditions and worldviews, while also working within institutions and a society that was created to oppress them?

Beane and her family search for the legacy of Ohiyesa, while trying to determine what their own legacy will be.

## In Their Words

***"As Dakota people, we have our own heroes and our own people in history who have very complicated and relevant stories to tell, but few people know who Ohiyesa was or what he achieved. I think it's really important to bring his story home to Minnesota as well as to the wider world."***

— Kate Beane  
(Flandreau Santee Sioux/  
Muskogee Creek)

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## Producer's Notes



### Syd Beane (Flandreau Santee Sioux)

There have been a number of books and scholarly papers written about Charles Alexander Eastman based primarily upon his books and other resource materials without consulting family descendants or other

relatives.

In May of 2007, HBO Films released the docudrama *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* based upon the book by Dee Brown which chronicled the history of Native Americans being driven from their lands depicting both military intervention and congressional legislation.

The film weaved in a story of Charles Alexander Eastman as a central character along with his wife Elaine Goodale Eastman but with inaccurate historical material throughout the script. This Eastman story was developed again without consulting family members.

It became clear that a story about Charles Eastman developed and told from the perspective of family members was needed to help set the record straight. It was also possible to develop a documentary film from the Eastman Dakota family perspective with a group of family professionals familiar with the history, storytelling and the filmmaking process.

The family group involved in making this film includes: Syd Beane, William Beane, Kate Beane and Carly Eastman Bad Heart Bull direct descendants of John Eastman and Gail Johsen and Ginny Risk, direct descendants of Charles Eastman. This film is their story.

## By the Numbers

1. 1858: Charles "Ohiyesa" Eastman was born near Redwood Falls, Minnesota in 1858. His mother passed away shortly after his birth.
2. 1862: The US-Dakota War broke out resulting in the hanging of 38 Dakotas in Mankato, Minnesota on December 26, 1862. Many Dakota's were imprisoned, including Ohiyesa's father.
3. 1862-1873: Ohiyesa lived in Manitoba, Canada living a traditional life with his grandmother among the Santee Sioux.
4. 1873: Ohiyesa returned to Dakota Territory in Flandreau, South Dakota with his father, Tawakanhdeota (Jacob Eastman).
5. 1887: Ohiyesa graduated from Dartmouth College, received a medical degree from Boston University, and shortly after became a Government Physician at the Pine Ridge Reservation.
6. 1890: The Wounded Knee Massacre occurred on The Pine Ridge Reservation on December 29, 1890 when the 7th Cavalry of the United States Government attacked the Lakota people. It is estimated that between 250-300 Lakota men, women, and children were killed.
7. 1891: Ohiyesa met Elaine Goodale of Massachusetts who was also working at Pine Ridge and they returned east to get married. Together they had five daughters and a son but, unable to reconcile their differences, were separated in 1921.



Kate Beane, Hinhan Loud Hawk and Lillian Canunpa Loud Hawk visit the home where Hinhan grew up in Oglala, South Dakota. Photo by Stephanie Mosher

8. 1893: Ohiyesa left Pine Ridge and began his own medical practice in St. Paul, MN.
9. 1902: *Indian Boyhood* was published, the first of 11 books that Ohiyesa authored.
10. 1910: Ohiyesa helped to organize 32 chapters of the YMCA in Native American communities.
11. 1911: Ohiyesa was cofounder of the Society of American Indians which was the first Native American rights organization to be formed and run by Native people. The first convention was held on October 12 of 1911 in Columbus, Ohio on Columbus Day.
12. 1899-1902: Served as a government physician at Crow Creek Agency in SD.
13. Jan. 8, 1939: Charles "Ohiyesa" Eastman died at his son's home in Detroit, Michigan at the age of 80.

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## Discussion Questions

1. During his lifetime, Charles “Ohiyesa” Eastman experienced many pivotal moments that would change the direction of his life forever. Based on what we learn from the film, what were some of these pivotal turning points? Identify several of them and discuss the impact of these events on his life. What events in your life were pivotal moments?
2. Throughout the film, Kate’s narrative is interspersed with readings from her grandfather’s books about his experiences. How do these written words add to the story that Kate is telling? Explore which passages gave you the strongest sense of who Ohiyesa was as a man. Discuss the difference between oral history and written history.
3. In the film, Kate introduces herself in Dakota and talks about how important it is that she learn her language and teach it to her children. Why do you think it is so important to her? What role do you think languages play in expressing our cultural identity?
4. In the beginning of the film Kate asks, “And why is it that people like my grandfather, Ohiyesa, who was one of the first writers to come out of this area, who was one of the first American Indian medical doctors, why isn’t he remembered and acknowledged?” Explore the gaps that exist in the telling of history and why those gaps are there.
5. Ohiyesa was an important figure in American History. Besides his prominence as a Native writer and doctor he was, in many ways, a bridge between the native people and the immigrant population that poured into America during the 1800s. What evidence of this bridge exists in the major events of his life---even before his birth?



Kate Beane (Flandreau Santee Sioux) holds an image of her grandfather Ohiyesa.  
Photo by Chad Knutson

## Suggested Activities

1. Create a timeline of events surrounding the Dakota War of 1862 and the removal of the Dakota people from Mni Sota. Trace Charles’s path along that timeline.
2. Research the history of Native people in medicine from the time of Charles Eastman to today. Who were the early Native American doctors and how many are there today? What have been some of their significant contributions?
3. Select one of Charles Eastman’s books (or significant passages from one of them) to read and study. Compare and contrast the life he describes as a Dakota boy growing up with his grandmother with the life of a non-native child growing up in America in the 1800’s.
4. Charles Eastman was not only a writer and a doctor but a progressive reformer in support of Native American rights. Conduct additional research on these activities and identify the contributions he made during his lifetime.
5. The Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 was a terrible and significant event for the Lakota people as a whole and for Charles Eastman as an individual. Document the details of this event and describe how it impacted Charles Eastman personally. What led up to the attack? What happened after?



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## Resources

### Film Websites

- <https://www.visionmakermedia.org/films/ohiyesa-soul-indian>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-HPThJPHAI>

### Readings from Ohiyesa's books

- <http://www.mainlesson.com/display.php?author=eas-tman&book=boyhood&story=lodge>

### Other Suggested Resources

- Goodale Estman, Elaine, (2004), *Sister to the Sioux, The Memoirs of Elaine Goodale Eastman, 1885-1891*, Nebraska Press.
- Martinez, David, (2009) *Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought*, Minnesota Historical Society.
- (<http://aktalakota.stjo.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8884>)



Wilmer Mesteth, Syd Beane, Kate Beane and Hinhan Loud Hawk enter the Wounded Knee cemetery. Photo by Stephanie Mosher

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This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master's in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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Educational resources for this film are available at [www.visionmakermedia.org/education/ohiyesa-soul-indian](http://www.visionmakermedia.org/education/ohiyesa-soul-indian)

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