“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)

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.
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 Calvary 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.

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.

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?

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 lead up to the attack? What happened after?
Resources

Film Websites

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

Readings from Ohiyesa’s books


Other Suggested Resources

- (http://aktalakota.stjo.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8884

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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

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