

Black Elk

(1863 ~ 1950)



The person we know as Black Elk was born in 1863 near the Little Powder River in what is now the state of Wyoming. He was a member of the Oglala Lakota (Sioux) tribe and the fourth man in his family to bear the name, "Black Elk." He was one of the first Native People to share his story, and the story of his people, to the outside world.

Around the age of nine, Black Elk became so sick that his parents took him to their tribe's medicine man, who tended to him for twelve days. During these days, Black Elk went forward on his "Vision Quest" and encountered six elders. For years, he did not share these visions with anyone, but eventually they became essential to his development as a holy man.

As a twelve year-old, Black Elk fought at the Battle of Little Bighorn alongside his cousin, Crazy Horse. He participated in the attempted defense of his people at the Battle of Wounded Knee. After the defeat, it was clear that the Lakota needed to adapt to this new world in order to survive.

In 1904, Black Elk converted to Catholicism and took the name Nicholas Black Elk. He began looking for ways to become a Catholic educator while remaining a Lakota spiritual leader. Eventually, he was able to bridge the gap between his native beliefs and Christianity. According to his grandson, *"He was comfortable praying with ... his pipe and his rosary, and participated in Mass and Lakota ceremonies on a regular basis."* He was a holy man to his people, and also shared his visions of a united world in his book, *Black Elk Speaks*. In 2017 the Catholic Diocese of Rapid City nominated him for sainthood in the Roman Catholic Church.

*"There can never be peace between nations until there is first known
that true peace which is within the souls of men."*